

# Singita



Photo by Garry Bruce

## WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of April, Two Thousand and Twenty-one

### Temperature

Average minimum: 16.8°C (62.24°F)  
Minimum recorded: 14.0°C (57.2°F)  
Average maximum: 29.9°C (85.82°F)  
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95°F)

### Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 6 mm  
Season to date: 739 mm

### Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:13  
Sunset: 17:24

April is the second month of autumn here and we are gradually seeing the transformation of the bush from the lush green vegetation that our concession was covered in, into the neutral tones worn by autumn. The trees are also slowly beginning to shake off their leaves, and are becoming bare, with the exception of the evergreen trees and the trees that are positioned close enough to water sources, where their roots can tap into that constant supply. The herbivores are still in pristine condition boasting radiant coats.

Our rainfall levels have reduced significantly, leaving a numerous number of dehydrated pans across the property, with the only evidence that they once held water being the soft glistening mud in their centres. All of the drainage lines and rivers have stopped flowing and now have sporadic patches/strips of water across their channels.

## Here's a Sightings Snapshot for April:

### Lions

- The Shishangaan Pride have been seen on a number of occasions in the southern part of our concession where they have been maintaining their stronghold. The pride is in good condition and have been regularly seen with full bellies.
- The Kumana male has been seen with the Shishangaan Pride on many occasions. He was also seen mating with one of the lionesses, so, if all goes well, we could be expecting new additions to the Shish Pride at the end of winter.
- The Mananga Pride has been seen around the north western parts of the concession, where they rule, hunting and vocalizing not far away from Gudzane Dam. Xihamham (a Shish male) has also been spotted with them on a number of occasions with a special appearance of his brother joining them which has not been seen of late. This could be because there are two males slowly encroaching on their territory and the brothers realize they are stronger together than separated. The new members of the Mananga Pride have been seen on a few occasions, separated from the rest of the pride.
- Two unknown males have been seen in the northern parts of our concession. On one such occasion they were trailing one of the Shish males who seemed to be hurriedly trying to move away from them. The same two males also killed a lioness from the Mountain Pride who may have wandered a little too far away from the protection of her pride. After a few days all that was left was her bottom jaw, everything else was consumed by hyenas and vultures.
- The Mountain Pride has been seen moving around in the central parts of the concession, heading more and more north, even extending as far north as the block south of Mbatsane where the Northern Pride used to reign. This month they have also lost a member of their pride to two unknown males. They have also been seen feeding on a number of occasions on wildebeest and waterbuck.



A lioness from the Mountain Pride and cubs in the early morning mist. Photo by Wessel Booysen

### Leopards

- A female leopard has been seen with her cubs on a number of occasions although the number of cubs varies from 1 to 3 cubs per sighting. They are predominately in the Butterfly Crossing/Name Badge Hill vicinity. She is relaxed, however her cubs that are well under three months old are very skittish. We just manage to see tiny rosetted fluff balls dashing into any thick vegetation that hides them from the vehicles that they have not yet become accustomed too.

- A female leopard with her subadult cub has been seen a few times in the south western parts of the concession. One of these occasions she was sharing an impala carcass with her cub around Xikhova/James.
- A very relaxed young male has also been sighted playfully moving around the concession.
- A male and a female leopard have been heard discreetly mating and calling in front of Lebombo, however they have managed to successfully evade our peering eyes.
- Mhlangulane female has also been seen scent marking around Fig Tree Link area.
- A skittish unknown female has also been seen on a number of occasions around the Poort area.
- The relaxed Mbiri Mbiri male has been seen on a couple of occasions in the central parts of the concession where he is establishing his territory.



Mbiri Mbiri male up in a leadwood tree. Photo by Wessel Booysen

### Cheetahs

- Cheetah sightings have been limited to park roads as the vegetation is still thick and in some areas the grass levels are well over a metre long. However, we expect their return to our concession in the coming months.

### Wild dogs

- The pack of four have been seen around the Nwanetsi picnic spot on two occasions.

### Spotted hyenas

- Single spotted hyenas have been seen wandering around the concession waiting for an opportunity to scavenge and the opportunity to hunt. Their howls can be heard almost every night on game drive and from the lodge.
- A clan of eight have been seen lingering not far away from a python carcass that is wedged up on a vine not far from Madagga Crossing.

