

Singita

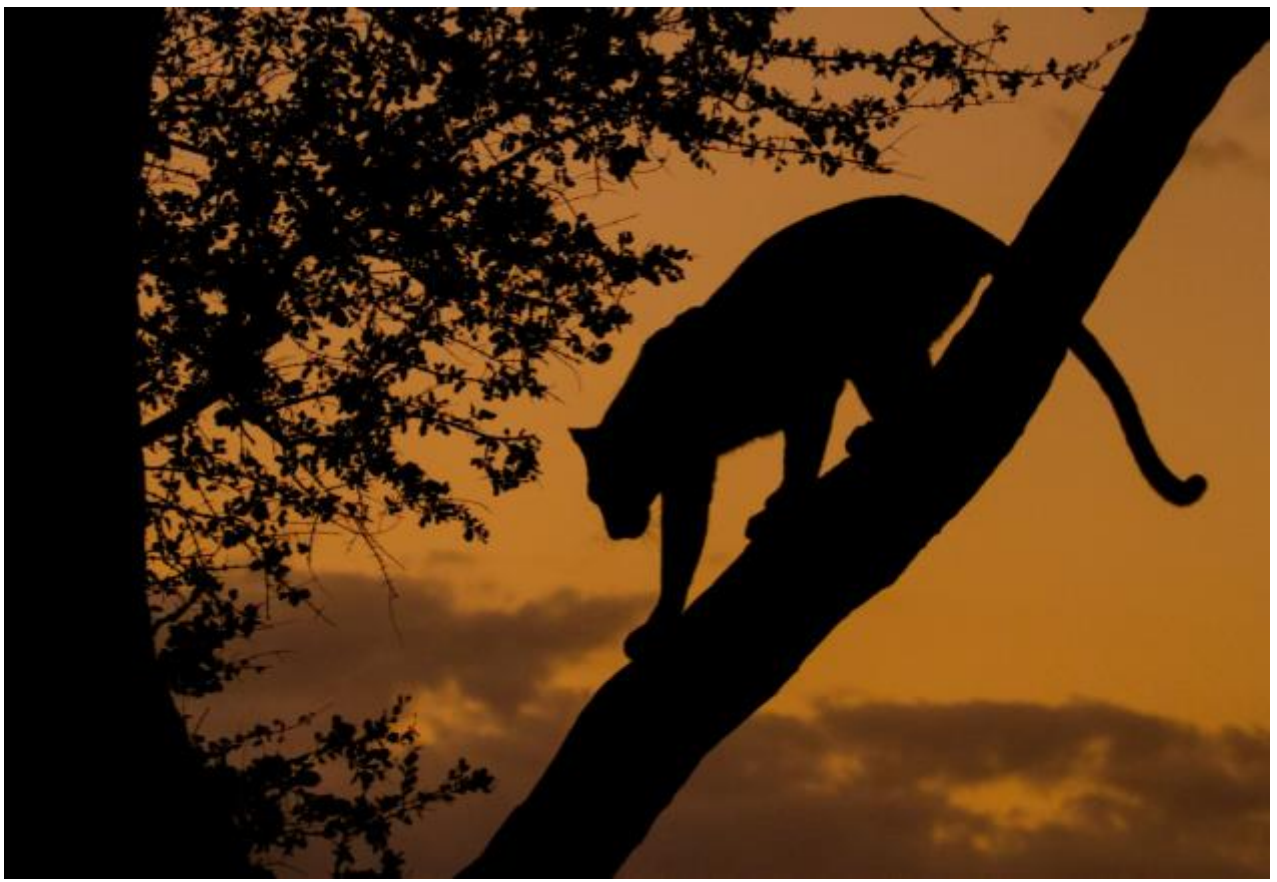


Photo by Barry Peiser

WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA For the month of July, Two Thousand and Sixteen

