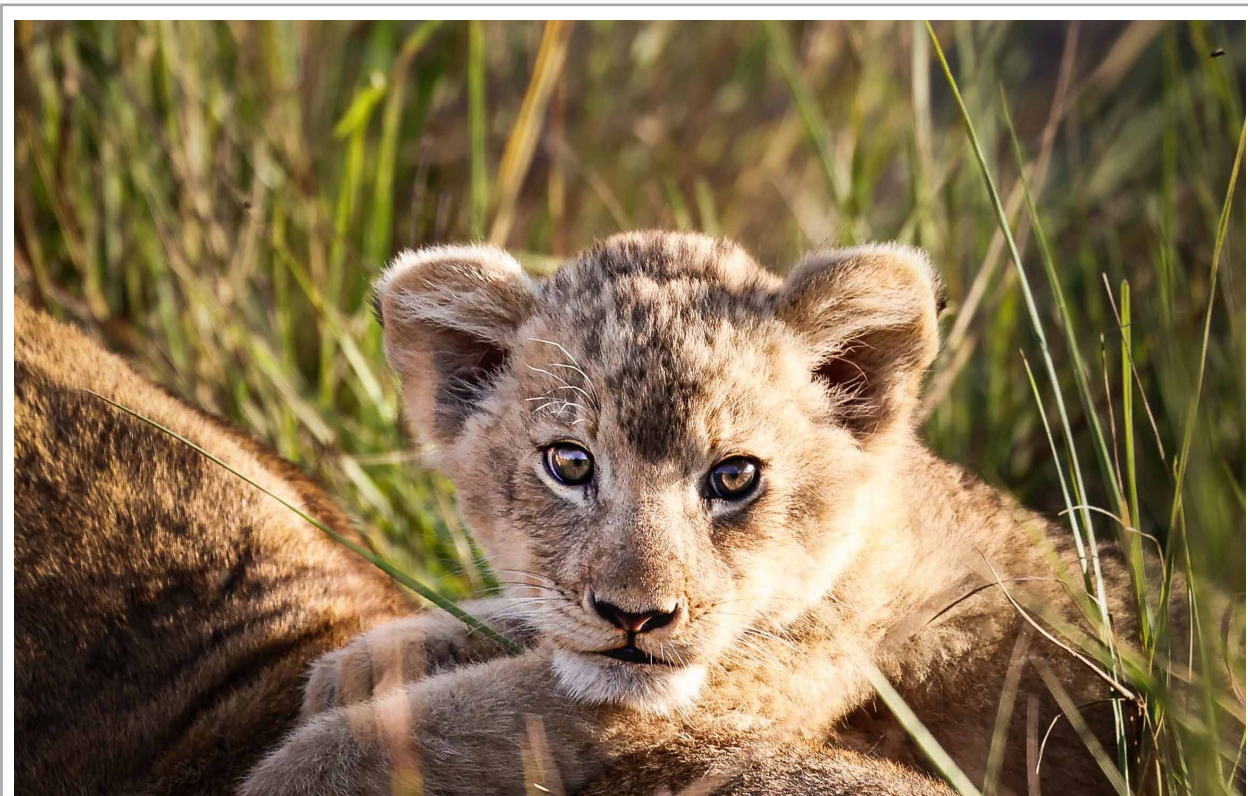


Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of April, Two Thousand and Twenty Three

Temperature

Average minimum: 17.7°C (63.8°F)

Average maximum: 28.9°C (83.9°F)

Minimum recorded: 15.0°C (59.0°F)

Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 3.0 mm

For the season to date: 589.2mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:08

