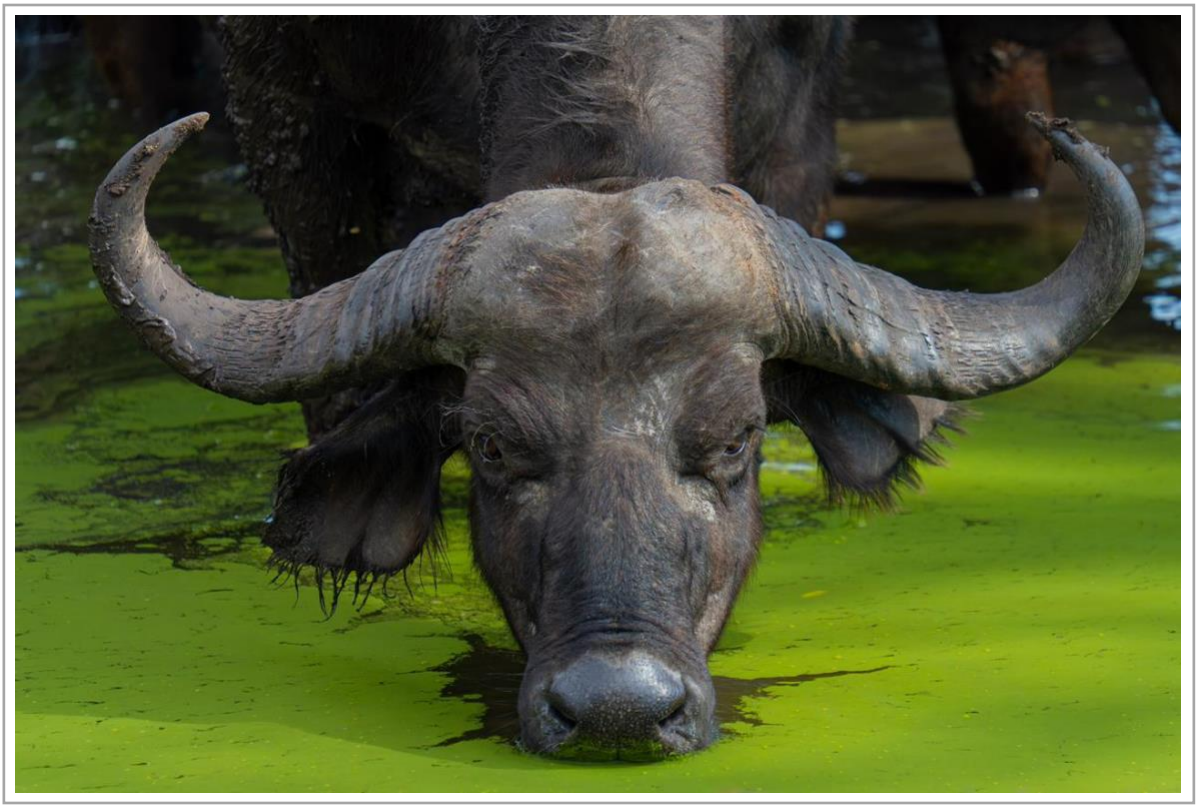
Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of June, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature
Average minimum: 14.7˚C (58.4˚F)
Minimum recorded: 12.0˚C (53.6˚F)
Average maximum: 27.7˚C (81.8˚F)
Maximum recorded: 31.0˚C (87.8˚F)

Rainfall Recorded
For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 444 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sept)

Sunrise & Sunset
Sunrise: 06h35
Sunset: 17h15

June has revealed a drier, more open environment, offering clearer views of animals as vegetation thins out. It is a favourite for many, with perfect daytime temperatures and skies so crisp and blue they hardly seem real. The dusty, dry plains are creating spectacular amber sunsets that transform to a deep burgundy before the stars emerge, one by one, to create the most dramatic scene overhead, humbling all that get lost in its beauty. Water has become scarcer, drawing wildlife to permanent water sources and increasing chances of incredible sightings.

