

Singita



Image by Matt Durell

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA

For the month of October, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 17.5°C (63.5°F)
Minimum recorded: 13.0°C (55.4°F)
Average maximum: 29.2°C (84.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.0°C (98.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 51.5 mm
Season to date: 51.5 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:07
Sunset: 18:09

Fireball lilies have given the bush a splash of colour this month, and we have welcomed back some of the familiar sounds of the summer here in the Sabi Sands as the red-chested cuckoos and European bee-eaters have been heard throughout the reserve. We continue to get some light showers after some of the warmer days, but what have looked like some ominous weather systems have blown past. We are most certainly transitioning into summer, marked by the rising temperatures and the start of the rainy season, which brings

lush greenery and birthing season for many animals, especially impalas. The landscape is bursting with colour and wildlife activity, with new life and returning migratory birds adding to the spectacle, making it a visually vibrant, and occasionally humid, time for safari!

Here's an overview of the month's sightings:

Elephants

- Almost like a scene out of the movie, *Holes*, the property has been dug by the herds as they target the roots. That and to loosen up the soil to have a bit of a dust bath. A few new tiny elephants have also been sighted with some of breeding herds. Groups of *askaris* (young elephant bulls) and particularly large bulls have also been frequenting the south of the reserve.

Buffaloes

- The large herd of buffalo have somewhat fragmented into smaller herds. With the changing lion dynamics and the sheer presence of the lions they continue to move throughout the southern section of the reserve.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride have been in and out of the Singita reserve. The three subadults are all looking healthy and the two younger lionesses will help strengthen pride numbers.
- The Plains Camp male lions have been visiting the Othawa Pride of lions a lot of late. They were all seen together towards the end of the month feeding on a warthog. The three cubs in the pride are also all looking healthy - all three are young males! With early rains having fallen, the males have been very vocal and move a country mile in cementing and marking their territory.
- The Ximungwe Pride, also known as the Bateleur Pride, of three lionesses have also been seen on a number of occasions.
- The Nkuhuma and Talamati male lions have been seen with two of the older lionesses. One of which we think is quite heavily pregnant.
- The ever growing Nkuhuma sub-adults are still together and avoiding trouble from any of the larger males in the area.
- Other lion sightings include the large Msuthu Pride and Gijima males.

Leopards

- The Nkuwa female and her young male cub seem to be thriving between Castleton and the lodges closer to the river. He is already about a third of mom's size.
- The Thamba male seems to have been in a fight with another male in the western sector of the reserve. He's still got some battle scars and a bit of a swollen head. He spends time waiting on top of unsuspecting warthog burrows for a meal. Switching tactics, possibly due to his injuries, to perhaps conserve the energy he has.
- The Tisela female and her two sub-adult daughters are also thriving. They have been seen regularly to the west of the lodges next to the river. They have also been given names for research purposes. The blue-eyed female is known as "Xihangu" (meaning hail or ice) and the yellow-eyed female is known as "Xiluva" (meaning flower).
- The Rivala female leopard has also been a regular sight in and around the river, west of the lodges.
- The Hlambela male continues to frequent the north of the reserve.
- Other leopard sightings include the Nhlangueni female and the Nottens male.

Cheetah

- The male cheetah has been frequenting the grasslands in the southern parts of the reserve. He has done well to avoid any altercations with the lions that have been in pursuit of the large herd of buffalo in the area.

African wild dogs

- We have had numerous sightings of the Othawa Pack of wild dogs this month! We've actually been spoiled now that the puppies are running with the pack. All eleven adults and eight pups are looking fit and healthy!
- There was also a sighting of just two wild dogs in the northern part of the reserve one afternoon.

Unusual sightings

- An amazing sighting of an African wild cat!
- Early one morning guide and guests were treated to a young elephant bull chasing an African civet from its hiding spot!

Bird list

We have added two more species to the list this month, taking the total to 288 birds. Grey-headed kingfisher and pied avocet being the highlights for the month.



Pied avocet

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

Buzzing pollinators and flower “ears”

Article and photos by Danelle Ferreira

With the onset of a new season there are all sorts of sounds around us, from insects fluttering, to frogs croaking the night away. Very seldom do we consider the effect of sound on sessile organisms like plants. Plants have many attributes that attracts pollinators, but did you know that sound benefits certain pollinator species and is even necessary for the cooperation with the flower?

Ever wonder why a honeybee buzzes around as it flies, other than letting us know that they are there. This is not done without reason, the sounds produced by insects, like bees, alerts plants of their presence. Petals from the new blooming flowers act as auditory organs or “ears” of the flowers and picks up on specific frequencies of wing beats from pollinators. Within the first three minutes of picking up this vibration from the pollinator, the flower reacts by increasing the sugar content in the nectar it produces. Nectar is the main source of carbohydrates for pollinators and assists certain species, like honeybees in the production of honey, which in return feeds the hive when no nectar is available from flowers.

