

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.9°C (67.83°F)
Average maximum: 28.9°C (83.97°F)
Minimum recorded: 14.0°C (57.20°F)
Maximum recorded: 35.0°C (95.00°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 20.0 mm
For the season to date: 586.2 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:56
Sunset: 18:10

As summer tapers to an end the winds of change can be felt in the most subtle of ways. Grass inflorescences reach high before making one last attempt to multiply, while the shadows that seem to stretch for a few minutes longer each day bring with them a noticeable change in temperature. The distant bray of a zebra stallion regrouping his harem carries for many miles as the golden afternoons are now almost as still as the star-filled nights. March has been a month of calmness and preparation for our biggest seasonal change which is that of winter. This time of year can be considered that of a shoulder season where summer slowly embraces the winter. We are grateful for this time and everything that accompanies it.

Here's a sightings snapshot and news for March:

Plains game

- We have noticed that the larger herds of buffalo are now splintering off into smaller herds that number a few hundred. There have been numerous sightings of bulls mating with some of the cows which would mean births being timed in accordance with the rains at the end of this year.
- As the days go on, we are hearing an increase in impala ram rutting. The deep guttural calls of older males leave our guests in awe as this is not a sound you would expect to hear from such an elegant looking antelope!
- The old Selati railway that weaves through the grasslands in the south has been the best place to view large congregations of zebra, a firm favourite for children on safari.

Elephants

- Most of our elephant viewing has been taking place in the south as well as on the edge of the silver cluster-leaf woodlands where damp soils bare the last of the seasonal herbs and forbs. While watching them feed we are greeted by the scent of wild basil and aniseed awakening our olfactory senses.



An elephant bull feeding on leaves from a strangler fig tree. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor

Lions

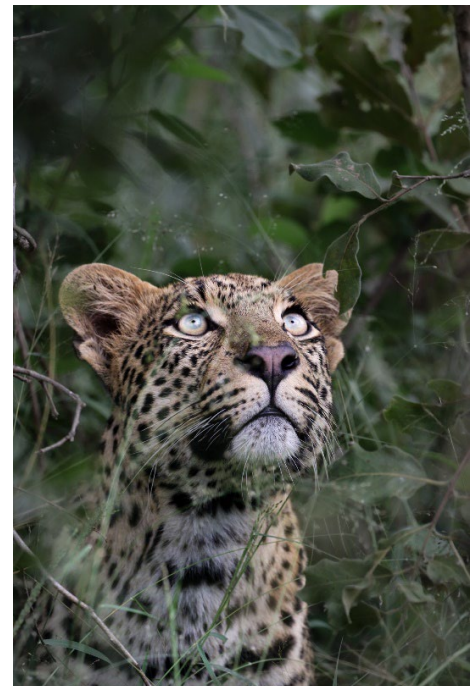
- The Mhangene Pride has dominated our lion viewing of late. They have been seen on a wildebeest kill just south of Castleton Camp, while one of the Plains Camp males had been mating with the oldest female north of the camp. Andrew and Johnson tracked and found a lactating lioness that headed into the Mobeni drainage suggesting her cubs may be stashed among the wild date palms in the riverbed. This area has been zoned for the next few weeks to allow the cubs and mother to settle during the most vulnerable time of their lives.
- In the north the Talamati Pride has been seen looking full-bellied on a few occasions. The five females with the one sub-adult male lion in tow. His days are numbered with the females as the Plains Camp males further their territory.



A Plains Camp male lion resting in the late afternoon shade. Image by Matt Durell

Leopards

- There has been a shift in territory with the aging Mobeni female leopard and her daughter the Ximobanyana female. One even Golden, Marc, and their guests watched as the younger female frequently scent-marked on Mveve hill, which once formed the core of her mother's territory. There have been two sightings of the Mobeni female just east of our lodges - once with a hoisted kudu calf kill and more recently on a patrol. It looks like she may be looking to set up a new territory around the area of Hippo Pools.
- Now the area that the Mobeni female has been seen in is part of the Schotia female's territory. It has been confirmed that the Schotia female has cubs close to our lodges. The rocky outcrops in the east of her territory are a well-used denning area but is now frequented by the Mobeni female. She will be a threat to the Schotia female's cubs if she were to move them there at some stage. Fortunately, using scent the Schotia female may be able to detect her presence early on before tragedy may prevail.
- Piet, Louis, and their guests viewed a successful hunt by the Nkuwa female. After a long, patient stalk she caught an impala just as the light was fading after sunset. What made this even more exciting was hearing her contact call for her cubs! We have not had a chance to see them yet but by looking at tracks we think there are at least two cubs.
- In the north the Kangela male (Photo on the right. Image by Matt Durell) is looking comfortable in the lower woodlands along the Sand River. This scenic area provides such diverse