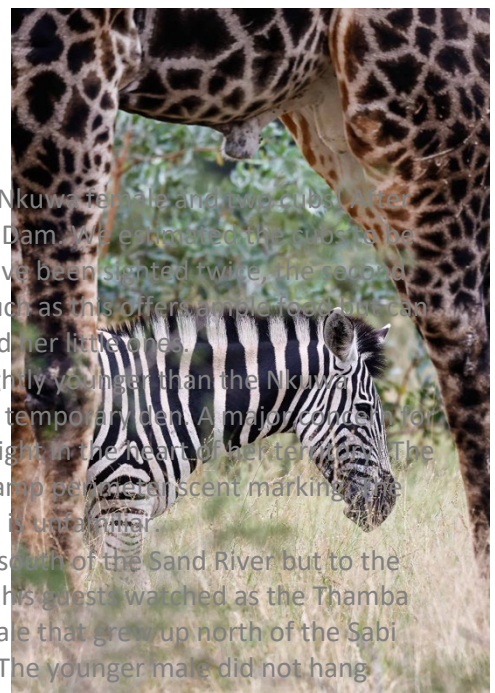
Sunset: 17:39

As winter knocks at the door, we reflect on what has been a spectacular period of wildlife encounters this April. From cheetah cubs to pangolin sightings, the lowveld has rolled out the red carpet for our guests in a quintessential manner. Dry grasses succumb to the parched earth while clear blue skies welcome us each morning without fail. On these still mornings sounds travel for miles following us along wherever we may go. As we gaze over the savanna termite mounds steam as the warm air meets the crisp morning temperatures above. This time of year is truly like no other, a time which has earned itself a reputation second to none. If this is just the start of the dry season, the months that follow will be phenomenal.

A sightings snapshot for April follows:

Leopards

- A major highlight with regards to leopards is the revelation of the Nkuwa female and two cubs. After many drives with great anticipation, she was found off Mhlwareni Dam. We estimated the cubs to be at least two months of age at the beginning of the month. They have been sighted twice, the second time their mother had led them to an impala ram kill. Large kills such as this offers a nice food source but can be too heavy for her to hoist in a tree, a real “Catch 22” for her and her little ones.
- The Schotia female is busy raising a single cub this time round. Slightly younger than the Nkuwa female’s cub, we have had only brief glimpses of the cub around a temporary den. A major concern for the Schotia female is the frequent viewing of the Mobeni female right in the heart of her territory. The aging Mobeni female has been sighted a number of times in the camp peninsula. Her distinctive marking Mobeni female will not hesitate to kill any leopard with whom she is unafraid.
- With regards to male leopards, the Thamba male has secured the south of the Sand River but to the north he has his work cut out for him. On one afternoon Jono and his guests watched as the Thamba male set off in pursuit of Xitsalala male leopard, a four-year-old male that grew up north of the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, that was mating with the Serengeti female. The younger male did not hang around and took off into the woodlands.
- It seems the Kangela male is having none of this and now can be found right up in the far northern reaches of Singita, close to the scenic watering hole of Mjombo Dam. For how long this three-year nomadic male will be viewed is anyone’s guess but many feel he may start looking to areas with less competition. He was seen on 26 April far east, opposite Main Camp on Mala Mala.



Lions

- Finally, the Mhangene Pride have revealed their cubs to us guides and gracious guests. A total of nine cubs between the ages of six and twelve weeks, from three different lionesses. They have provided regular viewing in the Ximobanyana drainage close to Khoza Pan. This is thrilling and we have not had this many cubs from this pride since 2019. We will bring you frequent updates on our social media platforms, so stay tuned.
- In the north an interesting development is taking place as six male lions consisting of a few sub-adults from the Nkuhuma Pride and their father, the northern Avoca male lion, are spending time together. For now, it is too early to say what will happen, but we will be keeping an eye on them and their movements as they look to settle out of the way of bigger males. The Plains Camp lions have a firm grip on territory to the south, but the north is largely unoccupied.
- The three Ntsevu Breakaway males and their lone sister have been a regular occurrence in the south, often near buffalo which graze daily in the grasslands. These young lions are still learning their abilities and provide great viewing. Earlier in the month Andries and his guests watched as they successfully took down a buffalo calf close to Castleton Camp. A crucial meal for their development and confidence as young hunters.



Grassland mammals

- We have had not only fantastic sightings of buffalo south of the Sand River but frequent viewings of smaller herds to the north as well. These herds move into the combretum-dominated woodlands as the grasses in the open areas are over utilised and unpalatable. The seep lines that can be found in the north hold a bounty of green grass species which are highly attractive to buffalo, rhino and zebra.

- In the south east dazzles of zebra can be seen far and wide dotted throughout the straw-coloured grasslands. The sickle bush and small thorn thickets that are found here attract giraffe, making for classic safari scenes of scattered trees with giraffe and zebra feeding in peace with one another.