Temperature

Average minimum: 12°C (53.6°F)
Average maximum: 25°C (77°F)
Minimum recorded: 10°C (50°F)
Maximum recorded: 33°C (91.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 3 mm
For the year to date: 112.5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06h28
Sunset: 17h28

The days are starting to get longer again as we wave goodbye to the middle of winter. We have had some glorious days, and a few cold mornings, but in general it has been warmer than was expected. Many of the trees in the hills still have bright yellow leaves and they are quite scenic at the moment. At the beginning of the month the candelabra trees were in flower and were attracting numerous butterflies. The aloes in camp and on the rocky cliffs were also in flower attracting many birds, especially the metallic-coloured sunbirds. It is still very dry although one night, towards the end of the month, we did have a light shower of rain, which left a few puddles in the hills. There is very little grass about and the grass that is in the basalt areas is dry and yellow and holds very little nutritional value. It is going to be a difficult winter for the animals until the rains arrive, probably only in November. Although the water in the river is receding there are still pools in a few places and these are attracting a fair amount of animals, including predators, and we have had some great sightings and seen some amazing animal interactions.



Photo by Brian Rode

Our wildlife review for the month is as follows:

Buffalos:



Photo by Brian Rode

All of the buffalo sightings were either of lone bulls or small bachelor herds. They are spending most of the time in the hills and valleys, coming to the river to drink and then returning to the stony ridges.

Leopards:



Photo by Brian Rode

We have seen the Ndlovu Male a few times this month. On the 3rd of July we found the Euphorbia Female on Ndlovu Road up on the Ryolite ridge. She had caught an impala and was busy feeding on it. The next morning when we arrived there we found the Ndlovu Male approaching the area. As he came closer to the carcass the Euphorbia Female ran away and climbed up a large dead tree. This gave the guests a great opportunity to get some good photos of her. On the 16th Solomon found her in the Nyokeng valley feeding on a kudu. They watched her as she dragged the young antelope up the rocky cliffs until they lost sight of her.

One afternoon Jani found the Tingala Female feeding on an impala in the hilly area on the way to the poort. The next morning when we went to the area we could not find her or the impala carcass and by looking at the tracks we were able to deduce that hyenas had managed to find the carcass lying on the ground and had chased the leopard away and stolen the meat.

The Xinkelengane female was also seen a few times this month. She seems to be moving around in the area between Gudzani Dam and the Central Depression. On the afternoon of the 10th one of our trackers, named Sunday, managed to follow her tracks and found her with an impala kill stashed high up in a large leadwood tree. She was there for the next two days feeding on the carcass and we had great views of her. On the night of the 13th Brian was driving near Gudzani Dam and came across her as she was walking west into the Knobthorn grasslands. She was busy marking her territory and was spraying urine on every large tree that she came across.

The N'wanetsi Male was seen right at the beginning of the month near to the concrete causeway that crosses the N'wanetsi River to the east of Camp. He was very relaxed with the vehicle, but was obviously hungry and was looking for prey. He headed into some thick vegetation near the spring and we left him to find himself some lunch.

Cheetahs:

We have only had four sightings of cheetah during July. On the morning of the 9th Mark located a male cheetah on the S41 quite close to camp. We responded to the sighting and found the cheetah walking parallel to the road in a southerly direction. The morning light was awesome and we watched him until he disappeared from view. On the 27th we found a female cheetah and her three sub adult cubs walking through the knobthorn savannah. We were unable to follow them as it had rained the night before and the basalt soil gets very muddy when wet. Fortunately we anticipated where they were heading and so we drove to the next road where we spotted them again. They walked right up to us and we had brilliant views of them. The female seemed to be walking very purposefully, while the youngsters followed on behind, chasing each other around and climbing up some fallen trees. In the afternoon we went back to the area and found them in an open sandy area. They were resting and the mom was looking for potential prey. There was a herd of impala just out of sight from them and we were hoping that one of them would stray out into the open area so that we could see the female running at full sprint. Unfortunately (or fortunately for the impala) they remained under cover and as the sun started setting we decided to leave them and go and have our sundowners. On the 30th the guides found them again on the H6 public road, while travelling to the lodge on the bus. JP returned to the area as soon as his guests were ready for drive and found them to the south of the road. He watched them until they disappeared from view.



