

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 11.8°C (53.2°F)
Minimum recorded: 09.0°C (48.2°F)
Average maximum: 24.0°C (75.2°F)
Maximum recorded: 30.0°C (86.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 569.2 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 17:29

July has reminded us why winter in the Sabi Sand is such a remarkable time to be on safari. The mornings have greeted us with a gentle chill and golden light filtering through the leadwood trees, while each day has unfolded with unforgettable encounters. As the bush continues to thin and water becomes scarce, wildlife has gathered around the remaining waterholes, rewarding us with incredible sightings of elephants, buffalo, and leopards. Evenings have ended beneath crystal-clear skies, wrapped in blankets beside the fire, sharing stories of the day's adventures. July has been a month of quiet beauty, extraordinary wildlife, and a reminder that the magic of the African bush often lies in its simplest moments.

Here's an overview for the month of July:

Elephants

- Large herds of elephants have been seen frequently during the month, especially around midday along the Sand River and at waterholes throughout the reserve.

Buffalos

- We haven't seen much of the larger herds of buffalo this month. There has been a herd of around 100 individuals frequenting the northern parts of the reserve and then the more permanent Sand River 'dagga' boys that are regularly seen.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride in the south of the reserve have been seen regularly, all four cubs are still looking happy and healthy. They have been seen on and off with the Nkumati coalition of males who cause a little bit of tension with the sub-adult male – offspring of the Plains Camp males.
- The Plains Camp males have been seen on and off, they still seem to move great distances between the western parts of the Sabi Sand and the far north-eastern parts of the reserve.
- The Nkuhuma male lion and lioness have been seen. The male lion was seen trying to climb a leadwood tree to get to an impala kill that the Thamba male leopard had hoisted there.
- The Othawa Pride of lions has been seen along the Sand River to the west of the lodges and even crossing the Sand River.

Leopards

- The Thamba male leopard has been seen on a number of occasions. He has also been seen mating with the Rivala female twice this month.
- The Nkuwa female seems to have left her young male cub, now around 15/16 months of age, and we seem to think that she may have given birth to a new litter somewhere.
- Other leopard sightings for the month include the Hlambela male, the Tisela female and the Ntoma female leopards.

Cheetahs

- The Makatini sub-adult coalition of male cheetahs have been seen on a handful of occasions for the month. The two young males have become a formidable force in bringing down impala.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa pack of nine wild dogs have been seen a bit more for the month after having lost the alpha female and her puppies.
- There's also a pack of three dogs that we have been seen moving throughout the reserve.

Unusual sightings

- An African wild cat was seen this month.
- Guests at Boulders Lodge were treated to the spectacle of two Cape clawless otters in the Sand River, in front of the lodge.

Bird list

- We have added another four birds to our list for the year, the highlight being the great white pelican, taking this year's tally to 280.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as images for the July Gallery.

There is something about the African bush that no photograph, documentary or story can ever truly capture. It isn't just what you see. It's what you feel. It settles somewhere deep inside you, in a place that no city ever seems able to reach.

Working as a field guide at Singita has taught me that every morning is a gift. Long before the sun rises, when the world is still wrapped in darkness, there is a quietness that speaks louder than words. As the first birds begin to call and the horizon slowly turns from black to deep orange, I find myself breathing differently. More slowly. More deeply. The bush has a way of reminding me that life doesn't always have to be rushed.

Some mornings, I stop the vehicle on a ridge and simply look. Endless wilderness stretches out in front of me, painted gold by the rising sun. Other evenings, I watch as the sky catches fire before surrendering to the stars. In those moments, nothing else exists. The emails, the worries, the noise of life—they all become insignificant. A sunrise or a sunset has an incredible way of resetting my mind. It reminds me how small I am, yet how lucky I am to witness something so timeless.

The greatest privilege, though, is sharing these moments with other people.

There is something magical about watching a guest experience Africa for the very first time. Seeing their eyes widen as elephants quietly emerge from the trees, hearing them gasp when a leopard appears on a branch, or watching them fall silent as the sun disappears below the horizon—it reminds me why I fell in love with this place in the first place.