Cheetahs

- At the beginning of the month, we were treated to multiple sightings of a mother cheetah and her two sub-adult offspring. Estimated age of ten months, these two siblings are now being taught by their mother where to find food in her vast home range and how to make a successful hunt. This comes with its challenges but she has done extremely well to make it this far with them. Due to the extensive area, she will cover we are unsure of when we will see them again.

Elephants

- What is arguably the best season of the year to search for elephants has surely lived up to its reputation. Now that water is slowly becoming scarce parades of elephant can be observed on their daily routine of finding fresh water sources. With Boulders and Ebony Lodges perfectly placed on the banks of the Sand River, one doesn't have to look too far to watch family groups of elephants enjoying a drink and splash in the water. We have also noticed two bulls with massive tusks in attendance of some females.



Special sightings

- The first day of the month started with a major highlight as Golden got a glimpse of something crawling into the bushes close to Tavangumi Koppies. On closer inspection he revealed it was a pangolin! A rather comical scene played out as Marc called in this highly sought-after nocturnal animal over the radio on what is typically known as April Fool's Day. The rest of the guiding team wary of the team's antics were doubtful if it was true but those that showed up were rewarded with the real deal! Only days later, another one was found! "Frequent" sightings of pangolin over the last few years are testimony to our effective anti-poaching efforts as pangolin are regarded as the most trafficked of any animal.
- Also worth mentioning is sightings of honey badgers which are now being seen more frequently during the daylight hours as the temperatures start to drop.



Bird List

- The bird list for April includes three new species, bringing our yearly total to 249.
- Special bird species: A pair of Cape vultures that were seen several times at an elephant carcass in the south of the reserve.

Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as an April Gallery of images.

The ultimate hunt

Article by Coleman Mnisi

During the morning game drive, myself and Greg followed up on a pack of eight wild dogs in the south of the reserve. Amazingly Greg found two wild dogs chasing an impala ram through the clearings into water!

What is amazing about wild dogs is that they are highly sociable and skilled hunters. Once the pair trapped the impala in the water, they called the rest of the pack to come and help. The six other pack members heard that something was happening and arrived on the scene.

The wild dogs kept running around the dam wishing the impala would come out. We spent over two hours watching and waiting to see what was going to happen. Eventually two male dogs decided to go into the water and pull the exhausted impala out. The rest then helped them, and the feeding frenzy began. After all that time the meal was over in 30 minutes.

As a guide this kind of sighting is very rare to see. I have seen wild dogs hunting and making kills many times while guiding here, but this sort of sighting is so special but also very hard to watch. However, for one to succeed it means another may need to sacrifice itself - we must never forget that.



April is impala season

Article by Andrew Taylor

The time has come for the change of seasons to set in and with it this brings other changes such as the terrain, weather, and animal behaviour, not only with mammals but there are certain other species that are affected by the change of season too. Migratory birds start to leave and the behaviour of certain insect species change too.

In this article I would like to discuss one animal in particular, the impala. The time has come for their rutting season to start and this is an extremely interesting topic to learn about. This behaviour is typically experienced at this time of year and the peak would usually be in May with it ending off in June when the females become pregnant and all the craziness begins to die down.

Days become shorter, mornings are becoming cooler and the blankets and seat warmers are starting to be used to their full potential. Coffee breaks are thoroughly enjoyed as a chance to slow down and warm up and appreciate all the sounds and views that the spectacular Sabi Sand Nature Reserve has to offer. This is often when we hear the guttural sounds of the impala rams as they fight and herd the receptive females so that they can eventually mate and bring on a new generation of impala to continue the cycle of nature.

Testosterone and energy are high and the dominant males will engage in fights that can lead to their death. Dominant rams will try to protect their herds, and bachelors will fight to try and claim rights to a herd of their own. Only the impala rams have horns (essentially a bony structure that is fused to the skull and is covered in a protective keratin layer) and use them to battle out dominance during this time. Horns will often break or be damaged and they will not grow back after this. This is different to the antlers of deer which will shed and grow back when damaged or broken.



The social structure of impala is called a 'harem' and this will consist of one dominant male and various females, and in some cases younger males that are subservient to the dominant male. The fighting that takes place during this time will determine the top rams and they will each acquire a harem of their own. After this mating will take place over a period of about two weeks.

During this time impala rams are often killed in high numbers by predators as they are distracted by their own behaviour and it gives the predators a huge opportunity to take advantage of their distraction - often in their bouts of chasing one another around and fighting the predators will be lying in wait and the impala rams will run directly into them.

