

Singita

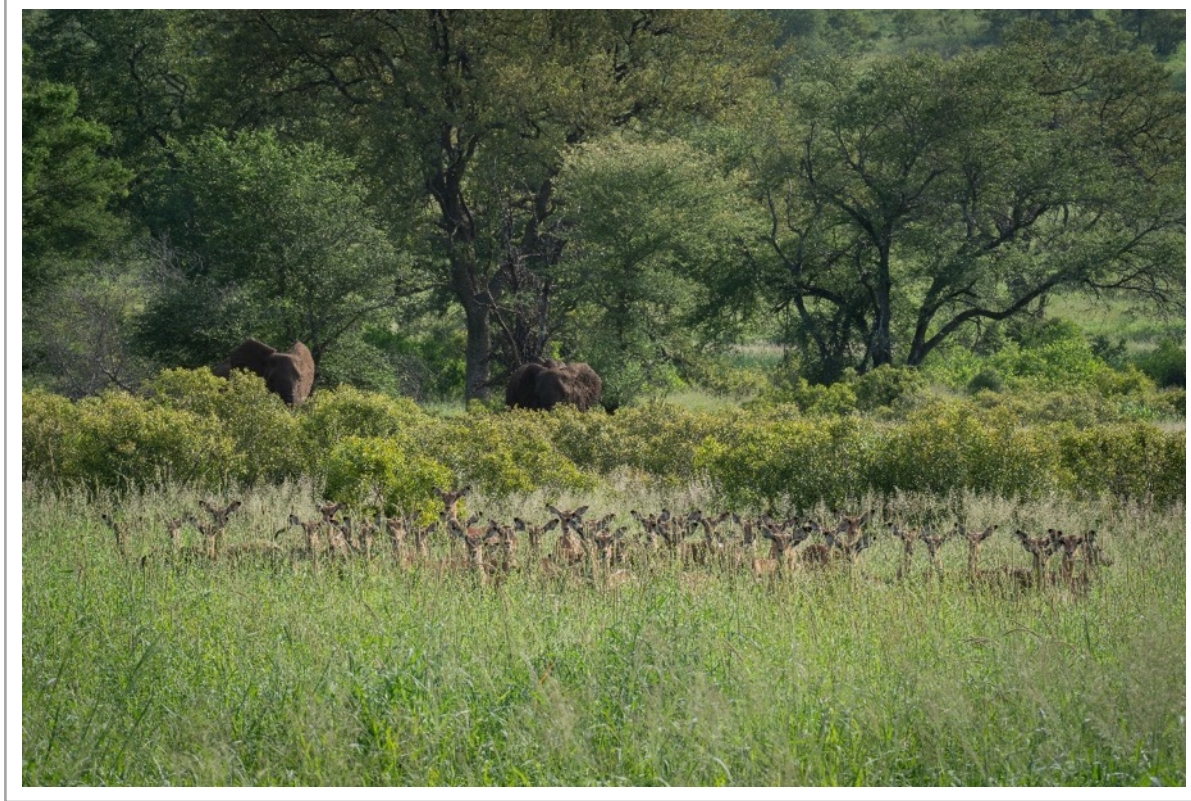


Photo by Monika Malewski

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 23.1°C (73.5°F)
Minimum recorded: 21.0°C (69.8°F)
Average maximum: 34.0°C (93.2°F)
Maximum recorded: 40.0°C (104.0°F)

Rainfall Record

For the month: 167 mm
Season to date: 129.5 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h28
Sunset: 18h42

The rain has worked its quiet magic, transforming the landscape with an astonishing swiftness that almost feels otherworldly. The grasses now surge to chest height, a lush sea of vibrant blades swaying in the breeze. The tree's branches are heavy with new life, weighed down by an explosion of fruit. The air hums with the melodies of countless birds, their songs filling the sky in a symphony of joy and renewal. Everywhere, insects buzz, their wings a blur as they revel in the abundance around them. An old bridge, once weathered and forgotten, has been restored, its sturdy beams now spanning the confluence of the Sweni and N'wanetsi Rivers. This new

gateway has opened up a breath-taking route, revealing the rugged beauty of the granophyre landscape. The view from the bridge is a living canvas, a harmonious blend of earth, sky, and water, all infused with the spirit of renewal brought on by the rains.