This sweeter food source not only attracts the pollinator, but it also ensures that it will revisit this species of flower. This ensures the reproductive success of the plant. Within the first few days of spring in the Lowveld we witness several species of flowering plants bloom and within a few days the beautiful flowers die off, leaving the plant structure without colour. This shows the importance of the flower’s nectar being as irresistible as possible. On top of having beautiful flowers for the next season this smart adaptation from flowers also saves them energy, knowing when the production of sweeter nectar is needed and when not.

Another method that some bee species use for pollination is called sonication or “buzz pollination”. This takes place on the anthers of the flowers. Anthers are the top part of the stamen or male organ of the flower, which produces the pollen. A bee will attach itself to the anther and vibrate its abdomen using flight muscles. The vibration shakes the pollen loose from pores on the anther and gives the bee access to it. Many different wildflowers need buzz pollination to ensure they reproduce and even some of our favourite cultivated fruits like blueberries and tomatoes rely on the busy bees.



Even though the bloom at the beginning of the season was brief, we can thank the pollinators that we get to see some of these beautiful flowers. Of all the springtime sounds, buzzing is going to be one of my new favourites of the season.

Why zebras wear stripes

Article by Luke Abbot



It is one of Nature's great fashion questions: why did zebras evolve to wear black and white stripes in a land of tawny gold and green?

For years, biologists and guides alike have debated the mystery. Early theories were colourful, suggesting that the stripes confused predators, helped zebras recognise each other, or even acted as a natural form of camouflage in tall grass. Some said it was to regulate body temperature, others thought it simply looked good (and honestly, they do pull it off).

But the story takes a turn from style to survival. Research has uncovered a less glamorous but far more fascinating reason: biting flies.

Zebras live in areas where tsetse flies and horseflies are a constant menace. These insects do not just irritate; they can transmit diseases like nagana, a parasitic illness caused by *Trypanosoma* species that affects the blood and energy levels of animals. In domestic livestock, nagana can be devastating, weakening cattle, reducing milk and meat production, and often killing them.

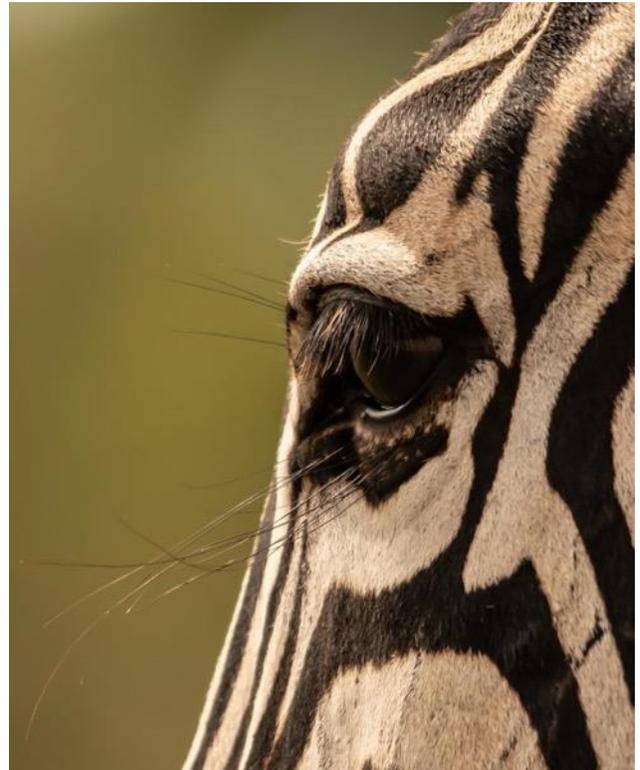
So where do stripes come in? Studies have shown that the alternating black and white pattern confuses the visual systems of these pesky flies. The sharp contrast of the stripes disrupts the way light

reflects off the zebra's body, making it difficult for the flies to land. It is a natural optical illusion. Zebras are wearing anti-fly camouflage.

When researchers placed black and white striped coats on horses, they found that the flies were far less likely to land on the striped surfaces. In the harsh African savanna, that is a major evolutionary advantage. Fewer bites mean less irritation, lower risk of disease, and more time grazing or keeping an eye out for lions.

The story becomes even more interesting when we look at the zebra's extinct cousin, the quagga. The quagga once roamed the drier grasslands of South Africa and had far fewer stripes, with a mostly brown rear half. This makes sense in light of the fly theory, because tsetse flies were not common in the quagga's range. With less pressure from biting insects, there was little need for full body striping. Evolution, it seems, gave each sub-species exactly what it needed for the conditions it lived in.