### Elephants

- In the beginning of the month, we were viewing small breeding herds of elephants of less than 10, however closer to the end of the month the larger herds of elephants are moving back into the



concession and smaller family units are grouping up once again, allowing us to see over 40 of these grey giants at one time.

- Bachelor groups of elephants or single bull wanderers are spread all across the concession.
- There are a lot of elephant calves among the herds at this time of the year.



Elephant calves smelling the vehicle      Photo by Wessel Booysen

### Buffalos

- The larger herds of buffalo are still at bay, we expect to see them marching in during the drier months, the biggest herd we have seen this month was less than 15 individuals.
- We have been seeing dagga boys spread across the concession.



Buffalo Bull (Dagga boy)      Photo by Wessel Booysen

### Plain's game

- Plain's game have been seen in good condition across the concession as the browning grasses still retain high level of nutrients which has been sufficient for them.



Female waterbuck with their young calves Photo by Wessel Booysen

### Rare animals and other sightings

- A dead 3m+ African rock python was seen with a full “belly” wedged on a creeper vine with bite marks to its face and pecks to the side of its long body. Cause of death is unknown at this time.
- A caracal has been seen on a number of occasions around Park Road.
- A number of black-backed jackal pairs have been seen across the concession, with one such pair lingering close to the Mountain Pride's wildebeest kill, waiting for an opportunity to scavenge.
- Seven small spotted genets were seen by one vehicle in one afternoon drive in different areas.

### Birds

- 175 bird species were seen this month, all but a handful of the migratory birds have returned to their respective homes.
- A number of Southern ground hornbills have been sighted on the concession.
- A striped crane was seen around Pony Pan.

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



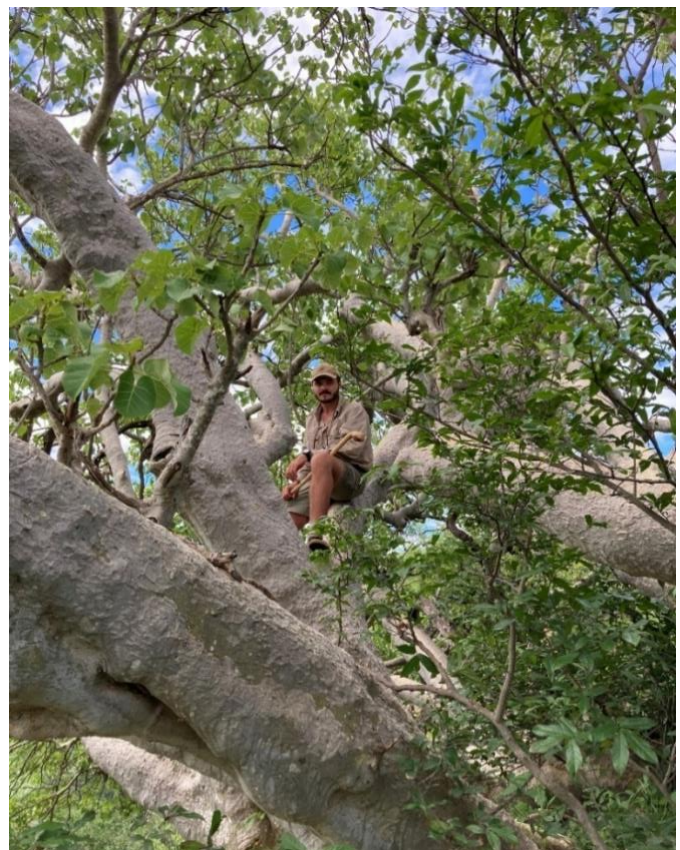
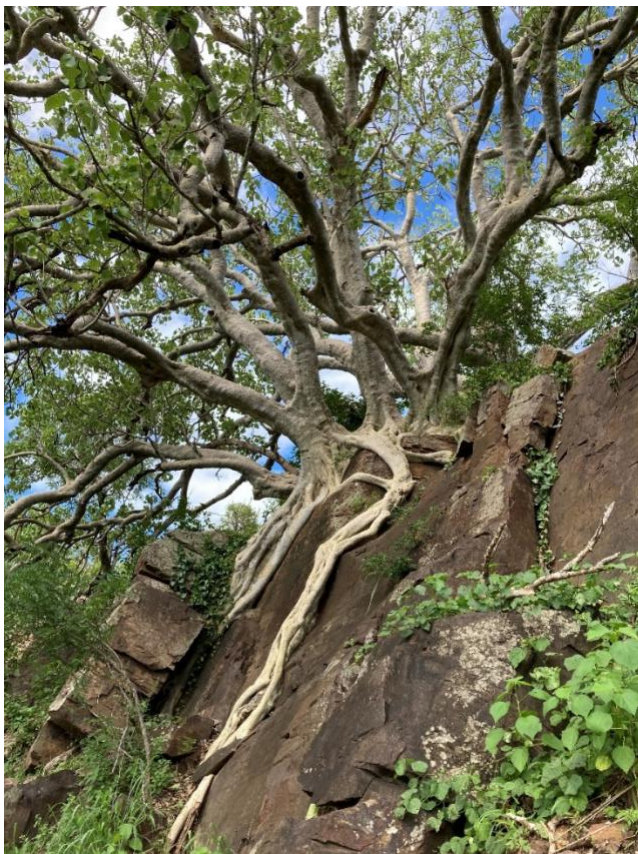
*Xirhomberhombe* is the Tsonga name for the large-leaved rock fig, *Ficus abutilifolia*. On our concession they are fairly common and grow wherever there are rocks. The pale yellowish colour of the bark stands out clearly against the reddish rocks of the Lebombo rhyolite and the lighter granophyre ridges.