A Sightings Snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- The Mananga Pride spent New Year's Eve, and the heavy rains the day after, on our concession in the southern central depression. It appeared as if they had fed and consequently spent the next two days just lying around digesting. The week after they managed to take down two adult buffalo, on which they fed until they were presumably chased off by the presence of other male lions. They then retreated into the mountains. A few days later they returned with one less cub, and now there are only ten cubs in total. Cub mortality is high in lions, with starvation, predation and disease being the main culprits.
- The Chava Pride and the blonde-maned Sonop male were found on a buffalo bull carcass in the north-west. It seems as if the fact that the large herds of buffalo have dispersed into smaller groups has resulted in their demise. On the 11th we found the Chava Pride with full bellies near Gudzane Dam. One of the females was walking steadily in a northerly direction. Her mammary glands seemed to be filled with milk and lionesses don't usually leave the pride with a carcass unless they are heading to... new cubs! We followed her to a rocky ridge, with vegetation creating the perfect den-site. Little cries from inside the vegetation proved our suspicions. At the end of the month three of the Chava Pride females managed to take down a wildebeest on Cassia Open Area where the game has been prolific the last couple of weeks.
- The Shish Pride has been elusive this month, with only tracks near the Mozambique border confirming they are around.

Leopards

- The Dubana female showed us her mountain climbing capabilities when we found her on top of the ridge near Xinanene Poort. She scaled down and then up the other side of the valley with a graceful fluidity. Once we had looped around the ridge, we found her moving steadily in a southerly direction, stopping every once in a while, giving us the impression she was on the hunt. With two, year-old cubs to provide for, every opportunity must be taken.
- At the beginning of the month, three male leopards found themselves a bit too close for comfort. It started with Mbiri-biri, who was spotted moving north, seemingly following the scent trail of another leopard, stopping to scent mark and scratch his hind paws through the dirt. He descended into a drainage line and we lost sight of him. Deciding to rather loop ahead, anticipating where he might exit the drainage, we came upon another male leopard! At the base of a large leadwood tree was the Zamani male, his golden amber eyes and scared nose unmistakable. After a minute, we spotted a third male up in the leadwood. He was smaller, and so we thought perhaps it was the Massia male, a younger male, named after the Shangaan clan that used to live in that area. He climbed higher into the leadwood, while Zamani, who initially looked chuffed with himself, was now straining his neck to see Mbiri-biri, who had come into site on the horizon. Mbiri-biri approached proudly, and the two squared off. Taking the opportunity, the Massia male jumped out the leadwood and ran in the opposite direction. The two larger males, now walking parallel with each other began to pick up the pace, until they were almost sprinting side by side. With drool spewing out of their mouths, we thought this was it, there was going to be a clash. We lost sight of them in the drainage, but as they emerged on the other side, they increased the distance between them and both lay in the shade of an apple leaf tree about 50 metres away from each other.
- Nungu female (Nhlanguleni's previous female cub) was seen again near the end of the month resting in a leadwood tree in the basalt plains, now a beautiful lush grassland.

- Kalanga male seems to have been enjoying the area around Puffadder Crossing this month, taking advantage of the readily available water, the open areas nearby abundant with game, and the tall trees, perfect to rest in or hoist a carcass out of reach of the ever-present hyenas.
- The Lebombo male is courting a shy female near the Fig-In-The-Lead (an old strangler fig that is atop a dead leadwood tree).
- We also saw tracks for Nhlangueni with a male leopard, so she is also potentially mating again.

Cheetahs

- The beautiful mother and cub that first arrived on our concession at the beginning of December, has found a home in our central regions. Just after New Year's Day we found her early one morning stalking along the western edge of the central depression, obviously using her local knowledge on where the general game tends to rest during the evening to look for any new and vulnerable impala lambs. She spent the morning watching a large herd, and when the time was right, used her speed to snatch one of the lambs. The small cub was left behind during the chase, and the mother moved the carcass under a guarri thicket to hide it from vultures and other predators. She headed back west and called in the typical, almost bird-like, chirp until her cub ran excitedly towards breakfast.