A Sightings Snapshot for June follows:

Lions

- This month delivered exceptional lion sightings, beginning with the Shish Pride feeding on a fully grown male giraffe. All 14 members were present, and the growing cubs—now nearly adult-sized—were a reassuring sight. Their increasing size means they're far less vulnerable to infanticide should a new male attempt a takeover. While this bodes well for the younger lions, the subadult males will soon face the natural next step: being pushed out of the pride. This typical dispersal behaviour prevents inbreeding and helps maintain the long-term genetic health of the pride.
- One afternoon near the N'wanetsi River, we heard the distant calls of zebra and paused to listen more closely. Just as I turned off the engine, a sudden burst of snarling and throaty, rasping growls echoed from the river below. We quickly drove toward the sound and came upon a striking sight—the Mananga Pride sprawled over the striped body of a zebra. Two lionesses still clamped their jaws around its throat, while the cubs squabbled noisily, letting out harsh, grating cries as they jostled and snapped at each other, each trying to claim a piece of the kill. They demolished the entire zebra that afternoon, and by morning, with the help of the crocodiles in the river, there was not even a bone to be seen.
- Another afternoon on the western basalt plains, we found the Chava Pride resting in the tall grasses. As the sun dipped toward the horizon, the distant sounds of a large buffalo herd stirred interest among some of the lionesses. Following the noise, they came upon over a hundred buffalo. With a sudden charge, they caused chaos, managing to split the herd and isolate a lone bull. Despite several attempts, the lions couldn't bring the powerful animal down. Darkness set in, and mindful of the nearby cubs and not wanting to interfere with the hunt, we left the area. At first light, we returned, finding only a network of lion and buffalo tracks. Carefully following the trail and periodically stopping to listen for feeding sounds, we scanned the bush in silence. Suddenly, one of the trackers turned, grinning—"There they are!" We had found the Chava Pride again, gathered around the remains of a buffalo carcass. All 12 cubs were present, along with the three Sonop males. The females and cubs had clearly already fed—many of the cubs were caked in a dark mess of blood and soil, nearly black with the aftermath of their feast. It was a truly unforgettable sight.
- A young, unnamed, male lion has been seen just north of the lodges. On two occasions he was seen with a single lioness that we suspect could be one of the Shish lionesses.
- One evening near the lodge, six large male lions were seen marching east along the H6. Their unified stride was striking. After crossing the road, they veered north into the bush and disappeared from view. Their arrival comes at a pivotal time. With the Trichardt males no longer present, both the Mananga and Shish Prides have been left without dominant males, resulting in unpredictable movements. A strong coalition like this could bring much-needed stability—if they choose to stay.

Leopards

- Leopard activity surged in the final two weeks of the month, with several sightings of the Dumbana leap. On multiple occasions, they were found finishing off an impala carcass hoisted in a tree. One particularly notable sighting involved the Dumbana female and her daughter leaving the young male to feed alone on the remains of a young impala. Below, two hyenas waited patiently for scraps. The scene intensified when a large, but shy, unknown male leopard attempted to sneak in unnoticed. He was eventually spotted. As the young Dumbana male fed, the carcass slipped from the branch and fell to the ground. He then descended the tree with grace, pausing now and then to growl at the intruder before making one final leap into the long grass. The unknown male quickly approached the base of the tree in search of leftovers, but the hyenas had already seized everything and dashed off.

- Separately, the Zamani male was also observed having hoisted an impala ewe into a large leadwood tree near the S41.
- Nhlanguleni female has been more secretive this month, with only one sighting recorded of her moving from the central depression into some long grass.
- The regal Lebombo male continues to rule over the southern Lebombo mountains, often passing along the outskirts of the lodge as he patrols his territory, marking it with scent to assert his presence to rival males. His preferred resting spots appear to be the reed beds along the N'wanetsi River and its adjacent tributaries.
- Fascinating interactions unfolded between the Lebombo male and the young Dumbana male toward the end of the month. One morning, the Lebombo male—who could very well be the father of the Dumbana youngster—was found lying at the base of a large knobthorn tree. Suspended above him was the partially eaten carcass of an impala. Upon closer inspection, we discovered the young Dumbana male just a few meters away, concealed within a guarri thicket. When we returned to the scene in the afternoon, both leopards were in the tree. The Lebombo male was sprawled across the carcass, while the young Dumbana male perched higher up among the thinner branches. Both were snarling and hissing at each other in a tense standoff. It is speculated that the young male may have been the one to make the kill and hoist the impala into the tree, only for the dominant Lebombo male to come upon the scene and assert his authority. What was most surprising, however, was that later in the day, the Lebombo male was once again resting at the base of the tree while the young Dumbana male was feeding—an unexpected turn that reminds us how much there is still to learn about the complex dynamics of leopard behaviour.