Their wonder becomes my wonder all over again.

Every excited smile takes me back to being a little girl, discovering the bush through fresh eyes. Before responsibilities, before work, before adulthood. Back to a time when every animal felt like a miracle and every drive held the promise of adventure. Some of my strongest memories are not made with my eyes, but with my ears. Late at night, lying in a tent somewhere in the African wilderness, my dad would gently wake me. "Listen," he'd whisper.

Outside, somewhere in the darkness, lions would be calling.

There was something so comforting about those moments. The deep, echoing roars rolling through the night, the excitement of knowing they were out there, and the quiet joy of sharing it with my dad. I didn't know it then, but those nights were shaping the person I would become.

Even now, when I'm lying in bed and I hear lions roaring in the distance or a scops owl calling beneath a sky full of stars, I'm transported back to those childhood memories. For a moment, I'm not a guide with responsibilities. I'm just that little girl again, listening in awe beside her father.

People often think this job is about finding lions or leopards. They think it's about photography, sightings and checklists. But for me, it has never been about that. It's about helping people reconnect—with nature, with wonder, with stillness, and sometimes even with themselves.

The bush has a remarkable way of healing without ever saying a word. It teaches patience, presence and perspective. It reminds us that the world is far older and far wiser than we are. Every morning I drive out into the wilderness, I am reminded that I am exactly where I am meant to be. And every evening, as the sounds of Africa

slowly replace the silence of the day, I silently thank the little girl who first fell in love with the wild—and the father who taught her how to listen.

Fluffy ferocious

Article by Alweet Hluwangane

On the morning of 29 July 2026, Back Office informed us that guests at Singita Boulders Lodge would arrive early, at 10:00. My tracker, Temba, and I headed out 30 minutes earlier to wait for their arrival.

The guests got delayed on the way, which gave us time. I decided to use it productively. I grabbed my camera from the game viewer and walked in search of something to photograph.

And there it was - perched atop a candelabra tree at the turning circle. A butterfly our Head Guide, Marc Eschenlohr, had been hoping to record for Singita Sabi Sand.



The Woolly-leg butterfly
Species #93 for our Singita Sabi Sand
iNaturalist project. A small win for citizen
science!

The woolly-leg is one of my favourites, not just for its looks, but for the complex world it lives in. Its larvae are ferocious little predators. They feed on plant lice, aphids, and scale insects - natural pest control for the trees. But here's the twist: the aphids are protected by ants. The ants farm them for honeydew, and in return, they defend them from predators like ladybugs, wasps... and woolly-leg caterpillars.

So how does the caterpillar survive?
Deception.

It produces chemicals that make it smell like an ant larva. The ants accept it into their nest and even protect it, while it quietly eats the aphids.

And those “woolly” legs? They’re not just decorative. The wool-like structures protect the butterfly from ant bites and help it detect chemical cues — from host plants, mates, and ants.

It’s a perfect example of how nothing in nature exists in isolation. If we spray pesticides, we don’t just kill aphids. We break the entire relationship between tree, ant, aphid, and butterfly.

Moments like this remind me why we do what we do. As guides, our job isn’t just to find the Big 5. It’s to notice the small stories too - the ones that teach us how the bush really works.

When I leave the bush, there is a restlessness in me. The once-in-a-lifetime sightings will inevitably stay with me forever, but they are not what I miss most.

When I return, I notice the endless African skies, the familiar silhouettes of ancient trees and the rhythm of life unfolding once again. But it is the scents that settle me. They tell me I am home. They are the quiet backdrop, weaving the tapestry upon which the landscapes and soundscapes come to life.

Unlike a photograph or a birdsong, scent cannot be captured. It exists only in the moment, quietly stitching itself into memory.

The day begins long before the first rays of sunlight reach the horizon. The familiar aroma of freshly brewed coffee drifts through the lodge, warming cold hands wrapped around a mug. Outside, a sharp winter chill catches in my lungs as I step into the darkness. Mist hangs low in the valleys, veiling the landscape in silence, while the scent of damp earth and dew-soaked grass lingers in the still morning air. Somewhere in the distance, an African scops owl gives one last call before giving way to the dawn chorus.

