

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.6°C (67.25°F)
Average maximum: 29.1 °C (84.32°F)
Minimum recorded: 16.0°C (60.80°F)
Maximum recorded: 36.0°C (96.80°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 215 mm
Season to date: 324.5 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 04:59
Sunset: 18:39

This December, as expected, the rain made its presence felt throughout our surroundings. Small pans filled to the brim creating micro habitats and bringing a buzz of activity on the reserve. Misty summer morning were serenaded with cicadas choirs and, as we gazed into the distance and the grey curtains parted, the Drakensburg escarpment was unveiled in such clear detail and beauty. As the evenings drew near bird parties erupted with the emergence of termite alates. These rains are more than just life giving, they're the prequel for a new chapter as our calendars start over. For our wild counterparts this time is only different by means of

sights and sounds as life goes on and brings change on a daily basis. We wish all our guests a joyous festive season and a prosperous year ahead.

Here's a snapshot of December's sightings:

Leopards

- At the beginning of the month a wonderful update was received over the radio. The Tisela female was seen carrying a cub into the Makubela Koppies. We estimate the cub to be only weeks old and we are not sure if there are siblings. For now, we give the Tisela mother and her offspring privacy during this crucial period of development.
- The Nkuwa female and her two cubs, which are both males, have been making frequent appearances between Mveve and Hlwareni Dam. They have been blowing guests away with their playful antics as she teaches them more about how to survive in this environment.
- The Senegal Bush male leopard has been pushing further west which may be a reason for the Nkuwa female and her cubs staying so far west in her territory. We suspect the cubs are his offspring and his presence here offers protection against the likes of Thamba and more so the Xipuko male leopard.
- During this time of year when the rain pelts the terrain and tracking is challenging, a stable sighting of a leopard, which would be classified as a sighting which is unlikely to change in its location on the reserve such as a leopard with a substantial kill in a tree, is a huge bonus for our guests. Such an event happened when the Xipuko male leopard was discovered with an adult warthog that had been hoisted in a marula tree not far from Castleton camp. He fed on it for four days ensuring all guests got their festive season leopard fix!
- Another exciting leopard worth mentioning this month is the nomadic young Ntomi male who has been seen in the eastern parts of Singita. It's always entertaining watching these young toms as they figure out life as an independent leopard, so crucial to learning and surviving, which certainly isn't easy yet.

Cheetahs

- Cheetah sightings are on the increase as the male that roams the south has now established a territory. This territory is vast and he is sighted as far north as our airstrip and all the way to the southern reaches of the reserve. As the vegetation gets denser by the day, he finds safety in the open and scans for opportunities to find prey. This has offered our guests chances to witness this feline hunting regularly. One particular sighting of this cheetah was when he was found feeding on a zebra foal which is no easy hunt considering how protective a mother is of her foal.

Lions

- The Mhangene Pride has been staying mostly in our central and western parts as they do their best to keep their cubs safe from the Ntsevu young male lions who do much of their hunting in the south and east. There have been a few sightings where not all ten cubs have been present but, as we have learnt from previous months, this is no cause for alarm as the missing cubs tend to be hidden away safely.
- Regarding the formidable Ntsevu lions it appears that there are just three males now and one female. A lot of the movements are centred around the buffalo herds that have dispersed in Dudley and our southern parts.
- It's been the second month running where the Tsalala lioness has made our highlights. This lone lioness has found refuge, like many others in her situation, along the banks of the Sand River to the east of the lodges. This female is in immaculate condition and just a few months away from growing her pride if the mating was successful.

Wild dogs

- There are two packs in our section of the Sabi Sand currently. One pack of ten and another splinter pack of three. In the wet weather, cooler temperatures allow these predators to keep on searching and

chasing before having to find a spot to cool off, as needed on hot days. Fortunately, with lots of seasonal pools a chance to cool off is not far away.

