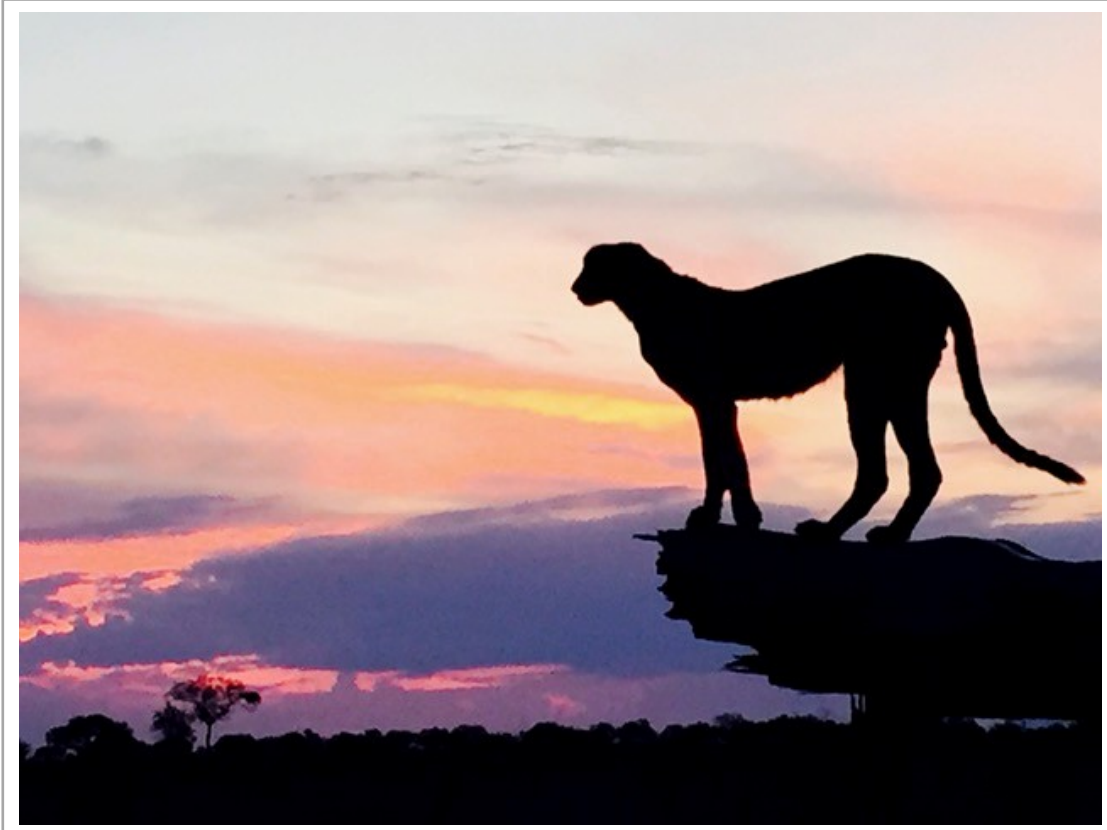


Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.3°C (70.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 19.0°C (66.2°F)
Average maximum: 29.1°C (84.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (102.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 219 mm
Season to date: 250 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:18
Sunset: 18:48

The month of January is associated with a fresh start and a reset of the calendar year, and this was mirrored by Mother Nature this month as we notice changes throughout the reserve. Fresh wild blossoms cover open stretches of the veld as far as the eye can see. Recent rains have encouraged life in many forms like southern foam nest frogs and village weavers as they dedicate this time to nesting. We have also welcomed the sight of new lions that have got the heart racing when watching them coordinate hunts on herds of buffalo. Temperatures have been mild to warm as the southern winds bring relief and cotton-candy clouds decorate our skies. We watch in awe as the changes unfold daily, and to be a part of this process is a privilege.

Here are this month's sightings highlights:

Cheetahs

- After a few weeks on the eastern Sabi Sand the Makatini female and her three cubs have made a return to the southern grasslands of Singita. She continues to secure frequent prey species for her cubs and navigate the numerous lions that are occupying this same area of the reserve. The dense vegetation is now in their favour as it provides ample cover for them.
- The male cheetah of the south has also been seen on a few occasions this January, and not just in the south but as far north as Castleton Camp.

Elephants

- The marulas' fruiting period has slowly kicked off after a low yield to start. Once the first significant rains had fallen there was an increase in marula fruits on the female trees. With that elephants of all sizes have made their way to the marula tree woodlands scattered throughout the crests of the hills on Singita Sabi Sand. The fruits have been a great addition to their grassy diet.