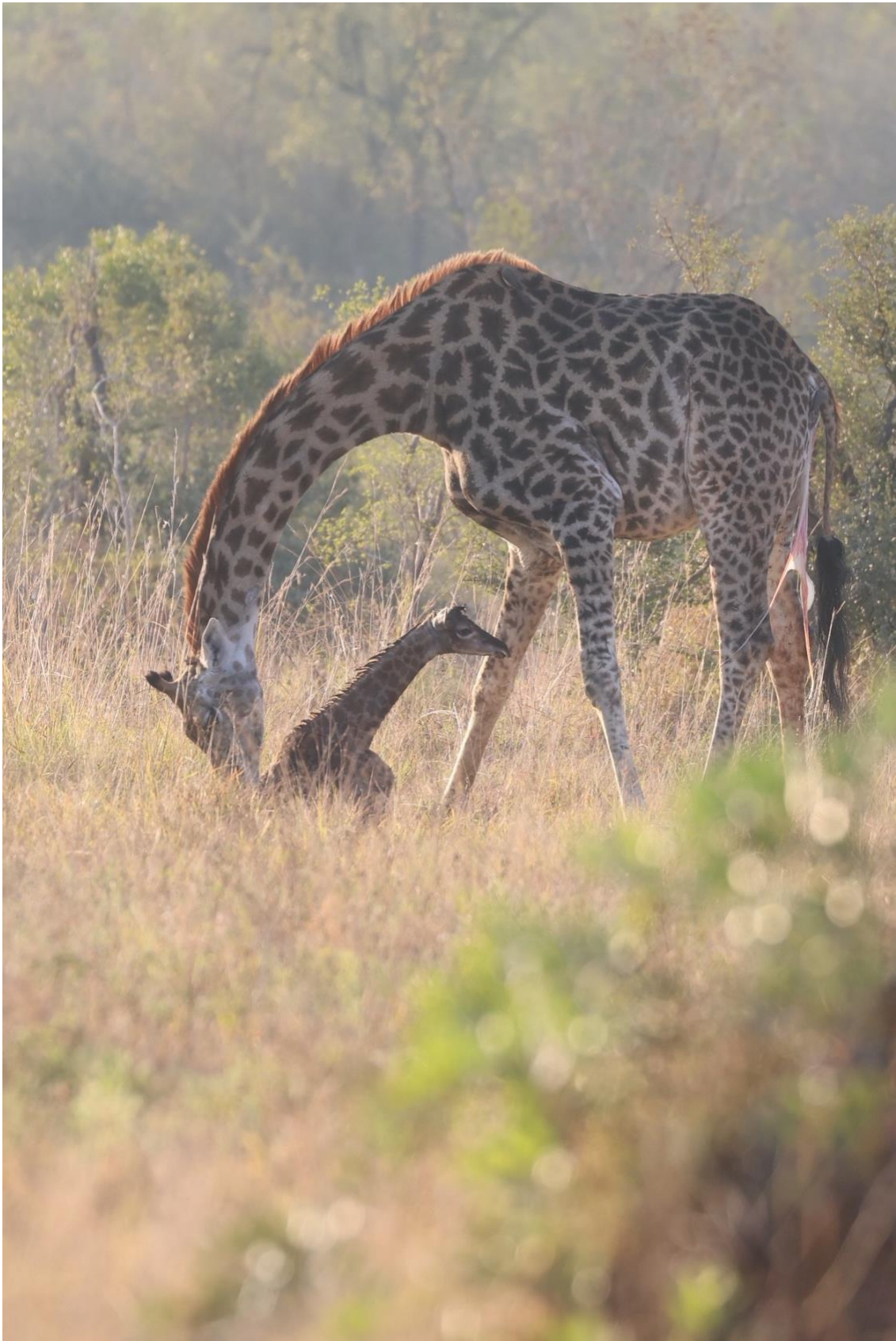
As the engine hums to life and the vehicle rolls quietly into the bush, the landscape slowly awakens. The first golden light spills over the horizon, warming the earth and releasing the fragrance of crushed wild herbs, sunbaked trees and the sweet scent of dry grass carried on a gentle breeze. Along the river, the air changes again to cooler and richer, carrying the unmistakable scent of water and lush vegetation.

