

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 16.4°C 61.52°F

Average maximum: 28.9°C 84.02°F

Minimum recorded: 12°C 53.6°F

Maximum recorded: 34°C 93.2°F

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 3 mm

For the season to date: 848.95 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:08

Sunset: 17:39

Misty layers blanket the bushveld ground contrasting the crispness of the glassy blue sky above. Autumn is upon us. Grass stems begin their yellowing, whilst the first leaves begin to drop. April brings about the familiar rutting calls of the impala rams as they hastily chase each other in attempts to overthrow the current dominant male. Burnt sunset skies illuminate the dark silhouettes of elephant herds as they wander through the grassland plains of the south. Nights bring a new chill and the mornings are welcomed with firepits and hot chocolate at the lodge.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for April:

Lions

- With rutting male impalas drawing the attention of many predators, it's been a busy month for the Mhangene Pride. We've watched them kill impala rams a number of times, making for some excellent game viewing.
- The Othawa male killed a buffalo calf close to one of our pans in the south providing an exciting but emotional sighting.



Mhangene Pride with an impala kill, photographed by Gareth Poole

- We are unsure of the number of newborn cubs within the Mhangene Pride. On the 8th April one guide was lucky enough to find a mother with four new cubs, however they haven't been seen since. It's always hard to say if they are alive or not, as there are so many factors against their survival. We continue to monitor the pride's movements and hope to see some small pawprints alongside the adults.

Elephants



Elephant bull, photographed by Marc Eschenlor

- It takes close to twenty years for a marula tree to reach its full height, achieving three and a half metres within its first eight years. Although fast growing, it takes about ten minutes for an adult elephant to strip a ring of rich red cambium from the marula's trunk, ending its life in a sweeping moment. There are an incredible amount of elephants on the property at the moment, from large breeding herds, to bulls in musth. This has brought about a noticeable amount of ring-barking on many marula trees this month.

Wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack were briefly seen in the north on a number of occasions, however only staying on our property briefly before moving on.

Leopards



The Schotia young male leopard, photographed by Gareth Poole

- The Schotia female's cub has a curious and confident nature. One fresh misty morning we followed up on monkey alarm calls around Ebony Lodge and located this youngster walking parallel to the river on the southern bank. He continued towards the river crossing and hesitantly began to journey across the rocks to the northern bank. Watching him leap from rock to rock was quite a special moment as we haven't seen him cross the river by himself before. We followed with curiosity as he continued his solo walk west along the northern edge of the Sand River. A fairly relaxing and aesthetic sighting suddenly evolved into a dramatic scene as impala alarm calls just north of this male signalled he wasn't the only leopard in the area. The Hosana male appeared a few hundred metres from the young male, seemingly unaware of where the youngster was, but head high smelling/sensing his presence. If these two leopards were to



meet it would mean a nasty fight as the Schotia young male leopard is competition for the Hosana male leopard and the latter would have no problem in chasing away the opposition. This tense sighting transpired into the Hosana male trailing the young male along the riverbank until he eventually located him. Luckily though, the young male also noticed the dominant male and sprinted south, managing to cross the river in the nick of time! Continuing south, he escaped the confrontation with the Hosana male and maybe will think twice before crossing north

into this large dominant male's territory. The Hosana male remained north of the river that day, but maybe one day he will be the one venturing south...

- With 38 sightings this month, the Schotia female remains our most viewed leopard. She's been seen several times hunting through the tall yellowing grass and continues to successfully provide for her youngster.
- The Misava male has been seen less, although still nomadic across the central region of our property.
- Interestingly the Finfoot female leopard, daughter of the Nhlangueni female, has been seen around Castleton a few times this month. We hope to see more of her, although this terrain is territory to the Mobeni female.
- Sightings of the Ntoma female leopard are very rare however we've had five different viewings of her this month. She's been viewed in the south-western parts of the reserve with hoisted impala kills.
- The Nyeleti male leopard continues his dominance around the central parts of the reserve. At the age of twelve, he's showing signs of age and it's with anticipation that we watch his continuing journey. With the younger Thamba male dominant to the west, Xipuku male south and the Hosana male to the north, it'll be interesting to see if and how the Nyelethi male's territory changes shape...
- The Thamba male leopard made a brief appearance towards the end of the month. We located him walking along the tall wall of one of our dams. He moved through the area scent marking with urine and later hunted and killed an impala ram. Although he managed to consume the majority of the kill, he didn't hoist the carcass in a tree, and lost it to hyena.

Cheetah

- Cheetah viewing has been incredible this month. A mother and two sub-adults have been seen regularly, once killing an impala ram although losing this to hyena shortly after. These three were also chased off another kill by the Mhangene Pride in the middle of the month. We enjoy seeing their playful nature and hope to see more of them as the bushveld beings to open up in winter.
- A male cheetah has also been located a few times this month, moving through the southern grassland planes.



Buffalo

- Several large herds of buffalo have groomed the grassland carpet of the property, and, for over a week, they were around the Sand River west of the lodges. Buffalo herds haven't moved through this area in a few years, so it was a delight to see them in their numbers.