Buffaloes

- The lush grasslands of the south have attracted large herds of buffalo numbering around 400. Once can notice the excellent muscle tone on many of the herd members as they regain condition after the long dry season. With water abundant on the reserve their movement has been localised.

Lions

- Lion sightings have been a regular on the daily sightings report captured by guides on the reserve. The first highlight was the arrival of four young male lions, the Monwana coalition that came from north-eastern Sabi Sand. Aged between three and four years they have proved themselves as excellent hunters of buffalo and even giraffe. Over the month their story has taken a strange twist, as one male has been with the Mhangeni Pride, another two moving together, and the fourth has not been seen for the past week. They find themselves among not only the Plains Camp males, but the Talamati and Nkuhuma males who have chased them off at least one of their buffalo kills.
- There has been mating between the Plains Camp males and one of the Othawa lionesses. This is exciting news for the pride as they look to grow in numbers.
- The Ximungwe Pride have been seen more often now around the Makalashi lookout, a scenic point overlooking the Sand River.
- The Mhangeni Pride has yet again had another male lion trailing them to secure a meal. This time the one young Monwana male joined them after losing his coalition after a giraffe hunt.
- Other infrequent sightings of lions include the Tsalala lioness and the young Nkuhuma breakaway brother and sister.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack has been seen mostly in central and western Singita, and as the woodlands now become heavily vegetated these canines focus their hunting activity among the combretum trees. Their pack number still stands at 14.

Leopards

- We have noticed the Thamba male's presence more east than we have seen him in years. He now patrols as far east as the Mobeni River close to Castleton Camp, putting pressure on the younger Ntomi male.
- The Ntomi male has been viewed more than any other leopard on Singita. One of many sightings that is worth mentioning is him feeding on a hoisted buffalo calf carcass in a marula tree. It is unclear if he killed it or scavenged it, but still an impressive sighting.

- It seems the Nkuwa female has pushed the Ntoma female further south. Nkuwa now patrols right in the centre of Singita and we hope that she will be looking to den with her new litter in this area.
- Another female that has cubs is the Xinzele female who was seen by Johan, Isaac and their guests at Tavangumi lookout. She is denning in a rocky riverbed on the northern side of the Sand River.
- The Tiyisela female provided guests with an amazing sight of hunting a warthog piglet out in the open on a sunny afternoon, close to Ebony Lodge.

Unusual sightings

- During the midday break between safaris a big squabble was heard in the Ebony gardens. On closer inspection a troop of Vervet monkeys had surrounded four thick-tailed galagos in the trees. A unique scene followed between the daytime primates, and the generally nocturnal primates.
- There was a sighting of what is one of the largest Southern African pythons recorded in recent times. The serpent was seen on the rocky outcrops.

Bird List

- The first month of the year has all the twitchers on the team starting their list from zero, so the race is on to find as many 'new' species as possible. January is considered to have the biggest variety of birds than any other month due to it being right in the middle of the rainy season. Highlights for this month are cuckoo finch, Eurasian hobby, African pygmy kingfisher, Eurasian golden oriole and marsh sandpiper. Our list is at 241 species.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the January Gallery of images.

The bushveld hummed with life. Birds chirped their territorial songs from the green bushwillow trees, and a soft breeze carried the rustle of green grass. Hidden among the undergrowth of the woodland, a boomslang snake lay coiled in wait. Its bright green scales glimmered faintly under dappled sunlight, blending seamlessly with the foliage.

The boomslang's large, round eyes scanned the ground below with unblinking precision. Unlike many snakes, the boomslang has exceptional eyesight, a gift that makes it a formidable hunter. Today, its gaze fell on a slithering figure weaving through the undergrowth - a red-lipped herald snake, its dark body stark against the pale grass, and the characteristic crimson hue marking its upper lip.

Unaware of the predator lurking near, the red-lipped herald snake moved cautiously, flicking its tongue to taste the air. It is a hunter in its own right, often preying on small amphibians and lizards. But today, it was prey.



The red-lipped herald snake.

The boomslang uncoiled slightly, its slender body tensing as it gauged the distance to the ground. With the stealth of a shadow, it began its approach, moving fluidly through the grass. Its movements were deliberate, ensuring not a single leaf rustled to betray its presence.

The herald snake paused, its tongue flicking faster. Perhaps it sensed something, a faint vibration in the air, a whisper of danger? It lifted its head, its black eyes scanning the surroundings, but the boomslang had already chosen its moment.

The boomslang struck with lightning speed lunging from the undergrowth with its jaws wide open to reveal needle-sharp fangs set deep in its mouth. The herald snake recoiled, attempting to retreat, but it was too late. The boomslang's fangs pierced the herald's scales with surgical precision, delivering a potent dose of hemotoxic venom.

