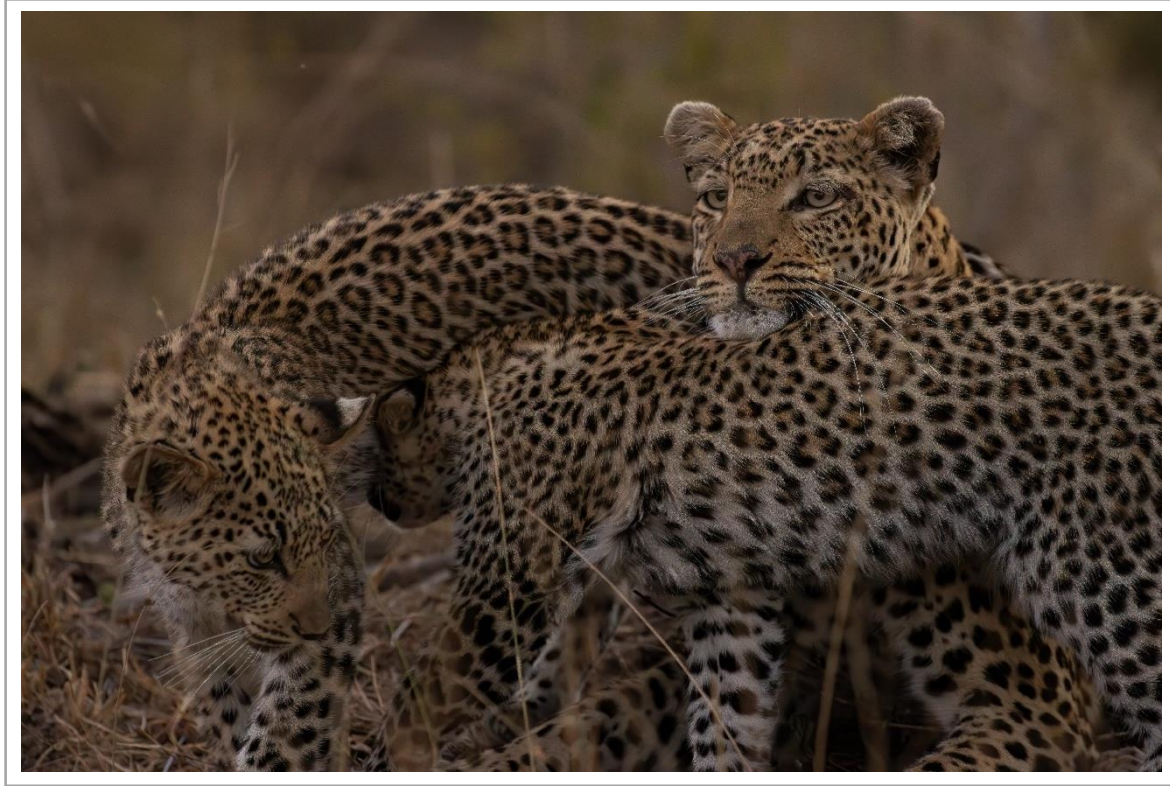


Singita



Dumbana female leopard with cubs – Photo by Graeme Stewart

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

For the month of June, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.7°C (56.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 08.0°C (46.4°F)
Average maximum: 27.3°C (81.1°F)
Maximum recorded: 32.0°C (89.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 2 mm
Season to date: 452 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:36
Sunset: 17:15

Dry season is truly on the go, grasses have turned to a beautiful golden brown and the brush is thinning out nicely. The days are starting later and colder, with everyone bundled up in blankets and ponchos as safaris set out, and yet still by mid-morning the elephants are making their way towards the river for a drink as the heat sets in. The colours of the sunset are crisp red and oranges, as the day gives way to our beautiful clear winter night skies.