Buffalo breeding herd, photographed by Marc Eschenlor

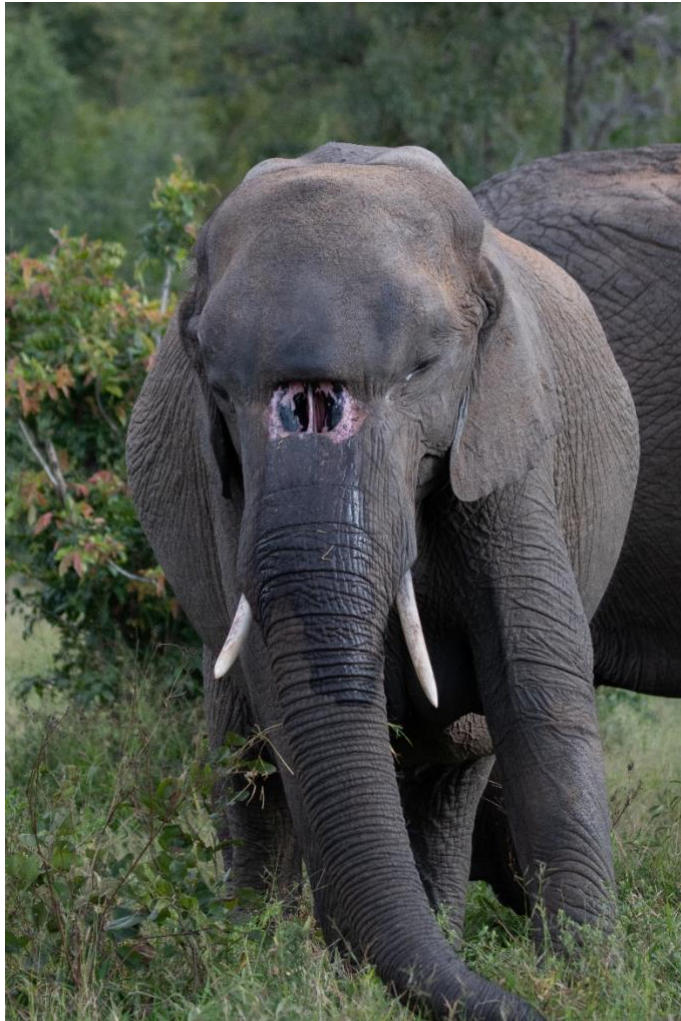
Bird List

The bird list for April includes two new bird species, bringing our yearly total to 269, so far. The two birds sighted and added were the half-collared kingfisher and trumpeter hornbill.

An extraordinary elephant

Article by Paul Josop

We introduced you to Rhandzekile in last month's journal, and here's more news about her: Rhandzekile, meaning 'Loved' in Shangaan, made an appearance east of Boulders Lodge during the month.



She is unique, because she has a massive hole in her forehead from where she does most of her breathing. Her abnormality is said to be from birth, however this hasn't stopped her from living a normal life, raising a calf and moving through many areas of the Greater Kruger National Park.

Her disposition has allowed us to observe her life in great detail, to see how she has adapted, formed close cohesion with her herd and opened up a new elephant story for many of us as field guides, trackers and our guests.

Looking at her head, her obvious feature catches your eye first, but then you start to see other differences too. Her eyes are more slanted, pulling the skin inwards from the hole in her trunk and her eyes. She's got deep folds below her ear holes pulling the skin from her eyes to her ears and there is also a permanent wet stain of mucus running down her trunk from the hole.



Rhandzekile's condition is remarkably good, especially after this year's exceptional rainfall where the grass and trees have been abundant, high in nutrients and water has been available all over. Feeding is no problem for her, however drinking is facilitated by sucking up enough water that doesn't reach the hole in the trunk and then bending the trunk, lifting it up and spraying the water into her mouth.

Although Rhandzekile and her herd have moved on for now, I'm sure we'll bump into her again in the future.



The Nyeleti male leopard, photographed by Damin Dallas

Nyeleti, meaning 'Star' in the local language is a household name at Singita Sabi Sand game lodges, and some of us describe this male leopard as a beloved colleague. He has been, and still is, dominant in most of the western part of our property and a portion north of the Sand River which runs from west to east in front of Ebony and Boulders Lodges. For the better part of about 12 years we have had the privilege of enjoying sightings of this magnificent animal, with many pictures shared over the world. He has defended his territory successfully from many other adversaries trying to invade it.

He is now an old legend who is still running the show, except for the fact that every now and then he shows up with some battle wounds, which is something that never happened before. He does seem to spend a bit more time in a small part of his large territory, which could be a tell-tale that the tide might be turning. The north does have a rather large male leopard that seems to visit and he comes into Nyeleti's territory - a young, big strong-shouldered leopard known as the Hosana male. The south west also has a male, a rather intimidating looking creature who goes by the name of the Thamba male...