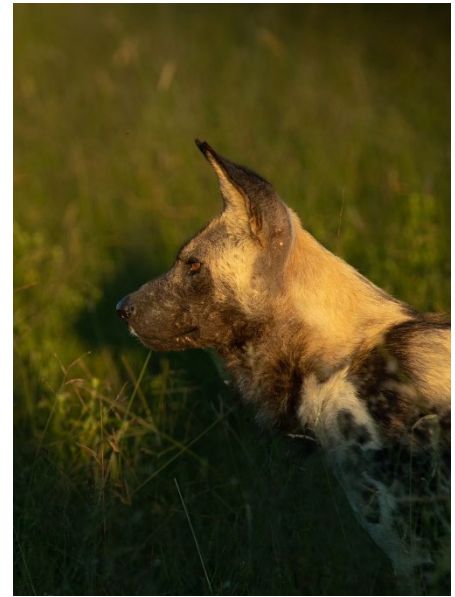
wildlife viewing owing to the variation in habitat. The cherry on the top is seeing the growing male slouched in the branches of a tree, which has been a frequent sight for guests this month.

Wild dogs

- The pack of eight that has been frequenting Singita of late have been seen mating. Both the alpha female and beta female have been mated with by two separate males. This behaviour is not commonly observed.

Cheetahs

- A female cheetah and two cubs were sighted on three occasions around 40K pan in the south. Sightings of females and cubs is not something we see on a regular basis. We desperately hope her cubs make it through to independence.



Wild dog at last light. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor

Special sightings

- A once in a lifetime sighting of a honey badger raiding a mopane bee hive was witnessed just after sunset. Guests watched as a male honey badger dug into the bee hive right next to the vehicle, completely undeterred by the bees.



Honey badger after a successful raid on a bee hive. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor

- A serval was also seen making a successful hunt on a rodent in the southern grasslands. Sightings of this small cat may only come around a few times a year. What a special encounter this was!

- Johan, Chris, and their guests witnessed a crash of both black and white rhino together, seeing black rhino, let alone both species together, is truly remarkable and shows what a success the protection of our property is yielding.

Wellness moments

- As we near the dry season we have been experiencing more time on foot. As the winds drop and game paths form, approaching game on foot has been more achievable without disturbing them. We have been lucky enough to view elephant bulls and rhino going about their routine without them being aware of us. These moments are unforgettable as we watched in complete silence on foot.
- Finding a quiet point along the Sand River is the ideal area to take a moment to meditate, slow down and reflect, just the thing Andrew and his guests did at Hippo Pools this month.



Thabgo leads guest through a meditation at Hippo Pools. Image by Andrew Taylor

Bird list

- The bird list for March includes twenty one new species, bringing our yearly total to 246. Special bird species: white-backed night heron, glossy ibis, curlew sandpiper, little stint, marsh owl, half-collared kingfisher, brown-backed honeybird, marsh warbler and violet-eared waxbill.

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

An unforgettable encounter with giraffe and friends

Article by Johan Ndlovu

I thought I should share with you some information about the most beautiful, elegant, graceful, and my favourite animal, the giraffe.

The giraffe is the world's tallest animal and has some amazing adaptations to accommodate their lifestyle. Giraffes' long necks give them a height advantage and they can access a two-metre band of vegetation out of reach to all other herbivores except elephants. The largest bull can reach almost six-meters high! Because of the height difference between sexes, male and female giraffe feed in difference zones, therefore they do not compete for food with one another. Bulls tend to feed higher up, stretching themselves to their height limit while cows tend to utilize lower browse. They do lie down to rest at some point during the night but they are very vulnerable during these times. Giraffe are also very curious animals - they will stare at predators lying in the grass giving shorter animals (even humans) a clue to the fact that there may be carnivores in an area. Due to their height advantage many other animals will associate with giraffes and respond to early signs of danger given by the tall browsers.



The picture above depicts a group of giraffes, collectively known as a journey of giraffe. Shortly hereafter they all began staring in one general direction thus giving us a clue that there may be carnivores in the area. Therefore, tracker Christopher and I became curious to the point where we decided to investigate... As we expected, some distance away from the giraffes in the same direction where they were looking, we discovered a lioness and two sub-



adult lions on an adult kudu bull kill, and what an amazing sighting this turned out to be! Our guests were thrilled with these sightings and our detective work.

Here are some more giraffe facts:

- Giraffe have long eyelashes which protect their eyes when they push their heads into the thorny canopies of trees to get their food.
- The length of a giraffe's tongue is 45 centimetres and it can extend a great deal beyond the mouth, this gives giraffes an additional height advantage.
- The tongue is prehensile and this enables giraffes to use different feeding methods.
- A newborn giraffe weighs about 100 kilograms and can stand within 15 minutes of birth.
- Giraffe have very loose social structures known as temporary associations, though they still prefer to be around members of their own kind even though the makeup of the group fluctuates. Bull giraffes are generally solitary and move from temporary association to the next, seeking cows in heat. They are not territorial but a local status hierarchy develops according to age and size and this is established through ritual necking encounters amongst bachelors, from an early age.