A Sightings Snapshot for June follows:

Lions

- The Trichardt male, still just one male from what we have seen, has been scarce and when he has been seen he has been quite vocal, announcing his presence to any would-be competitors for the area. Based on the locations he has been found, and the direction he is seen moving in, it seems he is spending the majority of his time near the Mananga lionesses as opposed to the Shish.
- The Mananga Pride have not been seen many times this month as they appear to be keeping their cubs along the N'wanetsi River further to the west of our concession, although they have left their tracks for us to find many times, so we know they have been entering the area and exiting again before we have the chance to find them. The females have been seen hunting more regularly than the cubs have been seen, but with each sighting of the cubs we are happy to see that all eight of them are still alive and well.
- The Shish Pride is still going strong, but there is a lot of pressure on the seven adult females as their fourteen cubs grow and develop even larger appetites. Although they all seem to be in good condition, they need to be feeding regularly to ensure all the members have adequate food.
- The Maputo males have been seen once or twice individually, but most sightings have been together with at least some of the members of the Chava Pride in the north-western reaches of the concession. They were even recently seen making a kill with one of the lionesses, she had initiated the hunt by tackling a large wildebeest bull, and the Maputo male bulldozed in and tackled the prey to the ground to finish it off. The three then fed noisily, growling and bickering constantly through the meal.
- The Chava Pride, although initially very nervous of our presence are steadily becoming more accustomed to the vehicles. Some may still appear apprehensive, while other members of the pride are much more relaxed. We have seen this pride, or certain individuals from this pride more frequently this month, often being accompanied by the very attentive Maputo males, even a few mating events have been observed.
- An unknown group of lions, including three males and two females were seen in the far northern reaches of the reserve. Also there were a few groups of adult male lions, seemingly working out some politics amongst them, as they have been seen vocalising and chasing each other around, north of the concession.
- An unknown young male and female were respectively seen in the southern area of the reserve, assumed to be the sub-adults dispersing from the larger portion of the Mananga Pride, but it is difficult to know for sure with young, independent animals.

Leopards

- The Lebombo male leopard has only been seen twice this month, with both sightings being near each other on the river just north of the lodge.
- Khalanga male, after a few months hiatus has re-emerged on the reserve, and brought some drama with him. After being seen for the first time in two months, looking healthy and in good condition, he suddenly appeared with his mother, the Dumbana female, and her two young cubs. A very interesting interaction followed, as the Dumbana female growled and grumbled, clearly disgruntled by the presence of her adult male cub now in such close proximity to her new litter, but when she tried to move away, he stood to follow her and he clearly had a bad injury on his back leg. The delight at seeing this young male again was then tainted by worry about whether he would survive this injury. Much to the team's relief, the wounds appear to be healing and he was even seen in the last few days with a hoisted impala kill upon which he fed for about three days. All good signs for a strong recovery.
- The Confluence male is gradually becoming more confident around the vehicles, with a few sightings of him near the lodge, seemingly in a similar area to the Lebombo male.
- Nhlangulene female leopard has been seen a few times this month, but only four times, coming as far south as to have met the Dumbana female in one of the sightings. Her independent daughter has also been seen once this month, stalking impala along the rocky ridges alongside the central depression.

- As the month has progressed, the Dumbana female together with her two cubs have become a much more regular sighting, where previously we were only seeing the cubs when they were found with their mother on a kill, we are now seeing them moving with her more frequently as they get older and are more mobile.
- Nyala female has been reported twice this month, which is much less than we usually see her, however there have been a few sightings of a shy, young female moving around the areas where Nyala would usually be seen.
- There have also been a few sightings of some unknown leopard individuals across the reserve, as sightings of this nature are sometimes too swift for the animal to be identified.

African wild dogs

- It is denning time again and that is often accompanied by very irregular viewings of the dogs as they always have somewhere more important to be. We expect the large pack of twelve may have pups hidden somewhere within the rocky crevasses of the Lebombo mountain range, and so we have had a few sightings, but the dogs never stay at any one place for too long, and soon disappear.
- A small group of eight African wild dogs was seen in the far northern reaches of the reserve which had two females showing enlarged mammary glands, which is interesting because usually within the pack only the alpha female will breed and raise pups. Although it has often been observed that the 'beta' female also produces a litter, it is not always certain if any of the pups of the lower ranking female will survive.

Spotted hyenas

- Spotted hyena have been a regular sight this month, as usual they are not always easy to predict where to find them, but always exciting to see when you come around the corner in the early evening to find one, and somehow, they are always moving with purpose.

Elephants

- Elephant herd and bulls alike have been persistent across the reserve during June.
- During the day the families of females with their young close at heel, make regular visits to the river to drink, but as the temperatures cool with the setting sun, we often see the herds making their way to slightly more elevated regions to avoid the bitter cold around the river.