Photo by Brian Rode

Elephants:

We see elephants on most drives. The afternoons and late mornings are often productive for elephant viewing as the large pachyderms come down to the last remaining pools in the N'wanetsi River to drink. On the afternoon of the 11th the guides found a herd of over fifty individual elephants that had come down to Xinkwenyana Crossing. It was a great sight. On the 15th a herd of over thirty elephants were seen coming down to Dumbana Pools. During most outings we see lone bulls or small bachelor herds.



Photo by Brian Rode

Lions:

There were at least 99 recorded sightings of lions this last month. Wow! That equates to an average of three sightings of lions per day. Amazing!

The three members of the Xhirombe Pride have been seen a few times in July. They have been walking and hunting in the hilly area between the poort and camp. They also like to frequent the fence line, where they have taught themselves how to utilise the border-line between South Africa and Mozambique. There are animals both sides of the fence and the area opposite our concession in Mozambique is also completely wild. The adult lioness and her two offspring, now sub-adults (1 male and 1 female) have learned to chase

animals towards the fence in order to catch them. They are quite successful using this strategy. On the 15th of July we watched the three of them hunting waterbuck along the fence south of Nyokeng Valley and on the 26th they were seen feeding on a kudu in the hills south of the poort (a beautiful gorge cutting through the Lebombo hills, where the N'wanetsi River flows runs into Mozambique. There are stunning cliffs and rocky hills covered in candelabra trees and Lebombo ironwoods.).

The Shish Pride (both the larger and the smaller portions) is in a state of turbulence. The young sub-adult males are of the age where the adult males in the area do not want them around. The sub-adults are basically running away from any adult male that they come across. If they get caught the chances are that the adult lion will kill them. The larger portion of the Shish Pride has been seen on quite a few occasions in the area along the N'wanetsi River between camp and Dumbana Pools. The size of the pride has varied between 9 and 14 individuals. The white lion is still with this pride and is growing up quickly. On the 14th of July it was quite a misty morning and as the sun was rising behind the Lebombo cliffs we found the lions had just caught a waterbuck just on the eastern bank of the N'wanetsi River. They were growling and arguing over the meat and it had attracted the attention of a hyena that was looking at the feasting lions. He was wondering if it was at all possible to get some scraps when a male lion appeared out of the misty bush and saw him standing there. The male lion quickly charged towards the hyena. Chaos ensued as all the sub-adult lions feeding on the waterbuck realised that a male lion had appeared. They immediately took flight, away from where the adult male was chasing the hyena. The three females were the only ones now at the carcass and the adult male (possibly one of the Southern Males) returned from the unsuccessful hyena hunt. He ran towards the carcass and the three females defended their carcass, spitting, snarling and clawing at the male. He backed down, but then saw some of the sub-adult males running away towards the north and started giving chase. He did not catch up to them though and the pride re-joined again later.

The larger portion of the Shish Pride have been seen feeding on quite a few hippo carcasses this month. Due to the lack of water and grass in the area the hippos are in very poor condition. Quite a few have die d and the lions have had a hippo feast. On the 19th we had an incredible sighting of the Shish Pride feeding on a hippo at Dumbana Pools. Brian explains what he saw there later in the report (see "Other Interesting Sightings"). They were seen feeding on another hippo carcass near Croc View, just north of camp, on the 21st and 22nd. They gorged themselves! On the 30th they found another carcass just near the windmill at Sonop waterhole, near the H6 public road, and once again fed upon it until their bellies were round like beach balls. The smaller portion of the Shish Pride were seen a few times between the Xinkwenyana and Dave's Crossings. Their numbers have varied between 8 and 11 members. We have heard from park tourists that they have been seen moving in the area of the S100 public road, to the west of Gudzani Dam.



