

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.5°C (58.1°F)
Minimum recorded: 11.0°C (51.8°F)
Average maximum: 27.1°C (80.7°F)
Maximum recorded: 33.0°C (91.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 331.5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:30
Sunset: 17:13

There's a quiet romance to being on safari in the month of May, the dry season, where every moment feels sharpened by the golden dust that hangs in the sunlit air. The landscape, parched and open, draws animals toward shrinking waterholes, creating intimate encounters that feel both timeless and raw. As the wind whispers through brittle grass and the sky blushes pink at dusk, there's a sense of profound stillness - of shared breath between you and the wild. Nights unfold under a blanket of stars, the calls of distant lions echoing like ancient lullabies, and in that vast untamed surrounds, the heart fills from the wonder of witnessing life stripped down to its essence.

A sightings snapshot for May follows:

Elephants

- We can feel the presence of elephants throughout the reserve. Pathways littered with footprints of all sizes and snapping of branches travel some distance on the still winter's days. Herds make their daily pilgrimage to large watering holes like Castleton and Giraffe Pan usually late in the morning as the day starts heating up. Some encounters with these parades number over 60, an incredible sight as they gradually make their way through the bushveld.

Buffaloes

- The majority of buffaloes have been in the southern reaches of our traversing where the Sand River draws in large herds from the nearby grasslands. Herds have fragmented into smaller groups as food becomes more scarce. Old bulls, which can no longer compete in the herd for mating rights, make the Sand River in front of Ebony and Boulders Lodges their place of refuge during the day and then make their way out the river valley for the evening.

Wild dogs

- We have had the Othawa Pack hunting right through the southern parts of Singita on a few occasions this month. The pack which number 12 adults, has been focused on finding food for the alpha female who is busy nursing her pups back at the den. The den is beyond our boundaries but this is still exciting news for this pack which has been resident in the area for many years.
- There has been a pack of six, one of which is collared by the Endangered Wildlife Trust, to aid in research of these endangered canids. The cooler winter temperatures allow for longer hunting periods and the packs have kept guests amazed by their endurance while on the search for their next meal.

Cheetahs

- The Makotini female and her three youngsters of roughly one year of age have been covering large areas in the south. No impala is safe as these four are now effectively one hunting unit. The cubs are gaining experience following in her footsteps and learning the essentials of being a cheetah.
- The resident male has also been spotted from time to time. The most recent sighting was of him on Eastern Sandveld, a ridge that allows for breath-taking views of the surrounding savannah.

Lions

- At long last the Mhangeni Pride has reunited with the one adult that had been with the Nkuhuma and Talamati males. It had been about two months since she was last with her pride. They have been hunting daily to try and find prey suitable for seven lions.
- The Plains Camp male lions have made many appearances mainly along the Sand River as they patrol between the Othawa and Ximungwe Prides.
- The Othawa Pride has just the one cub left and have been seen along the Hukumuri River system in the north. The young lionesses have their work cut out for them as first-time mothers.
- A fascinating story still unfolds as the brother and sister lions from the Nkuhuma Pride, where two lionesses split about five years back, keep on surviving among the larger prides that are found throughout the region.

Leopards

- The Thamba male and Rivala female were seen mating in the central part of the reserve at the start of the month. Thamba has been spending more time on Singita as his movements shift further east now covering Singita from west to east. His large spoor is easily recognisable in relation to other males in the region.
- Along Treehouse Road a male leopard was seen over a few days in a leadwood tree with a yearling impala ram kill. We're unsure of the history of this leopard but the scars and nicks in his ears indicate he has been in some altercations with other leopards over the years.

- The Nkuwa female and her two cubs have been moving between the Boulders river system and the larger Ximobanyana riverbed as she hunts through the woodlands in the nearby vicinity. She has made successful hunts of impala and duiker.
- In the north the Thumbela female leopard has been vocal as she announces herself as a competitor for this section of the reserve. Her movements have been primarily along the Sand River which is wedged between the Thamba male and Hlambela males' territory. We hope this blue-eyed female lays claim to this area for years to come.
- The Xinzele female and Hlambela male have been viewed on a few occasions between Ingrid's Dam and Tani Dam.