Buffalos

- During the month of June, we have seen multiple large herds of buffalos moving through the concession. These herds have numbered into the hundreds, as hoards of the large animals have been seen moving together from grazing areas to water and back. Now that the water sources are becoming scarcer, their movements will become more irregular.
- In the drainage lines, where small reserves of water persist and the vegetation is thick and cool, there have been a few lone buffalo bulls seen, seeking shelter from potential predators and the heat during the day, in the dense thickets.

Plains game

- A small herd of three eland cows was seen within the concession in June, seen in the mountainous areas around the granophyre ridge.
- A small herd of sable were seen in the far north-western region of the reserve.

Rare animals and other sightings

- A very exciting report of a Cape clawless otter seen in the river at Dave's crossing.

- A couple of honey badger pairs have been seen, usually moving quickly away from the vehicles with their characteristic trotting gait.
- Many pairs of klipspringer can be seen along the rocky ridges overlooking the N'wanetsi River, unfortunately two individuals, possibly an adult with its sub-adult youngster, were killed by a pack of African wild dogs, leaving behind one female which will now need to find a new mate.
- Although we often have sightings of the black-backed jackals, having a sighting of a side-striped jackal is much rarer which we enjoyed this month.

Birds:

- Some Southern ground hornbills have been seen, although their sightings have not been regular.
- Unique sightings of a lesser swamp warbler in the river around Dave's crossing, as well as a fiscal flycatcher further into the central depression, were reported during this month.
- A flock of yellow-billed storks, with a few African spoonbills were seen flying at sunset along the river to Mozambique.



Mananga lioness – Photo by Graeme Stewart.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as a June Gallery of images.

Through the part of the N'wanetsi concession where Singita Kruger National Park is based run two rivers, the Sweni and the N'wanetsi. Looking at a hydrological map of the area these rivers are the two main arteries running through the body, with their extensive network of tributaries spreading like a veinous network in all directions. These waterways are the lifeblood of the land, providing a suitable habitat and nourishment to a host of different species.



N'wanetsi River – Photo by Bernard Stiglingh

Because of the water and unique vegetation in and around the rivers, an extraordinary amount of species diversity occurs, especially insect and bird life. The almost cliché call of 'ngungwa' the fish eagle, so well-known on African waters, is a constant around Dumbana pools and elsewhere on the N'wanetsi. African darters, the freshwater spearfishermen, dive underwater guided by their sharp beaks in search of tilapia and small catfish. Like the tops of totem poles these birds sit motionless with their wings spread after a successful hunt, drying themselves in the warm rays of the sun on some dead branch in or near the water. Kingfishers flourish and it is not uncommon to see three species in the same vicinity; the pied kingfisher hovering somewhere over the

water, the giant kingfisher patiently sitting on a branch and the malachite kingfisher hidden among the reeds, like a multi-coloured gemstone waiting to catch some tiny little fish. Even the scarce half-collared kingfisher has been spotted a few times on the N'wanetsi at a low water bridge called Dave's crossing. From this crossing you can also sometimes see a lesser swamp warbler jumping through the rushes, and not far downstream an African rail was spotted recently, a first for this area. Blue-cheeked bee-eaters are nowhere met with in abundance in the Park except for the Pafuri area of the north and around the N'wanetsi and Sweni Rivers, where they are attracted by the myriad of flying insects, especially dragonflies and damselflies. Blue water lilies grow in profusion and one need not look for long before seeing an African jacana run from lily pad to lily pad with their long spindly legs. Despite the name, these lilies also sometime have mauve, white and pink-coloured flowers and in spring and summer the river is a most beautiful sight, a sight that would certainly have inspired Monet to put brush to canvas! Saddle-billed storks stalk the shallows in search of prey to flush, and many is the memory I have of seeing them at sunset racing around and circling in tandem with wings spread as if performing some archaic dance while pursuing a fast fish darting away from them, all silhouetted against the backdrop of the red cliffs of the Lebombo mountains.



N'wanetsi River – Photo by Bernard Stiglingh.