Photo by Brian Rode

The three females and seven cubs of the Mountain Pride are doing well and are healthy. We have seen them regularly this last month. They are often in the company of one of the adult Shish Male lions. He is the grumpy male that often growls at the cars and has in the past charged the vehicles. He has injured his right back leg and is limping at present. The Mountain Pride tend to utilise the area in the central-northern parts of the concession. We saw them on at least two occasions this month feeding on zebras.

The three other males have only been seen a few times in July. We understand that they have been seen a few times by the public tourists on the S100.

Spotted hyenas:



Photo by Brian Rode

We have had some great viewing at the Nyokeng Hyena Den this month. The five cubs are of the age where they are changing from their black coats to their spotted patterns. A visit to the den has definitely been one of the guests' highlights. The youngsters are quite curious and are starting to investigate the vehicles. It is great watching them as they surround the car, smelling it and testing to see if it is edible or not.

The H6 den has also been quite active this last month, particularly after dark. This clan of hyenas is using a series of rainwater culverts under the paved road as den-sites. They are also quite habituated to vehicles and often walk right up to the cars to check them out.

One morning we were following the tracks of some wild dogs in the far north of the concession when we found four of the Cassia Clan members feeding on the carcass of an impala that they had recently stolen from the canids. There were also seven black-backed jackals in the vicinity, picking up scraps from the periphery of the kill site.



There is only one species of crocodile in Southern Africa, the Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*). Individuals can weigh up to 1000 kg, can reach a length of nearly 6 m (although most tend to be less than 3 m long) and can live to be over 100 years old. They have five toes on the front feet, four toes on the back feet, which are partially webbed. The Nile crocodile has a long snout with teeth that are exposed even when the mouth is closed (unlike those of an alligator). The snout of an alligator tends to be shorter and rounder than that of a crocodile. The eyes, ears and nostrils lie high on the head so that they can keep them above the surface of the water while the rest of the body is under the surface. This allows them to remain fairly hidden and they can thus approach prey easier or hide from enemies.

Nile Crocodiles tend to be an olive colour when adult, but juveniles are more brightly coloured with more contrasting colouration.

When a crocodile catches prey, like catfish, it has to open its mouth underwater. When this happens it has valves in the nostrils, which close to stop water from entering. It also has a gular flap at the back of its mouth, which closes and stops water from entering the lungs. This means that a crocodile cannot swallow its prey underwater and has to come to the surface to swallow.



Nictitating membranes protect the crocodile's eyes while underwater and the ear slits close when going below the water surface. It is estimated that a large crocodile can remain under the water for up to 2

hours, if it remains inactive. Crocodiles show many adaptations which enable them to remain underwater for long periods. They have a unique circulatory system that allows for greater control of blood flow, as opposed to other reptiles. The heart can also be slowed down during dives, and in the process oxygenated blood is directed only to the most important organs such as the heart and brain.

It is believed that when crocodiles are lying in the sun with their mouths wide open they are regulating their body temperature by using the moist surface inside their mouths in the manner of a radiator (thereby losing heat). They may also use the mouth to absorb heat from the sun in cooler weather.

Crocodile teeth are designed for gripping rather than chewing and if prey is too large to be swallowed, they will tear off smaller chunks by rolling in the water. As they cannot chew their prey they need to swallow chunks whole. They do this by throwing the food up into the air and catching it in their mouths.

A crocodile's diet changes with age. Hatchlings prey mainly on insects, frogs and snails. When they get over a metre long, they feed mainly on fish, especially catfish. Crocodiles over 3 m eat anything that they can overpower, including fish, terrapins, birds, snakes, other crocodiles and even larger mammals. They take live prey as well as carrion.

Crocodiles become sexually mature at 12 to 15 years old (about 2 to 3 metres long).