All southern African fig trees are pollinated by a small species of wasp, and the large-leaved rock fig by two known species, *Elisabethiella comptoni* and *Nigeriella fusciceps*. These wasps enter the fruit through a small hole in the top to reach the flower which is situated within, whereupon they lay their eggs and also pollinate the flower.

These fig trees are also what is referred to as 'rock splitters', as their roots find their way through cracks and crevices and actually cause the rocks to crack.

As far as figs go the large-leaved rock fig is by no stretch the biggest, hardly ever growing taller than five metres, however along the eastern bank of the N'wanetsi River, not far upstream from Dumbana Pools and growing on the western cliffs of the Lebombo mountains, there is the biggest rock fig I have ever seen and one of the largest in the Kruger National Park.

I had always threatened to climb this tree, and one day in late winter when the N'wanetsi River had dried up making it crossable, I decided to give it a go. After scrambling up an almost sheer rock face, I got to a spot where I could access the tree. The bark of all figs are quite slippery, maybe a reason you don't often see leopards in them, and the drop was about 20 metres down so I had to move very carefully until I found the perfect seat! A few African green pigeons burst through the foliage and flew off as I negotiated the branches and, peering through the densely leaved branches, my view spread far across the Lebombo plains.



Many people have heard of the elusive pangolin but very few have ever seen one in the wild, including some guides who spend hours every day on safari! Until fairly recently the pangolin was steeped in mystery, to both scientists and naturalists alike. With the illicit trade of their meat and highly sought-after scales becoming exposed in recent years, much more awareness has been raised about this unusual and shy group of animals and thus more funding has become available for the study and protection of them. There are eight species of pangolin in the world, four of which occurs in Africa. In the South African lowveld and at Singita Kruger National Park, Temminck's ground pangolin is what we dream of finding on safari, and showing to our guests.

The last pangolin that was seen at Singita Kruger National Park was in January 2020 - over a year ago. About four weeks ago when out on morning game drive, my tracking partner Howard's right hand shot up from the front of the car, meaning that he had seen tracks and wanted me to stop. He turned around in his tracking seat and with excited raised eyebrows peering over his mask said one of the most exciting words a person could hear on safari: "*Khwari*", the pangolin.