Elephants

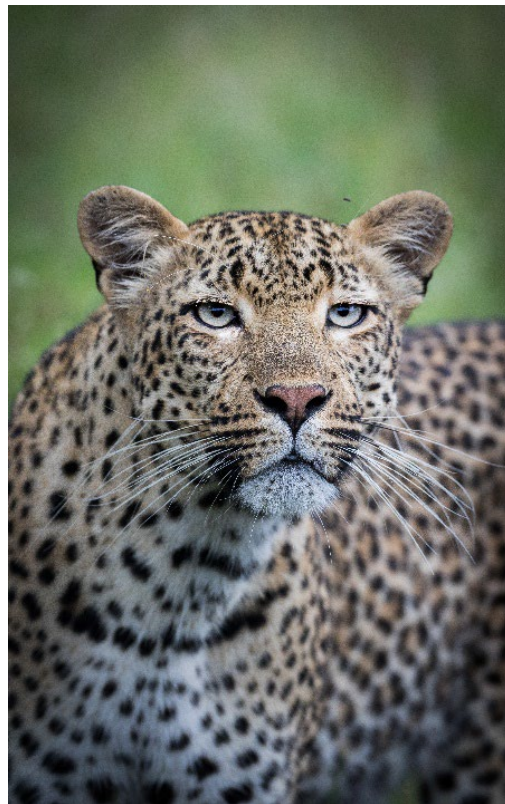
- To our welcome surprise we still have large herds of elephant present through all corners of the reserve. Being able to sit and spend time with a herd in one spot for hours as they rip swaths of grass and seasonal herbs has been a highlight for guests during this time of plenty. Their complexion varies from browns, reds and grey as mudbaths become a daily necessity and can be extremely entertaining to watch.

Grassland mammals

- Buffalo herds have fractioned into smaller herds now that water and food is in abundance.
- Giraffe and kudu have also been seen on numerous occasions feeding on the sweet white berry bushes that grow all over the southern slopes by the old Selati railway line.
- Over the past two months we have been observing a pair of black-backed jackals raising two pups. They have been exploring their surrounding more lately and were seen feasting on termite alates during a recent emergence. Termites are packed with protein and serve as a valuable food for so many living creatures in the savanna.

Bird List

The bird list for December includes five new species, bringing our yearly total to 289. We are looking forward to seeing what we can add to our list with all the seasonal pans full to the brim!



Some bush reflections follow, as well as the December gallery of images.

Singita, untamed

Article by Sipho Sibuyi

In my two-decade career as a guide at Singita, a particularly memorable day unfolded in the company of guests and my teammate, Israel. This event transpired in the morning during a drive with four guests when Israel alerted us to the sound of a buffalo. We followed up on his lead, and another station confirmed the location of about 200 animals not far away. The morning was shot, and the buffalo were heading towards Giraffe Dam, approximately 100 meters away, seeking water.

Spotting a lion trailing the large herd, Israel, using binoculars, identified the familiar pride known as Ntsevu. These lions, usually territorial to the east, were potential threats to the buffalo. As we discussed this, the lions began to move, focusing on a female buffalo lagging behind the herd. The herd, alerted by the others, sprinted towards the dam, creating a scene of dust, sounds, and panic. Some buffaloes rallied back, while others circled the dam. Unfortunately, the female buffalo was cornered in the dam, and the lions killed her, dragging the carcass to the side for feeding.

The experience was both thrilling and frightening for the guests initially, but by the end, they gained a deeper appreciation for the challenges wild animals face in maintaining their health in their natural habitat.



Sometimes it pays to stop for the termites

Article by Marc Bowes-Taylor

No, this is not another article about termites and how they are so ecologically important! But yes, it's all because of our curiosity about small organisms that led us to find and experience a moment that could never be recreated...

After a frantic start to our morning trying to get a glimpse of a pack of wild dogs in the riverbed, we meandered along looking for what was next. I knew we had to slow the pace of our drive down. We had been chatting the day before about termites and I felt this was a suitable time for us to jump out the Land Cruiser, to climb a termite mound and peer down a chimney to see who was responsible for this exquisite piece of architecture. It was a cool day and still relatively early so the chances of seeing termites at the entrance to the chimney was pretty good.

As we reached the summit of the termite mound, our spotlight illuminated the tunnel where we saw the soldiers and some workers. It's always incredible to realise something so small is so efficient. The calmness of the moment was halted by a few snapping branches and the trill of a red-billed oxpecker. "Buffalo," said my tracking partner softly. We were perhaps 20 feet from our vehicle and with just our small party of four it meant we could stay where we were without disturbing the big mammal.