So, while the zebra's looks might appear designed for a catwalk, they are really about survival in a landscape buzzing with danger. The stripes tell a story written by evolution, shaped by hardship, and perfected by time. Nature's most stylish form of insect repellent.

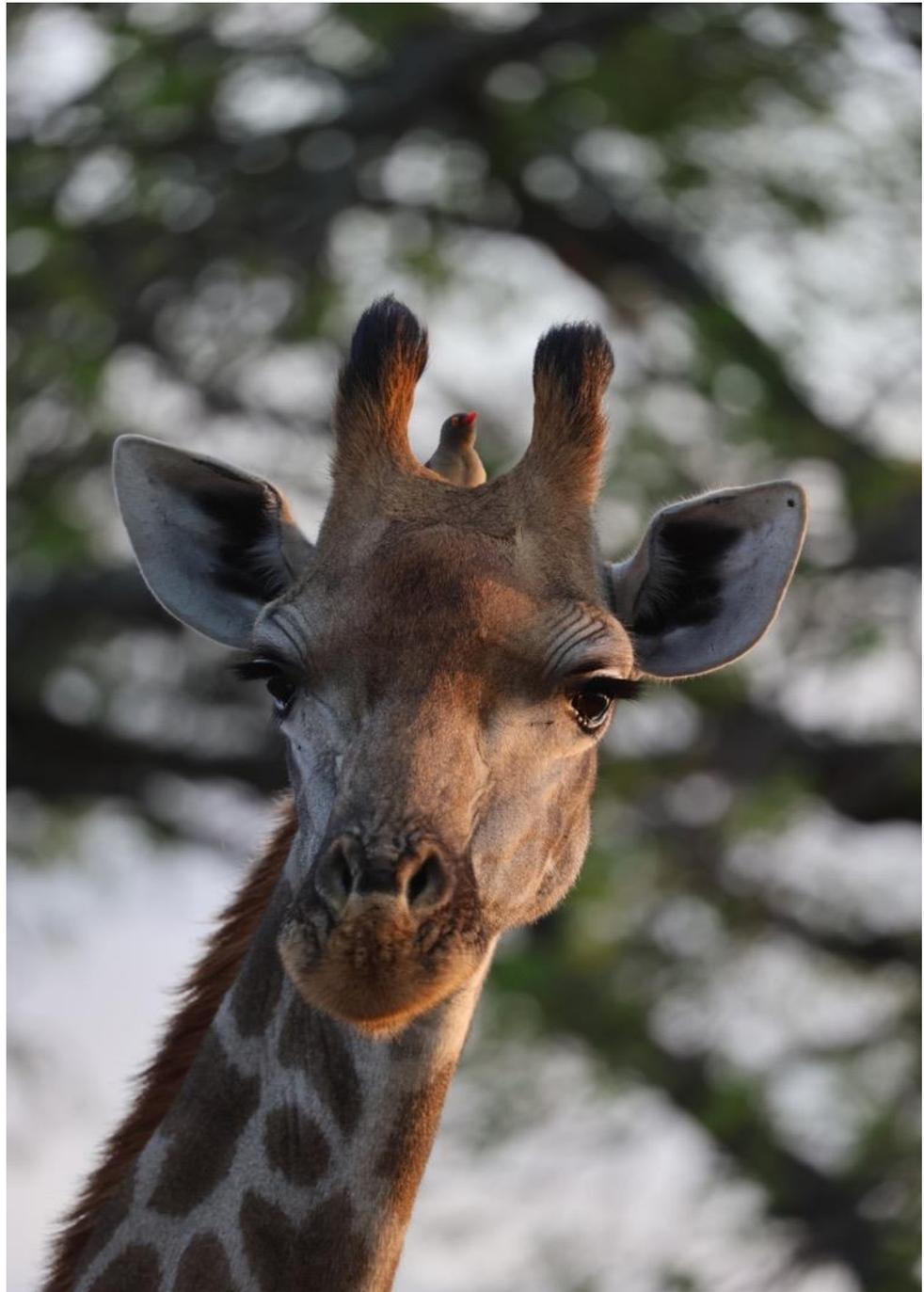


As we move into our summer months, trees are growing new leaves, and all browsers are enjoying rich, nutritious food. We have our “tree trimmers,” which we call kudu. Because of their size, kudu browse higher than black rhinos but lower than giraffes.

Then we have the “ladder,” the one that works right at the very top of the tallest trees — the giraffe. With its long neck, the giraffe can browse at heights of up to five meters, which is more than three times my height. Its favourite food is the leaves of thorny umbrella trees. Using its long, leathery tongue — which can reach about 60 cm (that’s two school rulers) — it strips the leaves off the branches with ease.