I hopped out of the car and had a look with Howard. Sure enough, right by my feet were the clear and fresh tracks, the bi-pedal gait being unmistakeable. Here and there was a drag mark of its long scaly tail and scuff marks where the front claws, carried tucked up under the chest, had grazed the ground. I urged my guests to hop off from the vehicle and have a look, explaining to them what a significant find this was. We followed the tracks for a while and noticed that they ran to a low row of hills. The grass was very tall and the ground very rocky so we soon lost the faint tracks. Later one of the trackers, Glass Marimane, tracked it for a while but also soon lost it in the broken terrain.

In the following days and weeks we saw the tracks again in the same area, and also tracks of another, larger pangolin further north in the reserve. Now the tracks are seen every couple of days and I believe it's only a matter of time before some lucky group on drive finds the rare and elusive pangolin!

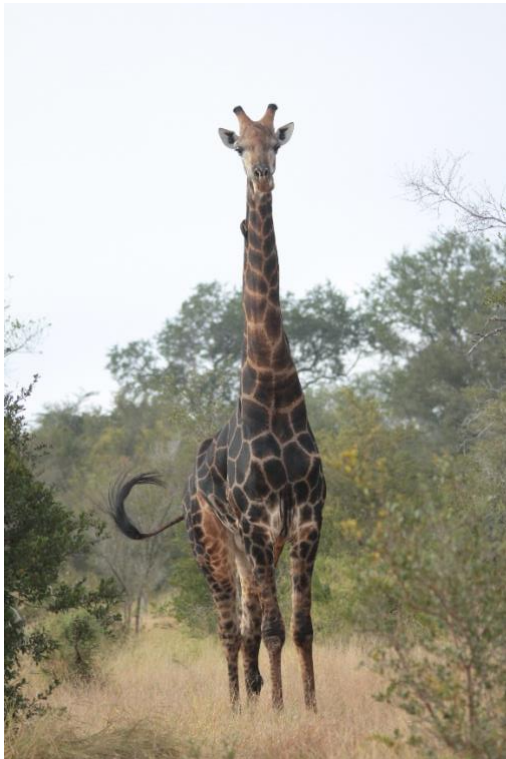


Photos by Briand Rode





Mountain Pride male



Male giraffe



Mbiri Mbiri male watching male impalas

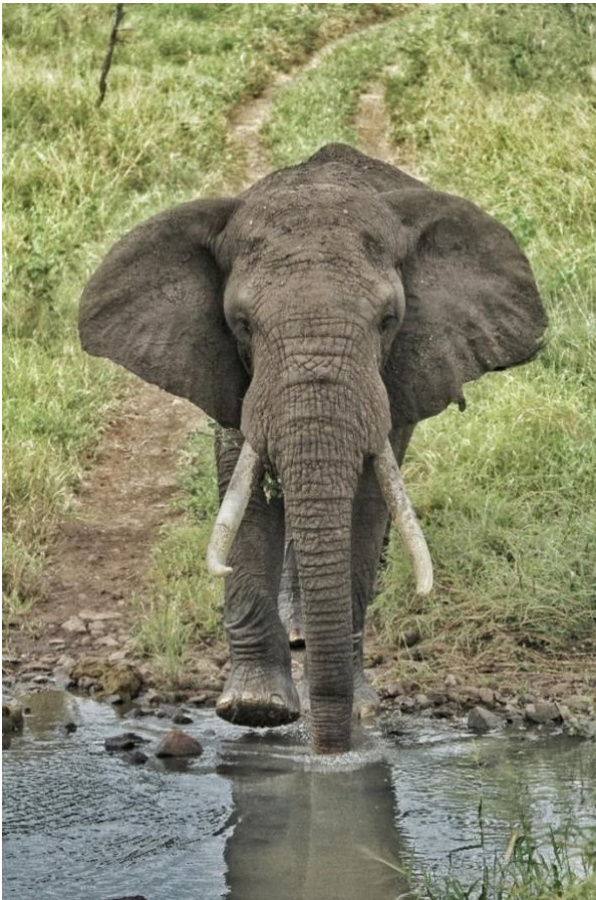




Last surviving member of the Kumana Male coalition



Young male leopard on a dead leadwood tree



Elephant bull crossing a drainage line



Elephant bull feeding





Monitor lizard soaking up the sun



Male chacma baboon