Unusual sightings

- During the cooler times of the year reptile activity slows down considerably but one of the most infamous characters of the African bush still has some business to do. The black mamba mates during this time of the year. Before any mating takes place males combat in the presence of a female to decide mating rights. On one morning drive two males were seen in combat, a unique dance where males try to push their competitor to the ground.
- With temperatures dropping we have seen more honey badgers out during daylight hours.
- As vegetation thins out herbivores are forced to feed for longer and adapt to the conditions. The ebony trees bear fruit this time of year and often we have seen the shy grey duiker at the base of these giant trees feeding on fallen fruits.
- We have been excited to see the July East den being occupied again after months of no signs of hyenas using it. There has been at least one cub of roughly 2-3 weeks of age and its mother occupying the old aardvark excavation.

Birds

- We recorded just one new bird for the month, now tallying 270 for 2025, and it was a really elusive one, an African finfoot! This shy bird was seen on more than one occasion along the phragmite reeds on the Sand River.

Some exciting and informative Bush Stories follow, as well as the May Gallery of images.

Today I would like to speak about a topic that is incredibly fascinating. Elephants are extraordinary animals that have some unique features which we are learning more about every day. One of the most fascinating aspects is the way that elephants are able to communicate with one another, sometimes from very far distances. Today I will go over some of their methods of communication and just give a brief overview of what we understand so far.

Elephants communicate using a number of different methods such as body language, chemical signals, tactile communication, vocalizations and even seismic vibrations. Elephants make use of trumpeting, growls, types of squeaks and even low grumbles. The vocal communication between elephants can travel long distances and becomes incredibly useful when trying to warn others of imminent danger or threats, they can also warn other elephants of their current emotional state. A recent fascinating study also showed that elephants also use specific calls to other individual elephants suggesting that they have a form of name-like communication very similar to humans using names to address each other. Body language is also incredibly important when it comes to elephant communication such as ear spreading and the use of their tail. Elephants use their bodies to convey a wide variety of messages such as the ear spreading to make themselves appear larger for intimidation purposes, visual displays are very important when it comes to social interactions and dominance displays. They also use touch for communication especially within family groups which can include touching their trunks together or rubbing bodies together which can help to strengthen bonds within these social circles or family groups.

Elephants are also able to use their feet to be able to feel vibrations in the ground and communicate via infrasound which is very low frequency sounds which are below the range of human hearing. They are able to create seismic waves by producing very low frequency rumbles, which create the vibrations that travel through the ground and they are also able to detect these vibrations over very long distances allowing them to communicate and coordinate movements within the herd. They have very specialized receptors in their feet and in their inner ear called Pacinian corpuscles and this allows them to detect these vibrations. Seismic waves can travel much further than airborne sounds and this is what allows elephants to communicate over very long distances.

Elephants are incredible animals and we are privileged to get to spend so much time with them here at Singita Sabi Sand. They provide us with excellent entertainment and one can never be bored spending time in the presence of these amazing animals.

Image by Matt Durell.



First time in my career!

Article by Colman Mnisi

I have been lucky enough to see the magnificent martial eagle on many safaris, even incredible moments like them hunting monkeys, impala lambs and lion cubs, but this is a first for me. I've been in the bush for 42 years and had never seen mating martial eagles! I was so excited and managed to get couple of pictures.



One of many good things about nature is that you have never seen everything and you keep learning until the end because every day is different. Here is some interesting information about the bird.

The martial eagle (*Polemaetus bellicosus*) is a large eagle native to sub-Saharan Africa. It is the only member of the genus *Polemaetus*. It has feathers over its tarsus, one of the largest and most powerful species of booted eagle.

It is a fairly opportunistic predator that varies its prey selection between mammals, birds and reptiles. It is one of a few eagle species known to hunt primarily from a high soar, by stooping on its quarry. This species is an inhabitant of wooded belts or otherwise open savannahs. Sadly, its population has shown a precipitous decline in the last few centuries.

Due to a variety of factors, the martial eagle is one of the most persecuted bird species in the world due to its habit of taking livestock and regionally valuable game. Some farmers seek to eliminate martial eagles although the effect of eagle on this prey is almost certainly exaggerated. Currently, the martial eagle is classified with the status of Endangered by the IUCN.

During a recent walk through the open grasslands of Castleton, near the railway line, we observed a black-winged kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) engaging in hunting behaviour. The bird exhibited its classic hovering flight, often referred to as "kiting" as it scanned the grassy area below. This distinctive hunting method allowed the kite to maintain a stationary position mid-air, with its wings held high in a V-shape and its tail slightly fanned.