African wild dogs

- The pack with the floppy-ear member have been moving through our entire concession with sightings every week this month. A few lucky guides saw them hunting impalas, or lying around waterholes with full bellies.
- The pack of three males that move around the Mozambique boundary were seen once this month.

Spotted hyenas

- A large female was seen carrying what appeared to be the femur bone of a buffalo. We had received over 70 mm of rain the day before and, interestingly, this behaviour is quite common amongst hyenas after it rains - perhaps the scent of the bone is stronger once it's been soaked. While watching her, a slightly smaller individual snuck up behind the vehicle, sniffing the side and slowly, with much curiosity, walked around the entire vehicle, stopping to investigate Sunday, who was sitting on the tracker seat.
- There is a clan denning in the small caves in the northern granophytes. A few adult females and two cubs were seen sleeping nearby.
- Solitary individuals are seen regularly skulking along roads early morning and late afternoon.
- Over 100 vultures perched in Kori Clearings one morning led us to the remains of an adult zebra, only bones were left, and a hyena was dragging the last bits away.

Elephants

- The tables have turned, and the elephants are now spending the majority of their time in the northern half of the concession where, after the winter fires, the grass has bounced back, forming a lush green carpet. A much tastier treat than their dried bark and roots diet from the dry season.
- Large gatherings of up to 60 elephants congregated near the Central Depression and were seen one morning crossing the Gudzane River.

Buffalos

- The buffalo herds have been scarce this month, with the large herd of 200 being seen once in the far north.
- Four bulls have been spending time around the Xinkelegane drainage.
- A herd of around 50 are moving around the grasslands east of the Gudzane Dam.

Plains game

- A troop of Chacma baboons exploited the alate eruption from the small termite mounds, offering a hilarious show of running and jumping to catch these new flying termites packed with protein.
- Zebra and wildebeest have been congregating in their hundreds in the open areas with shorter grasses. The rest of the concession is already boasting chest-high grasses, creating the perfect camouflage for any stalking predators.

Rare animals and other sightings

- The leucistic kudu has been seen again in the area just north of the lodges. She is growing up quickly and looks like she might just be pregnant with her first calf.
- A white-tailed mongoose - a large, nocturnal mongoose not often seen, dashed across the road one evening on our way back to the lodge.
- While following some fresh leopard tracks, we noticed something bouncing through the long grass, getting closer we were surprised to see it was an African wild cat!
- A single female eland has been spending time amongst the hundreds of impalas, zebra and wildebeest on Ostrich-Link open area. It would be interesting to know if this is the same one we saw around this time last year?

Birds

- Two ostriches have been moving through the western basalt grassland and found their way to the central depression.
- A little bittern was seen fishing in the rank emergent vegetation, that was built up after the flooding at Dave's Crossing.
- The Amur falcons took advantage of elate eruptions, as well as a few other eagle species, the booted eagle and lesser-spotted being some we don't see very often.
- A flock of ostriches with over 20 chicks sped across the H6 near Sonop. A rare sighting as most of the chicks were fairly large. Of the average sized clutch of 10-16 eggs laid, usually only a handful survive.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the January Gallery.

Here at Singita Kruger National Park, located within the heart of Southern Africa's pristine wilderness, the changing seasons offer a dynamic and ever-evolving safari experience. From the dry, crisp, winter months to the lush summer rains that almost magically transform the landscape, each season brings its own unique set of wildlife behaviours, sightings, and opportunities for exploration. Understanding how these seasonal shifts affect the wildlife in the area can help you make the most of your safari, whether you are seeking the drama of predator-prey interactions or the tranquillity of birdwatching.

Summer (November to April): A time of abundance



Summer is marked by warmth and the refreshing summer rains, transforming the landscape into a vibrant, green paradise. This season saw record-breaking heatwaves in December, with only a few pools of water left in the N'wanetsi River, hordes of animals congregated around the last water sources. January brought the torrential rain, with rivers bursting their banks overnight, and dams and pans across the whole concession are now full. The Nstibitsane drainage is still flowing and the grass has grown to waist height within a week. The veld comes alive with new life, as plants bloom and animals give birth. This is a prime time for spotting newborn animals - impala lambs, wildebeest calves and zebra foals can often be seen frolicking in the grasses. With the abundance of water and food, herbivores thrive, and predators take advantage of the younger, less experienced prey.