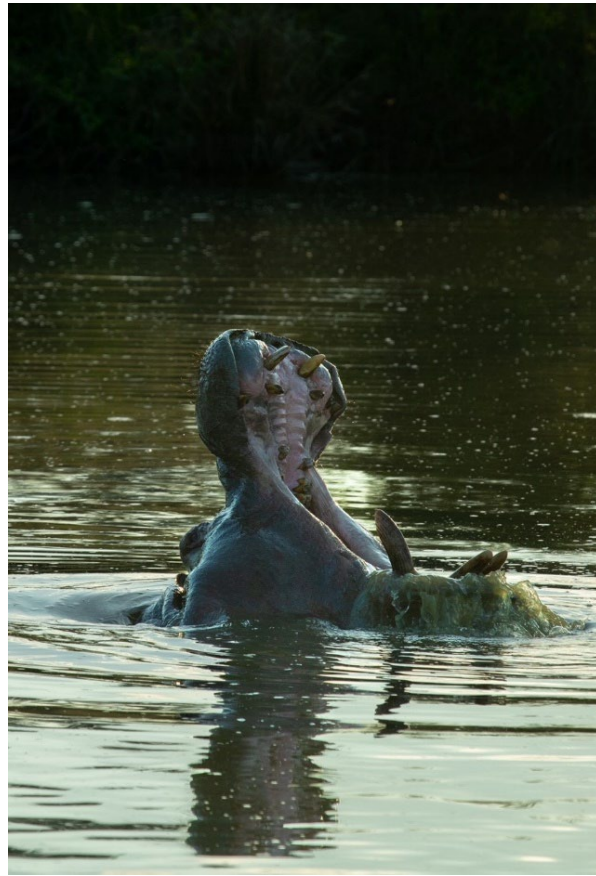
April Gallery



An excellent capture by Sipho Sibuyi of an African harrier hawk hunting a species of bat.



A spotted hyena comes away with a wildebeest skull after patiently waiting for a pride to finish their kill.
Image by Andrew Taylor.



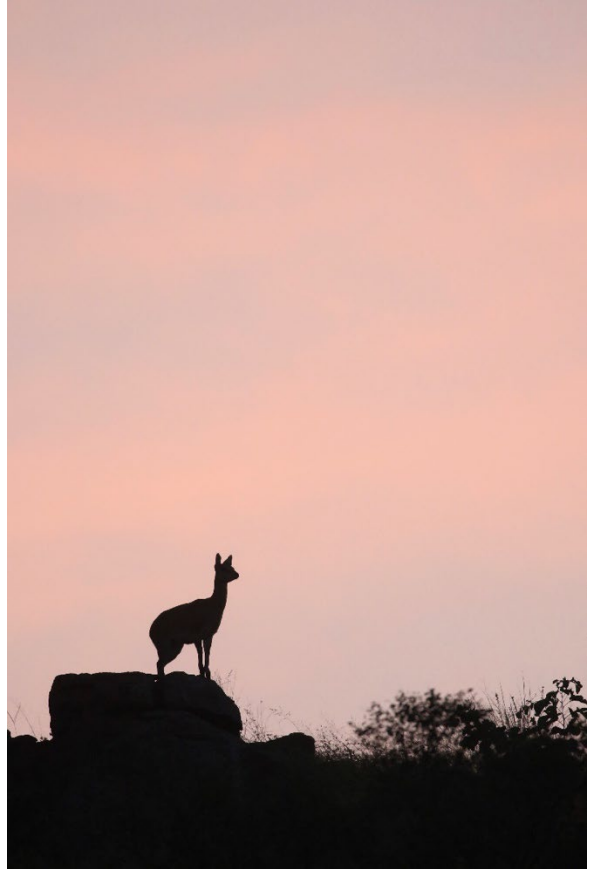
A hippo bull shows-off his weaponry to warn off those that may venture too close to his domain.
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A juvenile Nile crocodile regulates his core body temperature by opening his mouth and releasing heat.
Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



If looks could kill. Image by Andrew Taylor.



Klipspringer sentry. Image by Matt Durell.



Zebra quenching its thirst. Image by Matt Durell.



A Ntsevu sub-adult lion. Image by Matt Durell.