After several moments of steady hovering, the kite suddenly dropped down swiftly into the grass. We noticed that it successfully caught a small rodent – likely a mouse or vole – which it had been carefully watching. Once the prey was secured, the kite carried it to a nearby perch to consume its catch.

Key features observed:

- White and grey plumage with striking black patches on the wings.
- Red eyes that were noticeable even from a distance.
- Hovering flight with sudden stoops down into the grass.
- Prey was a small mammal, likely a rodent, consistent with typical hunting behaviour.

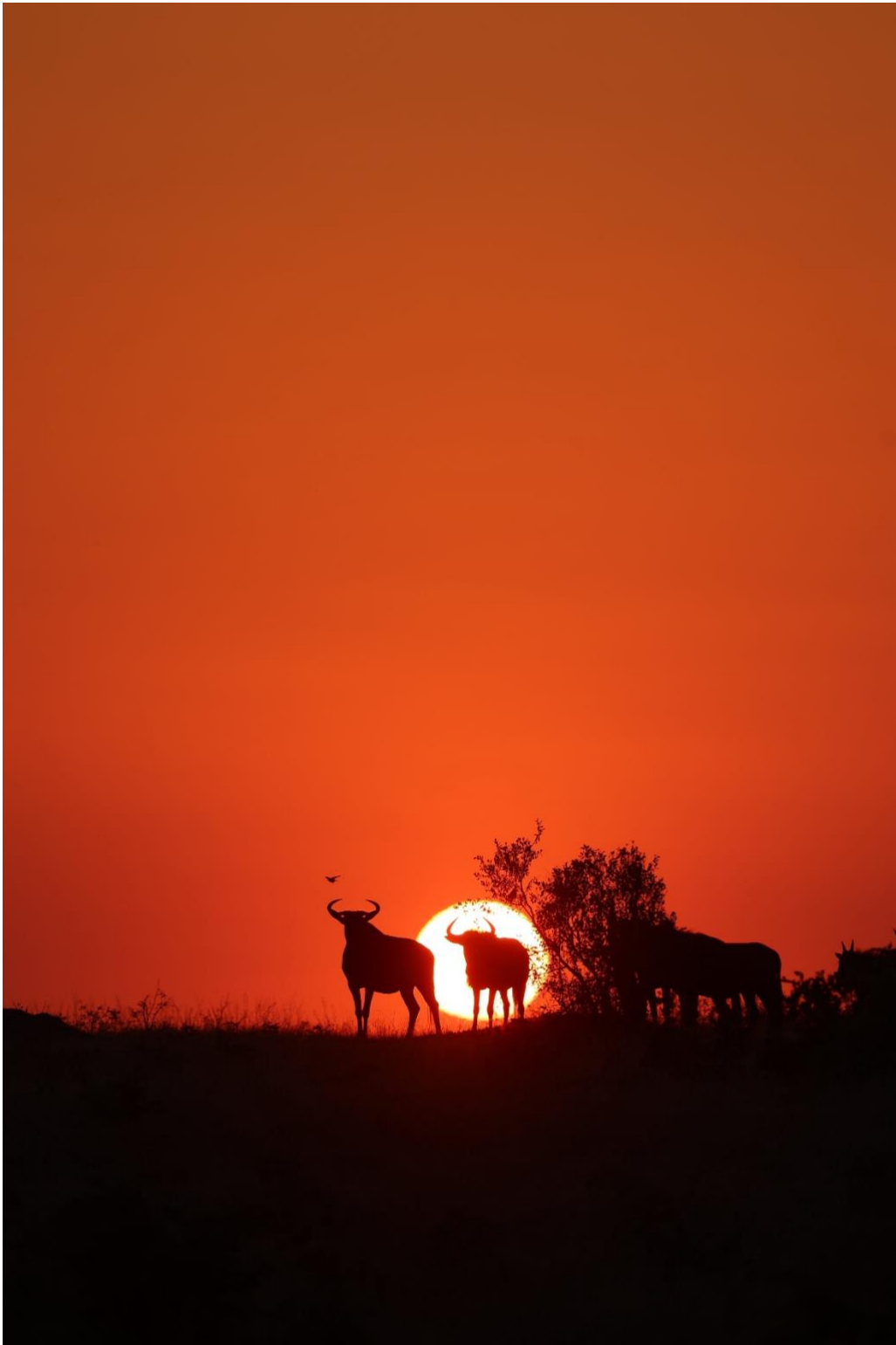
This observation highlighted the kite's impressive ability to hunt in open habitats, taking advantage of grassland prey. Compared to the African goshawk (*Accipiter tachiro*), which we observed earlier that day near the lodge, the black-winged kite relies on open terrain and aerial hunting techniques, while the goshawk prefers ambush hunting in more wooded or bushy environments.