The rains also bring a change in wildlife behaviour, with the wetter weather encouraging many animals to disperse across the reserve, leading to more varied sightings. However, the dense vegetation can make it more challenging to spot animals at times. For birdwatchers, this is a particularly exciting period, as migratory species arrive to nest, adding a burst of colour and sound to the environment. Insects, spiders and butterflies take advantage of the flowering plants and can be seen day and night. The sounds of cicadas singing in the midday heat and rain locusts buzzing through the night.

Autumn (May to June): The transition to dry conditions



As the rains subside and the landscape begins to dry, autumn at Singita brings a transition. The grasses begin to thin out and the land takes on a yellow-brown hue. This concentration of animals makes for some incredible sightings, as herds of elephants, buffalo, and antelope gather in the more open areas. As the sun is setting earlier and earlier the predators, too, become more active, taking advantage of the increased opportunities for hunting. This season offers a more open landscape, making it easier to spot game, especially in the early mornings and late afternoons when animals are most active. The cooler temperatures are also comfortable with early mornings averaging around 20°C (68°F) and middays a wonderfully warm 28 °C (82°F) .

Winter (July to September): A time of intensity and clarity



Winter brings cooler, dry conditions that often stretch into clear, sunny days. The bush begins to thin, and the once-lush landscape becomes quieter as many of the smaller, migratory animals retreat to more favourable areas. The insects complete their life cycles or find hiding places to wait until the next rains. The focus shifts to large, resident wildlife, who are drawn to the remaining water sources. These months are prime for predator sightings, as the lack of cover allows for more dramatic interactions between predators and prey.

Winter is also an exceptional time for birdwatching, with many species congregating around the waterholes. The cooler mornings and evenings are ideal for enjoying the stillness of the bush, and game drives often result in breath-taking encounters, with the soft light casting a magical glow over the landscape. For those seeking the thrill of a dramatic predator sighting, winter offers some of the best opportunities for action-packed safari experiences.

Spring (October): A rebirth of life



With the rising temperatures, the already dry landscape evaporates further. The wind carries dust and shakes the last dead leaves from the trees. Natural necessary fires become more prevalent, and the dusty skies create the most beautiful sunsets. Storm clouds build and the smell of distant rain teases us, as the heat beats down on the sparse earth. The promise of life becomes evident with some trees budding to bright green. Spring is a quieter, more introspective time on safari, ideal for guests who appreciate the tranquil rhythms of the bush.

Each season offers something different, and the time of year you choose to visit will influence the type of safari experience you have. For those keen on birdwatching and enjoying lush, vibrant landscapes, the summer months are ideal. If you're seeking clear skies, open vistas, and a more concentrated wildlife experience, winter is the perfect time to visit. Autumn and spring offer a balance between the two, with beautiful transitions in the landscape and the first signs of new life.

No matter the season we offer guests an immersive and unforgettable safari experience. With the changing seasons, there's always something new to discover, from the abundance of life in summer to the thrilling predator encounters of winter. Singita magic showcases the raw, ever-changing beauty of wilderness.

The cicada – mostly heard, not often seen

Article by Sean Surtees

While on safari during the hot and humid summer months here at Singita Lebombo and Sweni, you are more than likely to notice an extremely loud ear-piercing sound emanating from the lush vegetation growth, as you slowly meander along on your journey.

This sound comes from male cicada, the undisputed champion of loudness in the insect world, which produces the loudest sound that any insect can make. This high-pitched sound (or song), is actually the mating call of the specific cicada species. Each male of different species has its own unique sound which will only attract the female of the same species. These sound differences allow several different cicada species to coexist in the same area. Cicadas have been known to disappear for many years, reappearing in force once conditions are right – their abundance can be triggered by temperature, humidity and rainfall received at certain periods.



There are more than 3 000 described species of cicada globally, with about 150 known species in South Africa.