The females in Nyeleti's territory get thrown into uncertainty with all these developments as they just don't know with whom to mate... and which male will be dominate during their cubs' vulnerable early years. When new males show up and the old male can't chase them away, and cubs can get killed by the new incomer. Mother leopards try to appease the males to keep their cubs alive. The question is who will be the next dominant male?

What happens depends on the Nyeleti male. How he handles the situations he finds himself in. Does he still have the iron paw to deal with these big boys like he used to? Or will he go the way of the other old and weak leopards of years gone by?



Driving along the banks of the ever-impressive perennial Sand River, it's hard not to take note of the incredibly large trees that line the banks, trees that include jackalberries, natal mahoganies and sausage trees. While these tend to be the most well-known and pointed out species, there exists a smaller tree species, one that at the moment is bursting with life. While driving along the banks of drainage lines or through open woodland thickets, there is a sudden pop of bright yellow amongst the reds and oranges of the autumn colours.

The monkey pod (*Senna petersiana*) is a multi-branched shrub or small tree with a rounded crown which can grow up to seven metres tall. Identification can be achieved by noting the grey-brown, rough and fissured bark. Leaves are once-divided compound with 6 – 12 leaflet pairs. Leaves are shiny and dark green in colour with the upper surface being hairy. Flowers are poppy-like with yellow petals and are sweetly scented. The fruit pods are slender and are either straight or curved, hanging from the branches of the tree.

Multiple uses for this species exist in the wild and for both stock animals and humans. Traditionally it is believed that root-bark is ground up and given in a soup to a lazy hunting dog which will make it lean and hungry and therefore more eager to chase down prey. Various parts of the tree are used widely in traditional medicine as a purgative laxative to treat constipation, stomach-ache and intestinal worms. This is achieved by drinking a decoction of the roots. Leaves and roots are also believed to have antimalarial properties and so are used to treat malaria.

The sweet fruit pulp is extracted and enjoyed raw by children and the seeds and fruits can be made into an alcoholic drink. The wood is light and can be used to make tool handles as well as fuel.

The species is a favourite amongst elephants, keeping these trees cropped down to very small sizes and hence why it is very rare to find one that has reached its full growing potential in an area where elephants roam. The tree also plays an important role in the ecosystem, being only one of very few species preferred as a food source to the caterpillar of the African migrant *Catopsilia florella* butterfly.

With the long summer days coming to an end and the onset of winter, many wild flowers have died giving way to rusty coloured leaves and yellowing grass. It's with much joy to see the burst of bright yellow within the fading autumnal earth, although only lasting for a few days...

Gallery for April



Elephants dust-bathing, photographed by Gareth Poole



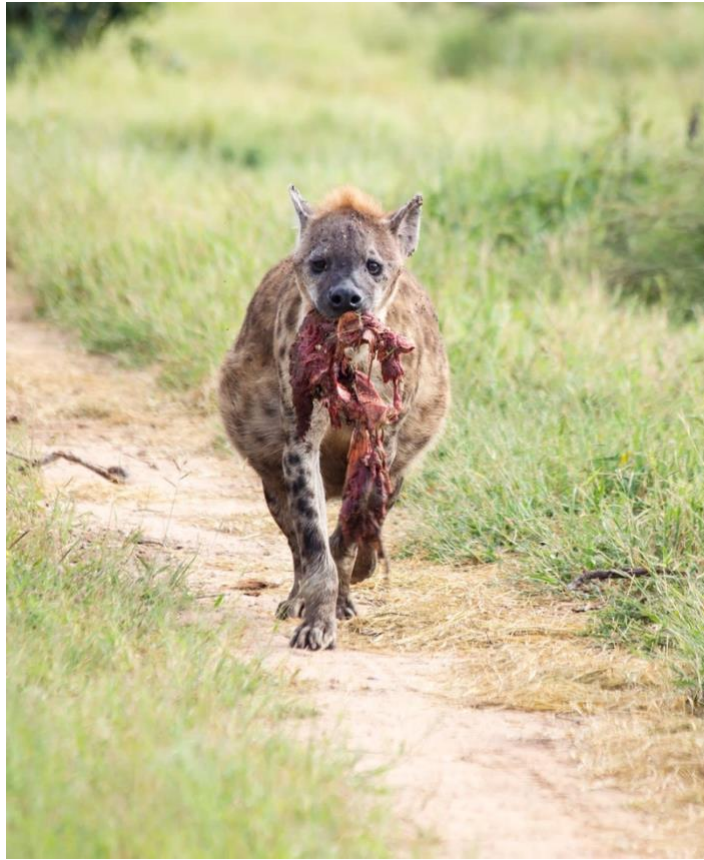
Ground hornbills resting in a dead tree, photographed by Gareth Poole



Cheetah and elephant bull, photographed by Gareth Poole



Curious buffalo, photographed by Marc Eschenlor



Spotted hyena with a take away, photographed by Marc Bowes-Taylor



Dwarf mongooses, photographed by Marc Bowes-Taylor



Elephant eye, photographed by Marc Eschenlor