Cheetahs

- A single mother and two cubs were spotted on the S41.

African wild dogs

- One morning on the way from our staff village, a pack of 11 wild dogs was seen trotting up the H6, including a heavily pregnant adult female. Denning usually takes place from May to July, coinciding with the dry season to boost pup survival. While most packs in this region typically den in Mozambique or southwest of our concession—where large termite mounds are more common—we're hopeful that, given how far along this female appears to be, she may choose a site nearby.

Elephants

- This month, the bush has visibly dried out. The elephants are actively transitioning from feeding on grass to foraging for the last remaining leaves at the tops of trees, often using their strength to push the trees over. If the roots are torn from the ground in the process, it's even better for them, as it exposes the nutrient-rich tissues beneath the surface that they can feed on. They've also begun their winter routine—heading to the mountains in the evenings and returning to the river and nearby plains during the heat of the day.

Spotted hyenas

- Spotted hyena sightings have been both frequent and dramatic this month. A particularly intense encounter mid-month involved around 15 hyenas vocalizing wildly and chasing two others—one with a bloody neck wound, likely the result of a territorial clash between the regularly seen Ntibistane Clan and the Granophyre Clan. The atmosphere was electric with woops, snickers, eerie laughter, and deep grumbles from dominant females. In addition, hyenas have been regular visitors at lion and leopard kills, often arriving with uncanny precision—nose held high, guided by their remarkable sense of smell.

Buffalos

- A herd, over 1 000 strong, has been roaming the grasslands in the north-western reaches of our concession. Despite the gradual decline in grass quality, the animals remain in good condition. Scattered among the sea of black hides, the occasional soft, rust-brown calf stands out—a gentle reminder of the new generation.
- Their low, cow-like groans carry for several kilometres across the plains, and in recent weeks, they've drawn the attention of the Chava Pride. On a few occasions, the lions have managed to isolate a weaker individual, providing valuable sustenance to the growing cubs and keeping the Sonop males well-fed this month.

Plains game

- This month has seen a noticeable increase in zebra sightings, with large groups of up to 50 individuals gathering on the open plains. Among them, wildebeest, warthogs, impala, and giraffe dot the landscape, creating a vibrant mosaic of wildlife. As water becomes more scarce, the movement of animals has become more predictable, with well-worn game paths clearly visible as they travel to and from the remaining water sources each day.

Rare animals and other sightings

- This month brought a welcome surprise with sightings of several rarely seen species: African civet, serval, white-tailed mongoose, and Sharpe's grysbok. All are small, elusive mammals that often go unnoticed—especially during the rainy season, when the grass grows tall enough to conceal even a buffalo. Their appearance is a reminder of the incredible diversity within the area, and how much remains hidden just beyond view.

Birds

- Bird activity has been vibrant this month. A black stork was seen soaring gracefully over Pony Pan—a rare and special sight. A controlled burn west of the central depression attracted an impressive mix of raptors and scavengers, including eagles, vultures, black-winged kites, starlings, rollers, and hornbills, all taking advantage of insects and small mammals caught by the flames. Pearl-spotted owlets have been especially vocal at dusk, their calls echoing through the trees, while small flocks of around 50 quelea have been seen fluttering through the grasslands in tight formation.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the June Gallery.