May Gallery



The path to nowhere, winter hues flourishing daily. Image by Matt Durell
Supplementing their usual diet with leaves. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

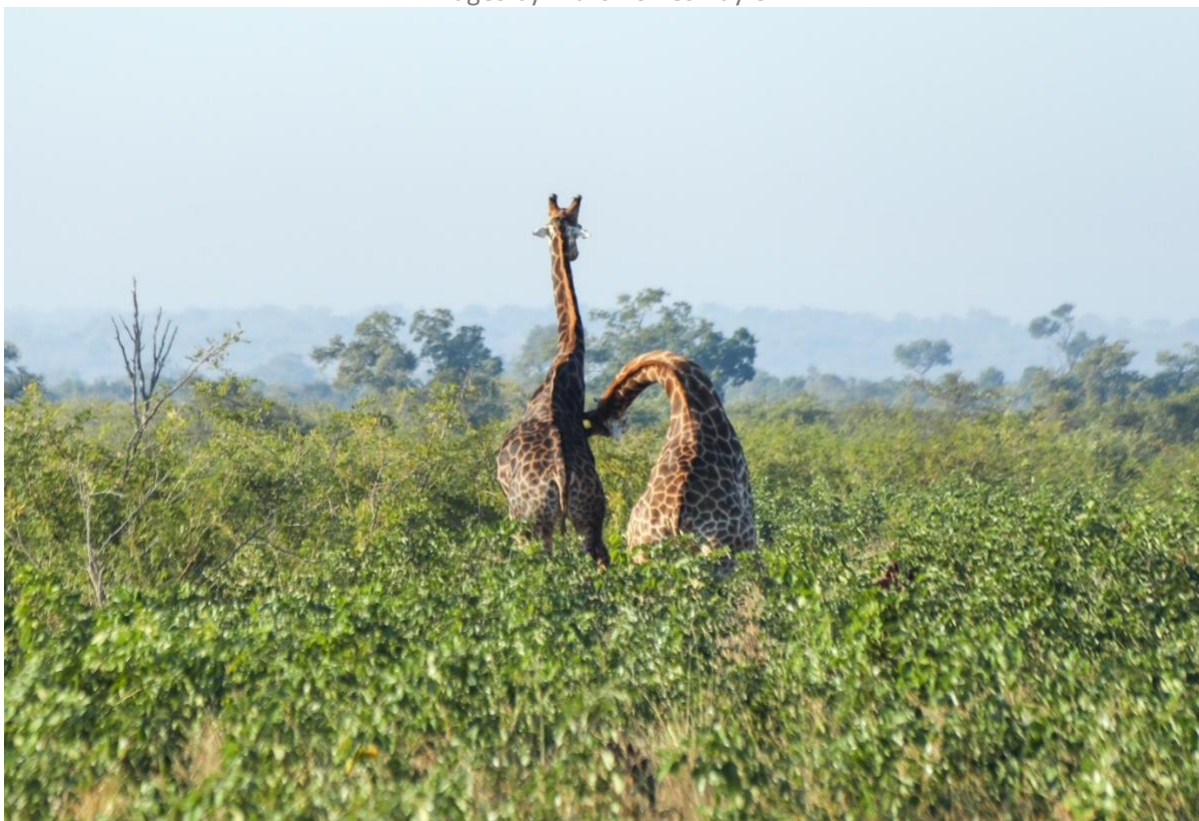


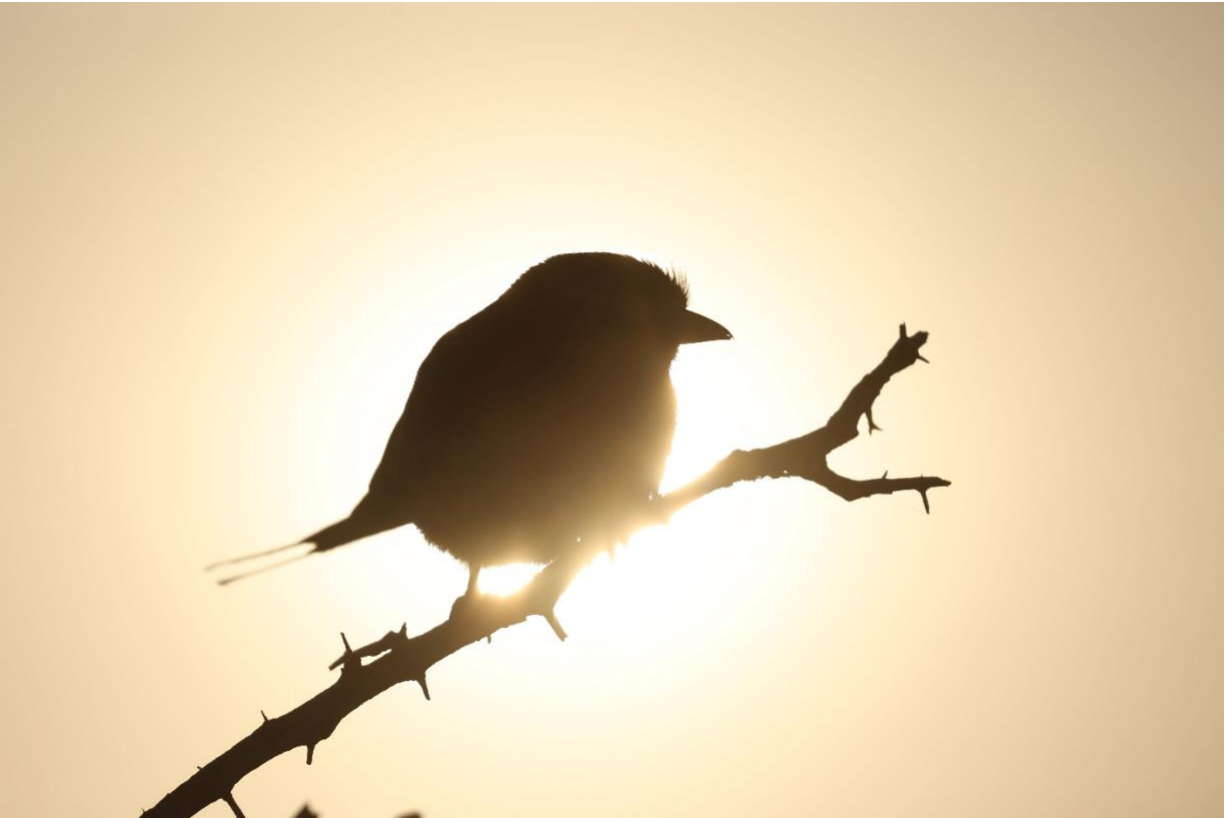


This time of year, the sun sinks into the landscape at a rapid rate. A herd of wildebeest