The Sweni and N'wanetsi Rivers also have a very healthy population of those feared and ancient reptiles, the Nile crocodiles, that feed mostly on the rivers' well stocked supply of fish and in particular the large sharp-toothed catfish. When lions or leopard kill an animal too close to the river's edge, there is a good chance that they will have their meal taken by large crocodiles who come onto land for a gratis meal, their tough skins protecting them from tooth and claw. The crocodile population often have their numbers checked by egg-stealing Nile monitor lizards and the hatchlings are prey to the many herons, storks, and other crocodiles of these dangerous waters. Both marsh and serrated hinged terrapins are also to be found, often seen basking in the sun on small rock islands or even on the backs of hippos.

Large freshwater mussels occur in both the Sweni and N'wanetsi and in some of the larger tributaries like the Xinkelengana. These bivalves provide food for several different animals, but most notably to the African openbill, a small stork with a bill specialized for finding and opening mussels and for finding freshwater snails, which make up the bulk of their diet. The larger shells were also used by both stone age and iron age people who lived on the land in the past. The mussels were eaten and the hard shells were broken into smaller fragments and worked into beads, which you often find in the middens of archaeological sites in the area. Today some Shangaan people still use these shells or 'rikatla' as pot-scourers and to cure eye problems, the ash from a burnt shell being rubbed into small incisions behind the eyes on the temples.



White-backed night-heron – Photo by Bernard Stiglingh

Around dusk and in the summer is especially a magical time to be at the river: a white-backed night heron is sniping fish in the shallows, and somewhere downstream the short and sudden harsh cry of the black-crowned night heron comes from the darkness. A leopard is rasping close to the foot of the Lebombo ridges and the reeds on the bank can gently be heard parting as a civet moves through on the hunt. Scores of crickets, painted reed frogs and bubbling kassinias give the river its vibrant soundtrack - that and the occasional splash of a crocodile or catfish every now and then or the echoing snorts of hippos before they head to land to feed. Hundreds of fireflies emerge from the reeds, like little floating emerald stars, switching on and off to the pulse of the life-giving river. It's all connected and intertwined; one large living being.

An amazing morning

Article by Brian Rode

What an amazing morning! We had headed out into the hills as the sun was coming up. The granophyre ridge was very mysterious with the thick mist. The columns of rock were shadowed with the rising sun behind them and the candelabra trees were like hands with fingers stretching into the hazy sky. We turned onto Granophyre Link. One usually has a great view over the park from on top of this hill, but this morning the mist only allowed us to see about fifty metres ahead. Water droplets were dropping from my eyebrows and eyelashes onto my face. Up ahead I noticed an animal walking in the road. It looked like a small dog with a white tip to its tail. As we came closer, I realized that a side-striped jackal was standing in front of us. As soon as I saw it, I turned around and it realized that we were there and quickly ran into the long grass. We carried on down the hill and as we were approaching the drainage line at the bottom two honey badgers jumped out of the shrubbery into the road. They made a rattling sound when they saw the vehicle and then headed back into the vegetation.



Maputo male – Photo by Brian Rode.

One of the guides had called in on the radio saying that he had found the Zamani male leopard near an area that we know as the N4. We decided to head there, hoping to see him. When we got there, he was still walking around in the open area sniffing all sorts of scents on the ground. He was wandering all over the place. The sun was now dissolving the mist away and the light was great on the leopard. He was stunning! He then headed towards a small rocky outcrop. We would not be able to follow him there so we decided to go around to the other side of the ridge and try and relocate him on that side. As we were going around the side of the ridge, we could hear impala alarm calls coming from the Gudzani Dam area. Just as we turned around the edge of the rocky area, we spotted two male lions lying in the open area up ahead. It was the Maputo male and his coalition partner, Xai-Xai. Maputo was lying with his head up, but Xai-Xai was completely asleep. Behind us, we could see the Zamani male leopard sitting on top of the rocks staring at the lions. We decided to stay with the

lions as the leopard crept away from the area. One of our guides decided to follow the leopard while we stayed with the lions. Soon after that, we could hear impalas giving alarm calls from the area that the leopard was moving. The lions also heard these noises and Maputo became very interested. He stood up and crossed the rocky ridge looking for what could be causing the impalas to be alarmed. I could see the other guide a few hundred meters away, still with the leopard that was walking through the long grass. We decided to leave the area as we had had great views of both the leopard and the lions.