Many people believe giraffe to be mute, and yes, they are generally silent but they do have several vocalizations that they use to communicate with one another and these include snorts, coughs and bellows.

As you can tell I love watching giraffes, and I look forward to sharing these sightings and others with you on your next Singita Sabi Sand safari!

Flying insects

Article by Kayla McClelland



The wet season is now coming to an end, and after all the rains we have had, especially after the first rain, the soil starts to erupt with thousands of flying insects! These are in fact winged termites called alates on their nuptial flight to reproduce, providing a feast for birds and other wildlife.

Termites play one of the most important roles in a healthy ecosystem out here in the bush. They do this by breaking down dead plant material to improve soil health which puts nutrients back into the ground, and by being a major food source for other animals.

Termites live in highly structured colonies where individuals have specific roles (a caste system). The king and queen termite are the reproductive termites, mating for life and producing a family of workers, soldiers and alates for their colony.

The king and queen only produce alates once a year, to leave the termite mounds and fly off to start their own colonies. This is called the nuptial flight, meaning the mating flight, and is the most important phase in the lifecycle of a termite. This special moment often occurs simultaneously for multiple termite colonies, as a response to temperature, rain, humidity, wind conditions and the time of year, ensuring different colonies can meet and swap genes.

Once the female alate erupts from the termite mound she releases pheromones to attract her future king and mate. She ensures that she chooses the fastest and fittest male termite to be her mate for life. When they meet, their wings immediately fall off, and they set off to start a new home together.

The queen termite can lay up to 30 000 eggs a day – quickly populating her nest with a community and family of her own to continue the cycle.

Many herbivores such as impala, elephants, zebras, and buffalo love the work termites do because they prefer feeding on the trees and grass that grow on the termite mounds due to the higher concentration of nutrients that they contain. All thanks to the termites working hard beneath the ground!

Termite mounds also form homes for many different animal species. Hyenas will den their cubs inside the dug out holes of termite mounds. Warthogs will use the dug out holes to sleep in at night to stay out of danger in the darkness when predators are active. Even reptiles will use termite mounds to incubate their eggs due to the temperature in the mounds always being consistent and warm (+/-30 degrees Celsius).

Termites can even act as firefighters for ecosystems: By breaking down dead vegetation matter they are removing tons of moribund material from the ecosystem every year, which is a dramatic reduction in 'fuel load' for wild fires.

It's wonderful to know that these tiny termites are possibly the most important little creatures out here. They are small yet fascinating, socially complex helpers of ecosystems, and an incredibly important part of the web of life here at Singita. Removing them from our ecosystem will likely cause it all to collapse!



March Gallery



A young vervet monkey brimming with naughtiness! Image by Matt Durell



Andrew Taylor captured an impala on the run using a photographic technic known as slow panning.



We have had great viewing of big raptors such as this pair of bateleur eagles above, and an immature martial eagle pictured below. Images by Coleman Mnisi





A stunning scene greeted guests as they rounded the corner, of the Schotia female leopard poised in a marula tree. Image by Andrew Taylor

A selection of bird photographs by Marc Bowes-Taylor:

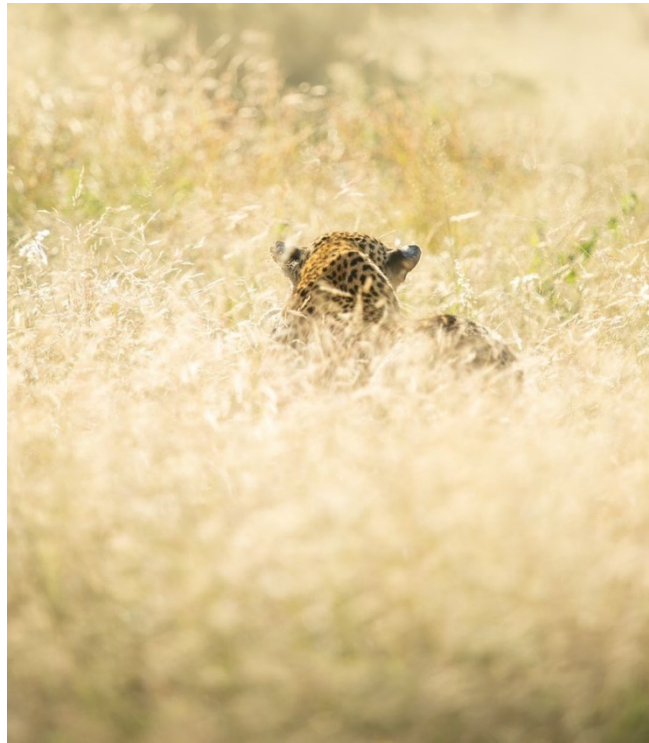


A pair of brown-headed parrots.



Above a male village indigobird.
Below, an immature African harrier-hawk.





The Nkuwa female leopard moments before she had success hunting an impala. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



A red-billed oxpecker and giraffe look on while a dazzle of zebra scan their surroundings.
Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor and Andrew Taylor