catch the last of its warm rays. Image by Matt Durell



A battle of the giants. A brief moment to size each other up before these two bulls got physical.
Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.

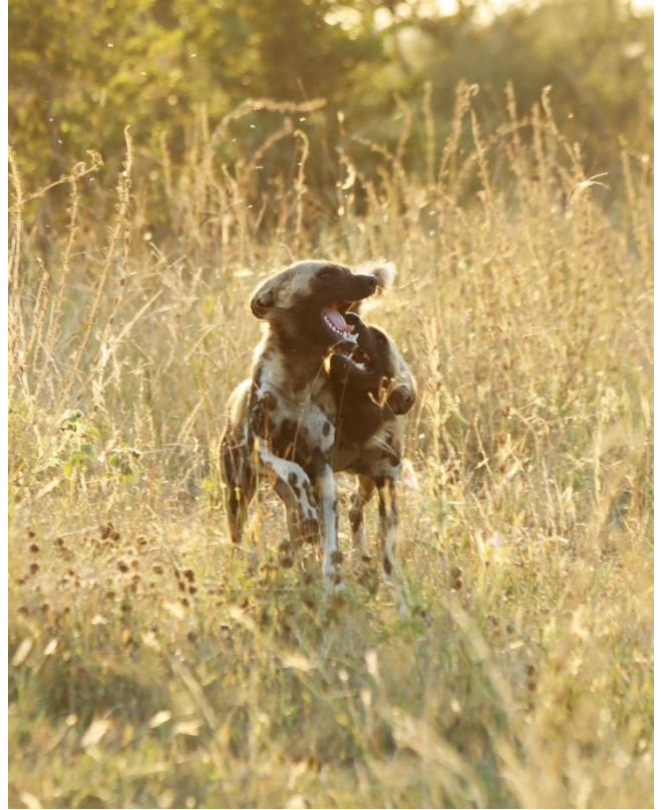




A different colour palette for this iconic lowveld bird, the lilac-breasted roller. Image by Matt Durell.