Zamani male – Photo by Brian Rode

As we were heading off the other guide called on the radio saying that he had spotted a cheetah nearby where he had the leopard. We headed across to him and found the cheetah walking through the golden grass. The cheetah then saw an impala, but the antelope saw the cat and ran away. The cheetah then sat down staring at the retreating impala. As she sat there, she noticed movement to the south of her and then noticed the Maputo male lion walking around sniffing, trying to figure out what was going on with the impalas running around and snorting. While she was watching the lion in the distance, she was concentrating so much that she was not aware that the Zamani male leopard had seen the female cheetah. He then started stalking her in the long grass. Since her attention was totally on the lion in the distance, she did not notice the movement behind her. The leopard then leapt high into the air and rushed at the cheetah.



Female cheetah – Photo by Brian Rode.

Fortunately for the cheetah, she saw the movement of the leopard as he jumped in the air and by the time the leopard got to where the cheetah was, she was gone. The leopard almost managed to touch the cheetah's tail, but the cheetah was much faster than the leopard and managed to get away.

We followed on after the cheetah for a while and then decided to leave her and go and have a leg stretch and coffee break. After our break, we headed north. While we had been watching the whole leopard/lion/cheetah episode I had heard that one of the other guides had found a small pack of African wild dogs in the far north of the concession. It had been quite a while since the guides had left the wild dogs so we did not think that our chances were good of relocating them. Fortunately, when we got to the area, we found them resting in the shade watching some impalas and giraffes. We watched them for a short while and then decided to head back towards the lodge for something to eat. On the way back we also managed to see a few elephants.

What an amazing morning!

June Gallery



Mananga lioness with cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



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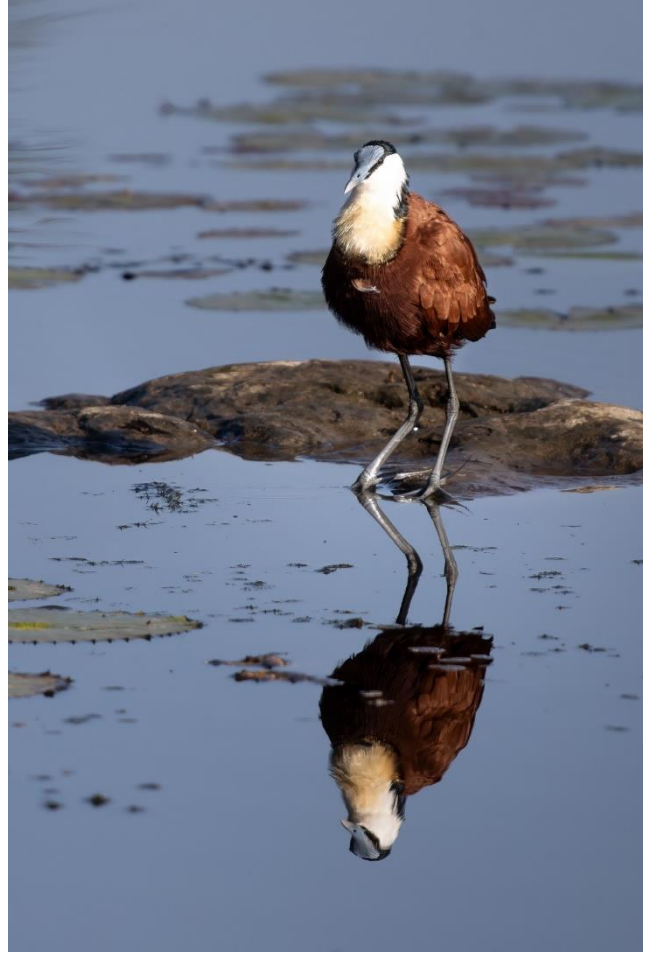
Common moorhen – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Dumbana female leopard – Photo by Graeme Stewart.



Shish pride cub – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



African jacana – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Nile crocodile – Photo by Marc Eschenlohr.