The herald snake writhed violently, its body twisting and coiling in desperate attempts to escape. The boomslang held on briefly before releasing its grip and retreating a safe distance. Unlike some predators, the boomslang didn't rely on brute strength to subdue its prey. Instead, it allows its venom to do the work.

The herald snake's struggles grew weaker as the venom took hold, disrupting its blood's ability to clot and causing internal haemorrhaging. The boomslang observed patiently, its tongue flicking intermittently to monitor the scent and movements of its prey.



Within minutes, the herald snake lay still, its body limp and lifeless. The boomslang approached cautiously, ensuring the danger had truly passed. Satisfied, it began the arduous process of consuming its catch. Its jaws unhinged, stretching impossibly wide to accommodate the herald snake's body. It started at the head, slowly working its way down. The process was unhurried, the predator pausing occasionally to adjust its grip and ensure the meal slid smoothly into its throat.

As the last segment of the herald snake disappeared, the boomslang coiled itself onto a low-hanging branch, its body swollen with its meal. It would rest now, digesting in the warmth of the afternoon sun. For the boomslang, the hunt had been a success - a display of patience, precision, and the deadly efficiency of Nature's design.

The savannah returned to its rhythm. Birds resumed their songs, and a troop of vervet monkeys chattered in the distance. Life moved on, indifferent to the drama that had unfolded beneath the bushwillow trees. For the boomslang, it was just another day in the endless cycle of survival.



Frog calls

Article by George Nkuna

One warm summer's evening we stopped and spent about an hour enjoying frog calls at night, at Shangwa Pan. Frogs are heard calling more than they are seen. Most species make a variety of sounds and can recognize each other through the specific sounds of a particular species.



During breeding season male frogs get together at a breeding site, and all call together to advertise to the females and attract them to mate. Calls made by males are normally heard during early evening while establishing their call sites. The call is meant to warn other males to move further away.

In most frog species the males clasp both males and females as they will try to mate with any other frog. If the frog seized is another male or a female not ready to mate, it expels air from the lungs in short bursts causing a vibration of its sides. This gives a message that the wrong sexual partner has been grabbed and causes the frog to release the clasped frog.



A scream-like call is made by a frog when grabbed by a predator, hoping to scare or startle the predator into dropping the frog, as well as warning other frogs of the predatory danger.

At dense sites males sitting next to each other often call alternately, thereby sharing time to avoid a calling overlap.

Sitting quietly in the dark and listening to a frog choir is a most wonderful bushveld experience!

One morning we decided to go and look for a mother cheetah and her three youngsters. We had spent almost an hour looking for any signs of them but there were no tracks to find. We only had one more road to check as we were driving one of the big clearings. From far away we could see five giraffes and zebras all looking in the same direction. Very suspicious...

So, my friend, Peter Ubisi, the tracker, stops me saying, "Please check under the tree behind the bush to the right side." When I used my binoculars, there they were! The mother got up and started walking. The three cubs also got up and climbed the trees – an unusual behaviour for cheetahs. As I was positioning my vehicle, I pulled my camera out and one of the cubs jumped down as I took a photo! I've been waiting and hoping for this type of photo for so long!



The other cubs jumped down to follow their mother hunting through the grasslands. We spent almost two hours with them after she killed a female steenbok. Vultures didn't take long to arrive at the scene. The mother let her cubs feed, and as soon she saw one or two vultures up above, she didn't waste time, and they all began to eat. A few minutes later more than 50 vultures were circling.

My guests could not believe what they saw - a cheetah makes a kill in front of them, plus the cubs going up a tree. It was a highlight for everyone, even old-timers like Peter and me!

January Gallery



A saddle-billed stork coming in for landing at Khoza Pan. On this occasion frogs were on the menu.
Images by Coleman Mnisi.





The two Monwana lions stalking a herd of buffalo in the long grass. They were successful in hunting an injured cow that was left by the herd on the way to water. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

The Ntomi male leopard making the most of the damp riverbed for any afternoon rest. Image by Matt Durell.





Viewing of hippos at Pios Crossing has been fantastic over the past few months. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.
The Nkuwa female leopard lying on a mound in the heart of Singita. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.





An elephant calf, small in stature but mighty in heart. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.
The mother cheetah of three cubs that has been amazing our guests. Image by Matt Durell.





Above: White fronted bee-eaters are found along the Sand River where they hunt aerial insects and nest in the sand banks. Image by Matt Durell.

Right: One of many reptiles out and about this time of year, here a female tree agama is being pursued by a male on a marula tree. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