Cicadas are definitely more often heard than seen. It is amazing how incredibly difficult it can be to find an individual on the trunk of a tree, even while the loud pitched shrill is all around you. The reason for this is the fact that most species are cryptic, mimicking the colour of the tree bark on which they spend most of their adult life. This cryptic colouration assists in avoiding predation.

But how does the male cicada produce this sound? At the base of the abdomen, there is a specialised hollow plate known as a tymbal. The tymbal is convex in shape - this shape being important in how the loud shrill is made. By utilising a strong muscle, the tymbal is buckled inwards – similar to making a dent in the lid of a metal tin. By using the power of its own elasticity, the tymbal bounces back to its original position. It is then buckled inwards again through a further contraction of the same strong muscle, producing a clicking sound. The speed of this process is accelerated until the tymbal starts oscillating. The tymbal soon oscillates at hundreds of cycles per second, producing the high-pitched shrill sound.

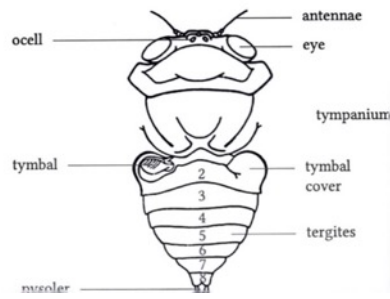


Diagram showing the tymbal of a cicada

Male cicadas are the only insects capable of such a loud and unique sound. Large species can produce sound in excess of 120 decibels at close range. This is approaching the pain threshold of the human ear – a jet engine at take-off is 150 decibels which will rupture your ear drum so that gives you an indication of just how loud some species of cicada can be. Interestingly, smaller cicada species sing in such a high pitch, way above our hearing ability, that we cannot hear them at all. However, this has been known to cause domestic dogs and other animals to howl in pain as they have the ability to hear such high-pitched sounds.

Interestingly though, there are individuals of male cicadas species that do not make any sound at all. These are parasitic males and it is a common occurrence among cicadas. These males are mute and they do not expend any energy on singing. Instead, they search for a singing male or males and hide behind the branch or trunk on which the singing male or males are attached. It has been known for a single singing male to have three or four “thieves” waiting close by and out of site, trying to intercept any female or females that are being attracted by the singing males. This is actually a popular strategy and it succeeds more often than not. To see a video of a male cicada making the loud shrill sound, click [HERE](#).

Another interesting part of the cicada is the very unusual life cycle or metamorphosis. Cicadas have a paurometabolic metamorphosis which is egg -> nymph -> adult. This is very similar to hemi-metabolic metamorphosis but differs in that the nymph and adult stages vary considerably. They also differ in terms of their place of living (habitat) and their activities (ecological niche) – this ensures that there is no competition for food between the adult and nymph. Nymphs spend their lives underground and can be periodic – most for two to five years, but some as long as 10 years or more – or annual (emerge every year). Once the nymphs are ready to change into the winged adults, they dig their way to the surface, emerging from the ground. They then climb about one metre up their host tree and shed their nymph exoskeleton. They then feed on the sap and xylem tissue of the tree and eventually fly off in search of a mate. Once mating has taken place, the adult female lays her eggs in a slit or crevasse of a branch of a tree and the cycle continues. Even though the adults can feed, this stage of their life cycle is not long at all, lasting no more than two months on average.



The exoskeleton after emerging from the nymph stages.

A. Underground nymph; B. Adult cicada hatching from the nymph stage; C. Hatched adult cicada; D. Cicada nymph exoskeleton.

January Gallery



Little bittern -Photo by Monika Malewski
Mananga Pride cubs - Photo by Monika Malewski





Mananga female - Photo by Monika Malewski



Yellow-billed hornbills - Photo by Monika Malewski

Rock monitor lizard - Photo by Monika Malewski





Woodland kingfisher - Photo by Monika Malewski

Warthog - Photo by Monika Malewski



Leucistic kudu - Photo by Monika Malewski





Chava pride cub feeding on waterbuck - Photo by Monika Malewski



Red-crested Korhaan - Photo by Monika Malewski



Elephant cow - Photo by Monika Malewski
Eland - Photo by Monika Malewski





Kalanga male leopard - Photo by Monika Malewski