Mananga lioness on a waterbuck kill – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



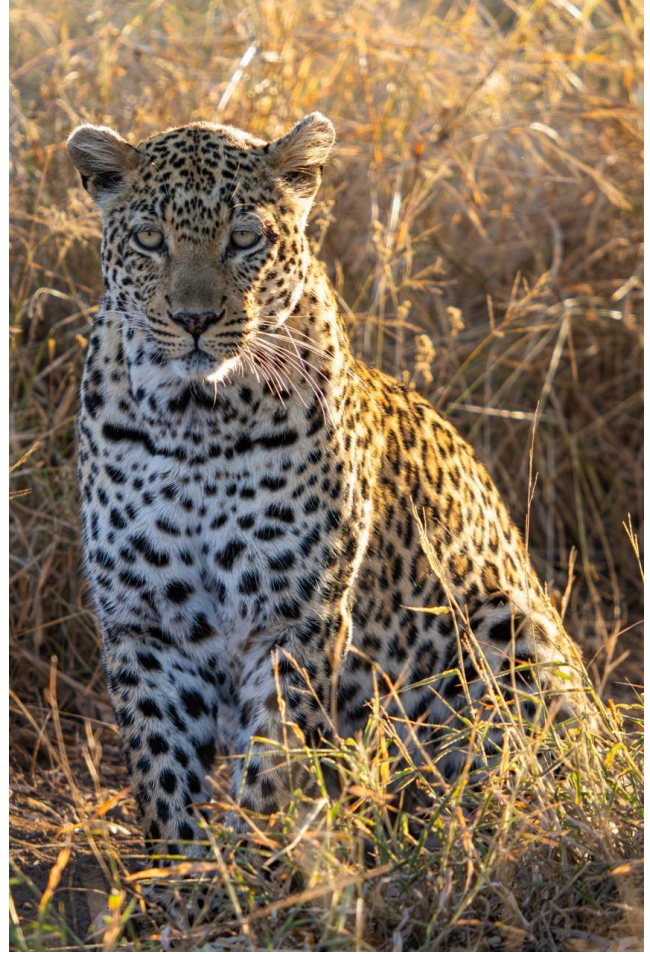
Martial eagle – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Trichardt male – Photo by Graeme Stewart.



Mananga cubs – Photo by Graeme Stewart.



Dumbana female – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Elephant – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Unidentified male leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



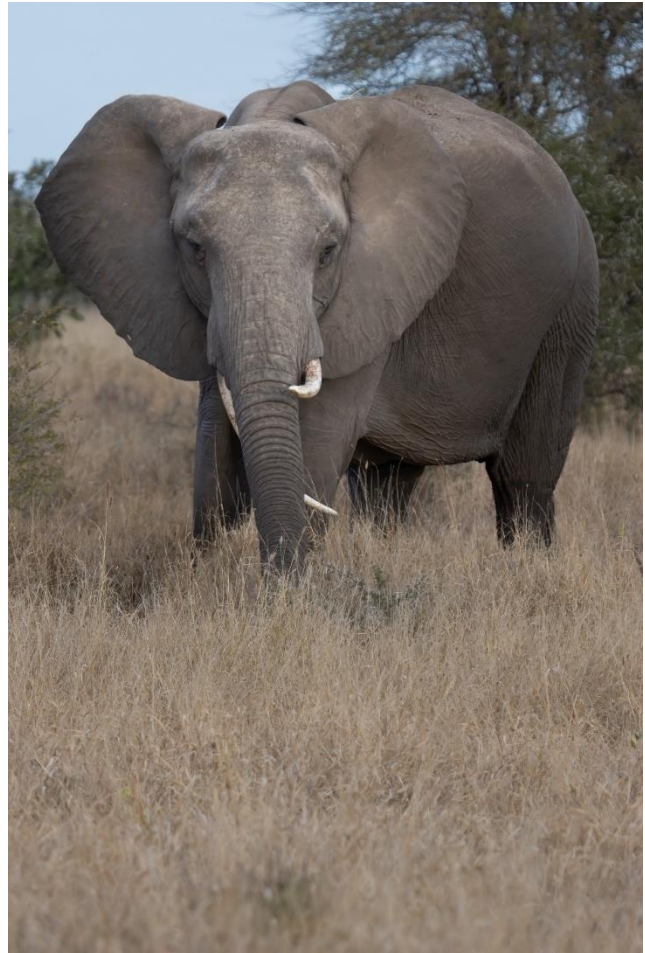
Misty winter morning – Photo by Marc Eschenlohr.



Shish lioness – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Nungu female leopard – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Elephant – Photo by Amy Roberts.



Xaixai male lion (of the Maputo coalition) – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Elephant – Photo by Marc Eschenlohr.



Dumbana leap – Photo by Rudi Hulshof.



Maputo coalition and Chava lioness – Photo by Amy Roberts.