The Nkuwa female leopard has been providing amazing viewing this month as she goes about raising her new litter of two cubs. Here she surveys the woodlands for their next meal. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The cunning slender mongoose takes a moment to see what lies in the riverbed.
Members of the Othawa Pack mobilising during a traditional greeting ceremony. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



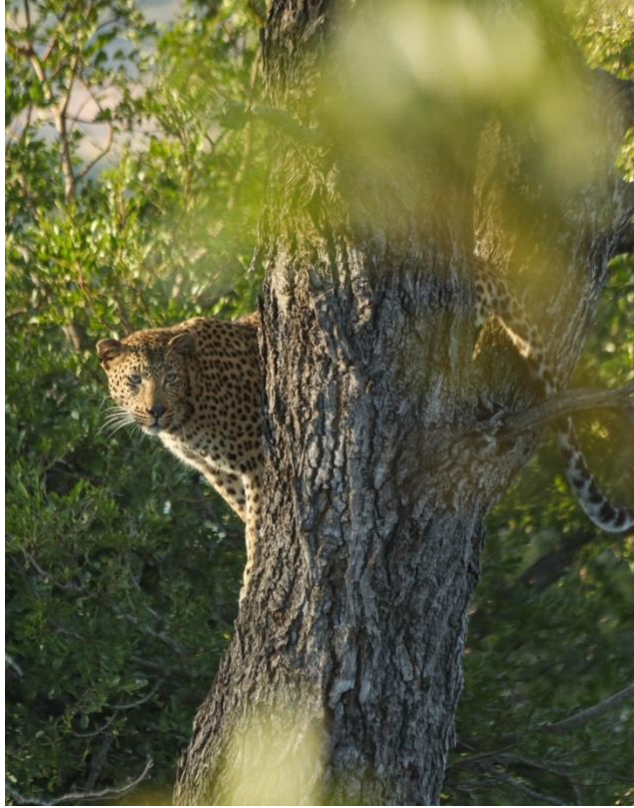
Never underestimate the heart of a warthog. These courageous pigs eventually chased the Makatini female cheetah and her three growing cubs out of their feeding ground. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



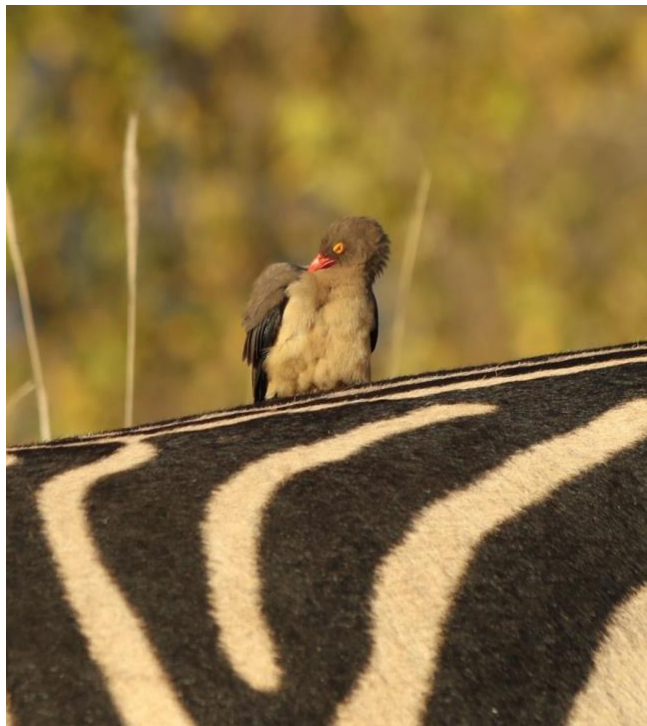
A crash of four square-lipped rhino at dawn. What a way to start the day. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The two faces of the Nkuhuma male lion. He and the Talamati male have been a regular feature in the south around Castleton camp and surrounds. Images by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



The beautiful Thumbela female leopard in a heart-stopping sighting where she was chased up a large knob thorn tree on multiple occasions. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



Not only is a large herbivore a suitable dinner plate but a good place to do any final preparations safely before the night sets in. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.