Males may fight to establish dominance. Mating usually happens in late winter (July and August). Females will usually use sandy banks as nest sites. These sites need to lie above the flood levels and the females will often make use of the same sites for many successive seasons. They usually lay their eggs in early summer (October and November). The gravid female will dig a hole, often in the late afternoon or at night, with her back feet, and lay between 16 to 80 hard-shelled eggs. She will defend the nest site against predators like water monitors, mongooses and other crocodiles. The female does not feed during this period but will drink. She will also chase the male away from the nest site. After 73 - 95 days the baby crocodiles hatch. The sex of the hatchlings is dependent on the temperature of incubation in the nest (females develop at temperatures between 26 and 30 degrees C and males at between 31 to 34 degrees). The hatchlings make a "cheeping" sound just before and during the time that they are hatching, and the female then opens the

nest and carries all the hatchlings to the water in her mouth, where they are released. They remain close to the area, and together, for about 6 weeks before dispersing. They are preyed on by numerous different creatures including monitor lizards, eagles, herons, marabou storks, ground hornbills, mongooses, otters and baboons. On average only one crocodile out of a nest of 50 survives to adulthood. As juveniles are more vulnerable to predation than adults they tend to favour more heavily vegetated backwaters, particularly where the larger crocodiles do not usually venture.

In southern Africa Nile crocodiles are largely restricted to game reserves and large wild areas. It is estimated that there are fewer than 12 000 individual crocodiles remaining in the wild. The Nile crocodile is listed in Appendix II of CITES, and thus trade is regulated through a government permit system. Crocodiles are, however, not considered by the IUCN to be “threatened”.

Nile crocodiles can be extremely dangerous to humans. They are one of the very few animals that consider humans to be prey. Many people are killed each year by crocodiles (possibly more people are possibly killed by crocodiles than even by hippos or any other large animal). People most at risk are those people who live near rivers, lakes and dams (particularly those who depend on the water for drinking, recreation, fishing etc.). Those people who come down to the water’s edge at a regular time each day are even more at risk, as crocodiles often patiently watch what is happening and soon establish whether there are routines.

Other interesting sightings:



Photo by Brian Rode

One morning we were out on drive when we heard that the other guides had found two sub-adult male lions feeding on a hippo in the water at Dumbana Pools. When we arrived there we saw the two male lions struggling to remove the carcass from the water, but they were unsuccessful. They then went and lay on the rocks nearby wishing that the hippo would just get up and walk towards them and then collapse right into their mouths. I did not return to the pool at Dumbana that afternoon or the next morning, but had heard that the two sub-adult male lions had remained near the carcass and had only left the area late in the morning, following after the rest of the pride.

I was waiting for this opportunity as I thought that once the lions had left the carcass the crocodiles would take over and feast on the rotten meat. I thought that this would be quite interesting to see and so I went there in the afternoon and as I drove between the rocks I could hear the growling of numerous lions. The rest of the pride had returned and were again arguing over the meat. We could see that they had not consumed very much since the last time we were here. The hippo was, however, smelling quite putrid by now. Fortunately the breeze was not blowing towards us and we only got occasional whiffs of the horrible stench of decay. The lions were obviously not affected by the smell and they were growling at each other and trying to get a position where they could get a mouthful of meat. One of the sub-adult males was right at the edge of the rock with his back foot almost in the water and the scrumming was pushing him closer towards the pool. There were lots of crocodiles around now and we could see their golden eyes poking out of the water only metres from the carcass. The next thing the rear end of the carcass that was floating in the water moved, like when one wriggles one's feet under the duvet. It sort of rippled. Then there was a wave and a short way away a long toothed snout appeared out of the surface of the muddy, murky water. The crocodile lifted its head up into the air with his jaws wide open, exposing the rows of sharp teeth and we could see, in its mouth, what appeared to be intestines or some other internal organs. He raised his head and threw the offal into his throat.