I shuffled down the mound to see if I could see what was making the disturbance in the bush. The sound I was hearing just didn't fit that of a buffalo. This creature was grinding branches in its mouth rather than breaking them with hooves while on the move. Then, seconds later, it made itself known. A black rhino cow and her calf strolled along a game path right in front of us! Realising we were downwind of the rhinos we could stay right where we were. The photographer in me was dying to zip back to the vehicle and grab my camera but this was not the time. All we had was 30 seconds of these two special animals moving just 30 feet from us, without having any idea we were watching them.

Although it was brief, it was personally one of the most unforgettable moments of my guiding career at Singita Sabi Sand. For my guest, this was just her second encounter in over ten years of safaris throughout Africa. How special it was to experience this with a guest who truly understands the magnitude of an encounter like this.

My personal passion for documenting wildlife got the better of me and I managed to video the two rhinos walking out the brush below us. I have screenshot two parts of the clip to add to this article but this does not do it justice!





The fate of our rhino is on a knife edge as conservation organisations race to do what they can for these horned beasts. The good news is that certain well-protected populations are on the increase.

On the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve in Zimbabwe, that is home to Singita Pamushana Lodge and Malilangwe House, the Malilangwe Trust's rhino programme that began in 1998 has achieved consistent success for both black and white rhinos. Capacity has been reached that allows the relocation of a small number of animals to other conservation areas to expand their range. The Grumeti Fund in Tanzania, home to all the Singita Grumeti lodges, is also actively involved in black rhino conservation and range expansion.



In the heart of the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, where the African wilderness unfolds its secrets beneath the star-studded canvas of the night sky, a magical tale of fireflies began.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting hues of orange and pink across the vast savanna, a gentle breeze whispered through the grass. In the fading twilight, fireflies emerged from their daytime hideouts, little emissaries of light in the velvet darkness.

A community of fireflies danced above the tall grass, their tiny bioluminescent bodies creating a symphony of soft glows. The Sabi Sand Nature Reserve, where Singita has three lodges, known for its diverse wildlife, became a stage for these enchanting insects.

Each firefly had a story to tell, and as they flickered and floated through the air, they painted trails of luminescence. It was a silent celebration of life, an ancient dance passed down through generations. The grass beneath their glow seemed to come alive with a thousand twinkling stars, mimicking the celestial wonders above.

Animals of the night, from the royal lion to the wise old elephant, observed this mystical display with curious eyes. The fireflies, however, carried on, weaving their luminous tales with grace.

A lone leopard prowled silently through the grass, its rosetted coat illuminated by the soft glow of fireflies. The majestic creature seemed to become part of the cosmic dance, a shadowy figure moving in harmony with the pulsating lights.

Under the ancient jackalberry trees, a group of elephants rumbled in contentment, their massive forms casting shadows on the moonlit ground. The fireflies, undeterred by their colossal neighbours, continued their ethereal ballet, creating a magical atmosphere that transcended the boundaries between the animal kingdom and the mystical realm of light.

As the night deepened, the fireflies orchestrated their final act. They congregated near the Sand River, their collective glow casting a radiant reflection on the still surface. The nocturnal chorus of the wild joined in, creating a symphony of sounds that echoed through the night.

And so, in this enchanted corner of the world, the fireflies of Singita Sabi Sand painted the night with their ephemeral brilliance, leaving behind a tale of magic and wonder that lingered in the hearts of those fortunate enough to witness their celestial performance.

December Gallery

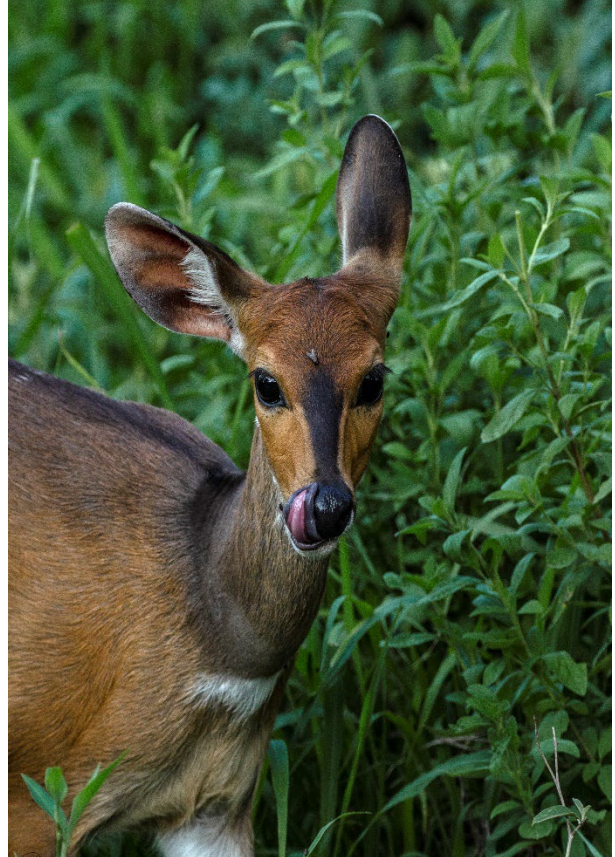
This first selection of photographs is from our talented sommelier, Luke Herholdt:



A chinspot batis in the leafy undergrowth at Boulders Lodge.



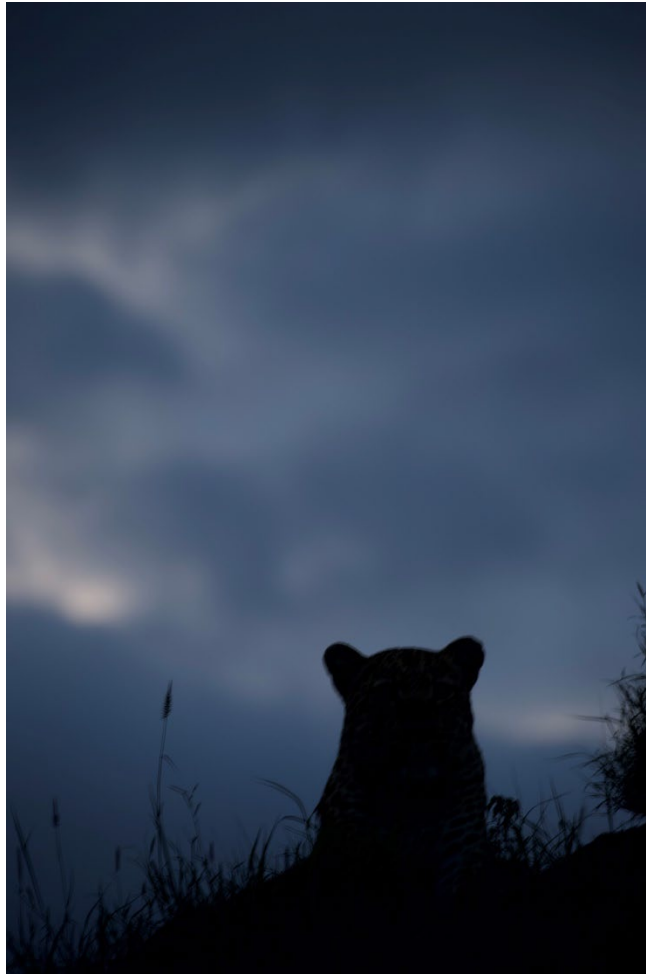
A special find, a European nightjar resting on its preferred perch.



Two friendly faces that can be seen from the lodge veranda: A young vervet monkey and a bushbuck ewe go about their daily lives in the lodge gardens.



A dominant bull hippo makes his way to a deeper, slower eddy in the Sand River.



As night sets in preparation and patience pays off for this predator. Image by Matt Durell



"If you think you will slip by me unnoticed, you're sadly mistaken." Image by Marc Eschenlohr



Elephants and mudbaths go together like a gin and tonic on a sunset safari! Image by Marc Eschenlohr



Every now and then one can afford a relaxing dip in the pool, go on, you deserve it! Image by Matt Durell



A pied kingfisher on an early morning hunt. Image by Matt Durell



Christmas lunch anyone? A Mhangene youngster with a belly full of buffalo. Image by Matt Durell



One of the Nkuwa females' cubs, post impala feast. Image by Marc Eschenlohr



The contrasting green make for exquisite photographic opportunities. Image by Marc Eschenlohr



Summer bringing out plenty of reptiles like this colourful male tree agama. Image by Marc Eschenlohr



A giraffe with fastidious companion



Zebras driving off a pack of wild dogs.



Happy New Year from all of us at Singita Sabi Sand!