Then come the scents that tell stories. The earthy aroma of elephants feeding beneath a marula tree. The sharp, unmistakable trace of a bull in musth before he steps into view. The metallic whisper of a fresh kill hidden in the thickets. And a mud wallow, broken and drying at the edges, still holding the deep, musky memory of buffalo or rhino long after they have left it behind.

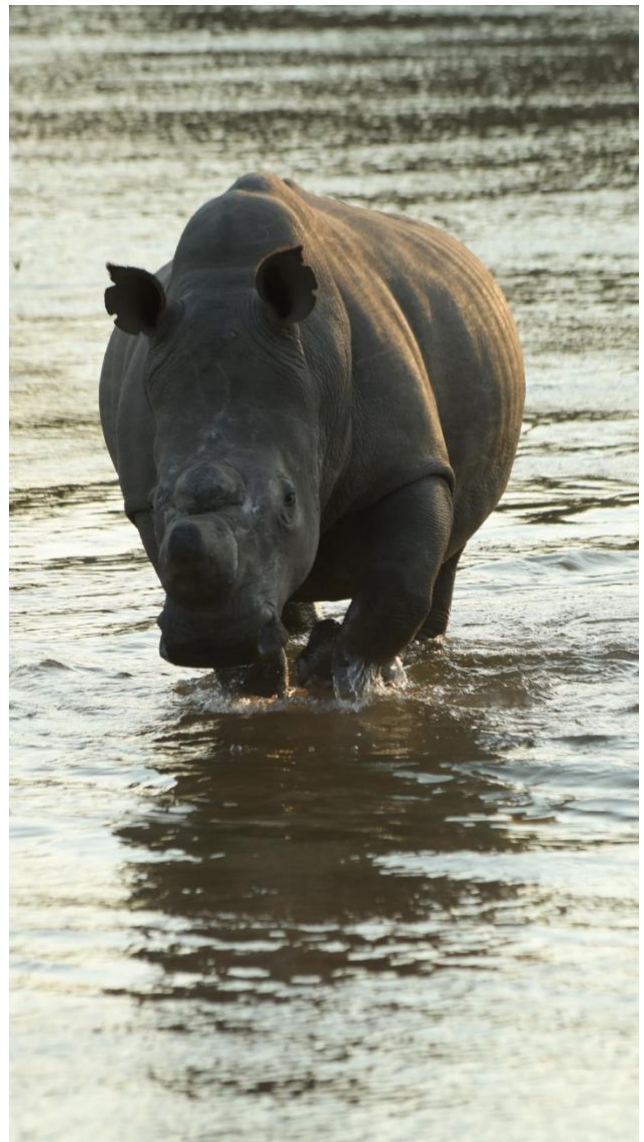
Then comes perhaps the most unforgettable scent of all: the first rain after months of dry weather. As the first drops strike the thirsty earth, the bush seems to exhale. Dust gives way to petrichor, leaves glisten with new life, and within hours the landscape begins its quiet transformation.

I've come to realize that while the extraordinary takes care of itself, it is these quiet moments that stay with me. The smell of freshly brewed coffee before dawn or damp earth rising through the mist. Crushed wild herbs. Rain falling on parched soils.

These are the scents that remind me that I have returned to a place that has shaped me. A place where time slows, the senses awaken and the wild quietly welcomes me home.



A newborn giraffe. Photo by Matt Durell



Left: The Nkuwa female leopard pauses briefly before setting off in search of a meal. Image by Matt Durell

Right: A white rhino crosses the Sand River while on a territory patrol. Image by Marc Bowes Taylor



A flock of great white pelicans. Image by Matt Durell.

A herd of waterbuck staring at a crocodile visible on the banks of the river. Image by Marc Bowes Taylor





A hamerkop keeping a watchful eye on a Southern African rock python.

A very new white rhino calf following mum closely! Images by Marc Bowes Taylor





An elephant enjoying what is left of the greenery this winter. Image by Marc Bowes Taylor