We also have the “cleaner-upper and tree-knocker-downer” — the elephant. The elephant uses its trunk to browse at all heights, from trees to grass, wrapping it around whatever juicy morsel it wants to eat. These gigantic mammals often push over trees while feeding, which provides food for other browsers that wouldn’t normally be able to reach the highest leaves. In doing so, they also open up areas where new grass can grow for grazers.

All these animals play an important role in maintaining a healthy environment.



October Gallery

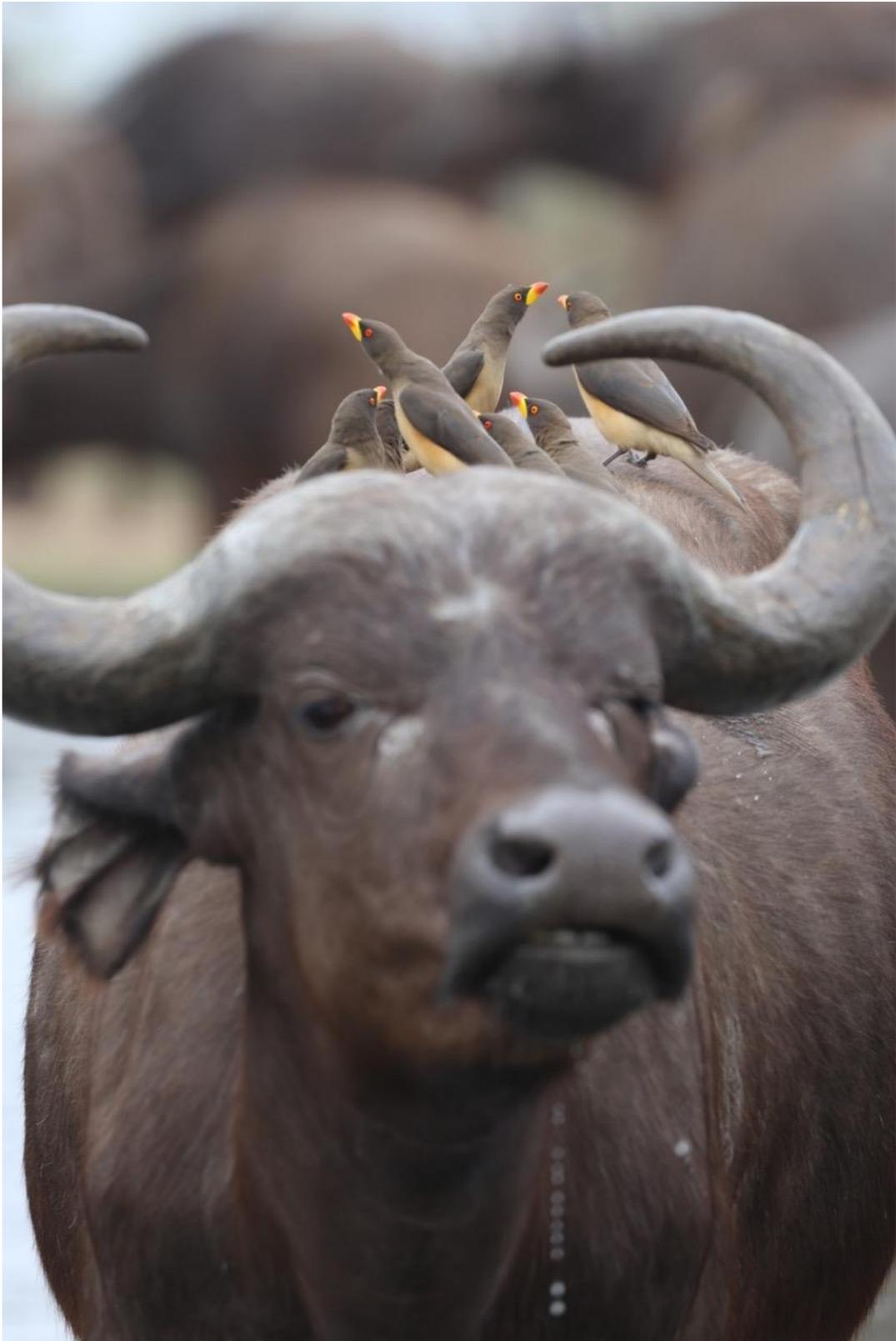


The Rivala female leopard rests in an ebony tree after a big meal. Image by Matt Durell
Members of the Mhangeni Pride set their eyes on a potential meal. Image by Matt Durell





Nkuwa's young male cub keeping up with mom. Image by Matt Durell



Yellow-billed oxpeckers adorn a buffalo. Image by Matt Durell



The male cheetah scales a fallen marula tree for a better vantage. Image by Matt Durell