Photo by Brian Rode

The mouths of crocodiles are not designed to chew meat, but rather to rip pieces off. They also do not have lips and therefore need to lift their heads up to get the food to fall into the gullet. As the crocodile lifted its head out of the water all the lions that were busy feeding stopped what they were doing and stared at the scaly water monster that had stolen their food from right under their noses and feet. We could see many more crocodiles streaming in now from the pond behind the carcass. Two of the cold-blooded creatures took exception to one another and the larger one launched an attack at the other, gripping hold of it by the mouth and shaking it. The lions stared at the two beasts fighting until their heads disappeared under the water. The cats then resumed feeding and once again the arguing and growling started. Once again the sub-adult male was being pushed more and more towards the water. He was right at the slippery edge and the waters around the carcass were now rippling with the movement of crocodiles. My guests were trying to tell the lion to move away from the water. Move away! The skin of the hippo moved from underneath

again and another croc got hold of some of the hippo from below. He also rose his head up out of the water a few meters away and the lions all snarled at it. Other crocodiles moved towards the carcass causing small bow waves and the lions snarled at any movement. The sub-adult male was growling at the toothed submarines and even swatted at them with his paw on occasion. A crocodile surfaced its head close to the carcass and the lions, and swallowed some of the meat it had just taken from the underside of the hippo. This was a bit too much cheekiness for the lions to endure and one of the females growled and spat at it. The afternoon light was golden now and the shadows of the rocks started to cover the pond. In the middle of the pool a grey heron had caught a catfish and towards the shallows at the eastern end we could see many crocodiles, some with bits of hippo flesh in their mouths. A yellow-billed stork was stealing bits of scraps that fell out of the crocodile's mouths. It then flew across the pond and attacked the heron causing it to drop the fish, which was immediately stolen by the stork! In the yellow fever tree towering over the pond the weaver birds were returning to their nest and they chattered in the late afternoon light. A monkey climbed up into the golden-hued tree for the evening. There was a pod of hippos in the middle of the pool. It was an incredible scene! The hippos were now becoming a little bit more curious. They gave a chorus of deep laughing calls and some of them slowly started making their way towards the carcass and the lions. The crocodiles were also torpedoing in on the carcass and had to go around a large hippo that was now quite close to its dead companion that was been torn apart by the lions and crocodiles. The hippo then raised itself out of the water and put its mouth and chin on the rump of the dead comrade and stared directly at the lions that were on the other side of the carcass. Quite a few of the lions decided then that they should move away from the edge of the water and the massive beast that was challenging them. The remaining lions growled at the hippo and gave a short charge and this caused it to return to the water. As it submerged the older lioness rushed at the wave of water and slipped off the side of the carcass. Her rear end ended up in the water and we could see a grimace on her face as if she was suddenly in great pain. I thought that she might have been bitten by a croc. She managed to climb back onto the carcass and safety of the rocks and we could not see any visible injury, although it was not long before a large crocodile poked its head out of the water right nearby and we could see the red blood all around its mouth. Surely the blood could not have come from the hippo carcass? The carcass was already days old and any blood would have long ago congealed. Did the blood come from the lioness and in the low light we could just not see the injury? She seemed fine though. It was getting quite dark now, with the sun having already set, and we decided to leave the scene and head back to camp. There were still a few lions at the carcass but most had moved away from the water and onto the rocks nearby. We looked back at the scene with complete amazement at what we had witnessed here. It was an incredible afternoon!

Other interesting nocturnal creatures seen this last month includes a number of sightings of honey badgers, African civets, both large and small spotted genets, porcupines, a sighting of an African wild cat and even two serval sightings. On two occasions Cape clawless otters were seen briefly in pools in the N'wanetsi River. These are very rarely seen in the concession!

July moments in time



Photo by Barry Peiser



Photo by Barry Peiser



Photo by Margaux Le Roux



Photo by Margaux Le Roux



Photo by Margaux Le Roux



Photo by Margaux Le Roux



Photo by Brian Rode



Photo by Jani Lourens



Photo by Margaux Le Roux

Articles by Brian Rode
Photos by Brian Rode, Barry Peiser, Margaux Le Roux, Jani Lourens
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