The ecological Importance of fires **Article and photos by Walter Mabilane**

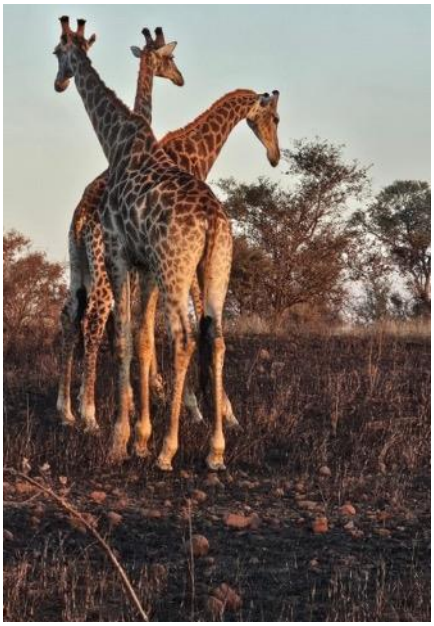
Fires are often seen as purely destructive forces, leaving behind scorched earth and blackened trees. However, in many ecosystems, fire plays an essential and even beneficial role. From grasslands to savannas and fire-adapted forests, wildfires are a natural part of ecological cycles, contributing to the health and resilience of the environment. While human-induced fires and climate change can push these events beyond natural limits, this article focuses on the advantages of naturally occurring or well-managed fires within ecosystems.

One of the key benefits of fires is the recycling of nutrients. When vegetation burns, the process releases vital minerals and nutrients that were locked within plant material. These nutrients are returned to the soil in the form of ash, enriching it and promoting new plant growth. This natural fertilization process is especially important in nutrient-poor environments, helping to sustain healthy and productive ecosystems over time.

Fires also play a critical role in shaping habitats. Some plant species require heat or smoke exposure to trigger seed germination. As the post-fire landscape begins to recover, new growth provides fresh feeding grounds and shelter for a wide variety of animals. The result is often an increase in biodiversity, as species adapted to early successional habitats thrive in the aftermath. Over time, this dynamic renewal supports a greater range of flora and fauna.

By burning away dead trees, dry grasses, fallen branches, and dense underbrush, fires naturally reduce the fuel load in an area. This lowers the risk of future fires becoming uncontrollable infernos. In essence, smaller, periodic fires help to prevent larger, more catastrophic ones. This self-regulating process is essential for maintaining ecological balance, especially in regions prone to seasonal droughts.

Many ecosystems have evolved not just to tolerate fire, but to depend on it. Grasslands, savannas, and certain forest types rely on fire to clear old vegetation, open up the canopy, and make way for new growth. After a fire, these ecosystems often burst back to life with fresh green shoots, wildflowers, and an influx of herbivores and pollinators. This regenerative cycle helps keep the ecosystem dynamic and resilient, reducing the spread of disease and supporting a diverse range of species.



While wildfires can be alarming, especially near human settlements, fire is an essential ecological process in many parts of the natural world. When allowed to function as part of a balanced system—or carefully managed where needed—they promote nutrient cycling, create habitats, reduce the severity of future fires, and support regeneration. Understanding and respecting the role of fire is key to preserving the long-term health of fire-adapted ecosystems.

It is for these reasons that conservation teams carry out periodic ecological burns as a proactive way to manage habitat quality, promote biodiversity, and maintain healthy, functioning ecosystems.

As guides it is an interesting subject to discuss with our guests, and the burnt landscape offers up some incredible sightings and landscapes after the fires and as the flora starts to regenerate.

Seed dispersal **Article by Sean Surtees**

While exploring the Singita Kruger National Park concession, one feature that stands out is the natural beauty of the landscape. The N'wanetsi and Sweni Rivers meander slowly through the southern section of the concession eventually making their way into the Lebombo mountains and continuing on into Mozambique. Along both river systems as well as the topography of the Lebombo mountains, one will notice a vast array of plants, both large and small alike. Each species of plant has one basic but very important requirement – they need to reproduce to ensure their continued survival. This is done by the process of seed dispersal.

But what exactly is seed dispersal and what is its importance? It is the process in which the seeds of a plant move away from the parent plant to a new location, often as far away as possible. This will enable the plant species in question to colonise new areas and avoid or minimise competition with the parent plant. By moving away from the parent plant, seeds avoid competing for resources like water, nutrients and sunlight.

Seed dispersal also ensures survival of the species and contributes to the genetic diversity within a plant population as the seeds are dispersed far away to new areas. Plants have evolved an amazing array of methods which ensure the dispersal of their seeds. These methods of dispersal include the following: wind, water, animals and even explosions!

Wind Dispersal: Adapted seeds are often light and may have structures like wings and/or hairs that allow them to be carried by the wind.

Water Dispersal: Adapted seeds are often buoyant and waterproof.

Animal Dispersal: Animals can disperse seeds through various means, including:

- Consumption – when animals eat fruits containing seeds, and the seeds pass through their digestive system and are deposited elsewhere.

- Attachment - Some seeds have hooks or sticky surfaces that attach to animal fur or feathers and are carried away.
- Caching - Animals like tree squirrels bury seeds, and some of these seeds may be forgotten and later germinate.

Explosive Dispersal: Some plants have pods that explode, flinging seeds away from the parent plant.

Among the rich flora found within the concession, three prominent plant species stand out - the wooden-banana (*Entandrophragma caudatum*), pod-mahogony (*Afzelia quanzensis*) and leopard orchid (*Ansellia africana*). Each species has an amazing method of dispersing their seeds:

Wooden-Banana (*Entandrophragma caudatum*)
Dotted along the Granophyre ridges of the Lebombo mountains, the Wooden-Banana is a semi-deciduous tree that branches high up and with a rounded canopy. It disperses its seeds through wind. Woody, cigar-shaped fruit pods are produced by the tree. When dry, the pods split open releasing numerous large seeds which are winged on one side. However, the seeds are light and thin which are designed to be carried as far away as possible from the parent tree, by using the wind.

Above left: the split open fruit pod of the wooden banana. Notice the five valves which split once the pod is mature, which resembles a half-peeled banana with a central seed column.
Above right: the seed that is adapted for wind dispersal.

Pod-mahogony (*Afzelia quanzensis*)
The pod-mahogony is also found along the granophyre ridges as well as any suitable low lying rocky outcrop. It is a large, handsome tree with a spreading crown and canopy. It uses animals to disperse its seeds. Vervet monkeys, chacma baboons and a variety of hornbill species are known to consume the aril (the red fleshy covering) of the seed – the bright red aril is attractive to animals, and its removal is a key step in the dispersal and germination of the seed. The hard seed is then discarded on the ground, which can result in germination – studies even suggest that seeds that have had the aril removed result in a higher germination rate. Rodents such as squirrels are also attracted to the seeds, potentially caching them, and their activities may contribute to dispersal.

Above left: the fruit of the pod-mahogony contains the seeds.
Above right: The seeds are black and oblong in shape with a bright red aril on the ends. This aril attracts vervet monkeys, chacma baboons, rodents, and varies species of hornbills to the seeds.

Leopard Orchid (*Ansellia africana*)

The leopard orchid in an epiphyte which can be found growing on numerous other species of large trees throughout the concession (an epiphyte is a plant that grows on other plants for structure and support only, and does not use any nutrients from the host species). Leopard orchids primarily rely on wind for seed dispersal – they produce seed pods that split open and release the dust-like seeds when mature. The seeds are extremely small and light, which allows them to be carried over long distances. In fact, each pod can contain thousands upon thousands of seeds. Interestingly, the seeds of leopard orchids also require a unique symbiotic relationship with specific fungi for germination, further influencing their dispersal patterns and success. The fungi provide the necessary nutrients which the seeds require to germinate and establish themselves, as the seeds lack sufficient stored food reserves.

Above: The pods of the leopard orchid. Each pod can contain thousands upon thousands of seeds. Designed for wind dispersal, the pod dries out and eventually bursts, allowing the tiny dust-like seeds to be carried away in the wind. The seed will only germinate if it comes into contact with a certain fungi, hence why the leopard orchid produces so many seeds.

June Gallery

White-backed Vultures – Photo by Matt Holland

Dumbana young male – Photo by Matt Holland

Chava Pride cubs – Photo by Monika Malewski

Tree squirrel – Photo by Monika Malewski
Lioness feeding – Photo by Rudi Hulshoff

Dumbana young female – Photo by Monika Malewski

Yellow-billed Oxpecker – Photo by Monika Malewski

Elephant Bull – Photo by Monika Malewski

Lebombo Male – Photo by Monika Malewski Bateleur Eagle – Photo by Monika Malewski

Sonop Males feeding – Photo by Monika Malewski

Nhlanguleni female – Photo by Graeme Stuart

Vulture in the mist – Photo by Monika Malewski

Hippo cow and calf – Photo by Rudi Hulshoff

Compiled by Monika Malewski