

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of June Two Thousand and Sixteen

Temperature	Rainfall Recorded	Sunrise & Sunset
Average minimum: 12.8°C (55°F)	For the month: 1.5 mm	Sunrise 06:39
Average maximum: 24°C (75°F)	For the season to date: 397 mm	Sunset 17:15
Minimum recorded: 8°C (46°F)		
Maximum recorded: 31°C (87.8°F)		

As the Sand River trickles down to the lowest level that we've seen it in many years, large mammals are drawn to deeper water sources that are scattered throughout the reserve. Even some of the more prominent pans have dried up. The marula trees have lost their canopies and their stark finger-like branches reach into the clear winter sky. The golden light during the early morning and late afternoon continues to linger over longer periods, which is a highlight for photographers. Big game is also a highlight with many of the species being driven to food or water sources, thus creating interactions that are spellbinding at times.

Here's a highlights package of the month's sightings:

Leopards:

Singita Boulders Lodge has had a frequent visitor this month. A successful kill nearby, by the Hlaba'Nkunzi female and son, of a bushbuck had them stay quite close to their kill for a few days. The inquisitive nature

of the young son had him explore the main area of Singita Boulders Lodge in the evening and he seemed to have enjoyed the fire pit, as he was found enjoying the warmth of it quite a few times!

Wild dogs:

The last month has seen the pack move to the south and then back again to the north with their young pups. The den-site has been moved again and we have found tracks coming south from their initial den-site so we are aware that they are in the area, however, we are currently tracking to pinpoint it. Pack members have been viewed hunting in the area north of the river and we are certain that the pack has not gone much further from the last den-site.

Lions:

There has been a great movement among the lions during the past few weeks. In particular the eight lions from what are now referred to as the 'Mhangeni breakaway pride'. They have been spending most of their time within the vicinity of Singita Castleton. Large herds of buffalo continue to congregate around the large water source of the dam in view of the lodge, and this water hole has been an attraction for many other species as well. Currently the two Mhangeni lionesses with the cubs have been viewed together with the cubs; however no adult males have been present during these interactions. The lioness with the four young cubs has been viewed in the north east of Singita, on Marthly.



Buffaloes:

Large herds continue to move within the Sabi Sand reserve and it is evident that more buffalo continue to move into the Sabi Sand from Kruger National Park as water sources and grazing material are depleted in some areas.

Elephants:

The elephant herds have been sporadic in their movements. Some days there have been 'waves' of several elephants, and the very next day only a few sightings of single bulls.

Bird list:

182 species were recorded in June 2016. Specials of the month were a secretary bird, Cape vulture and osprey.

What's in a name?

Article by Ross Couper

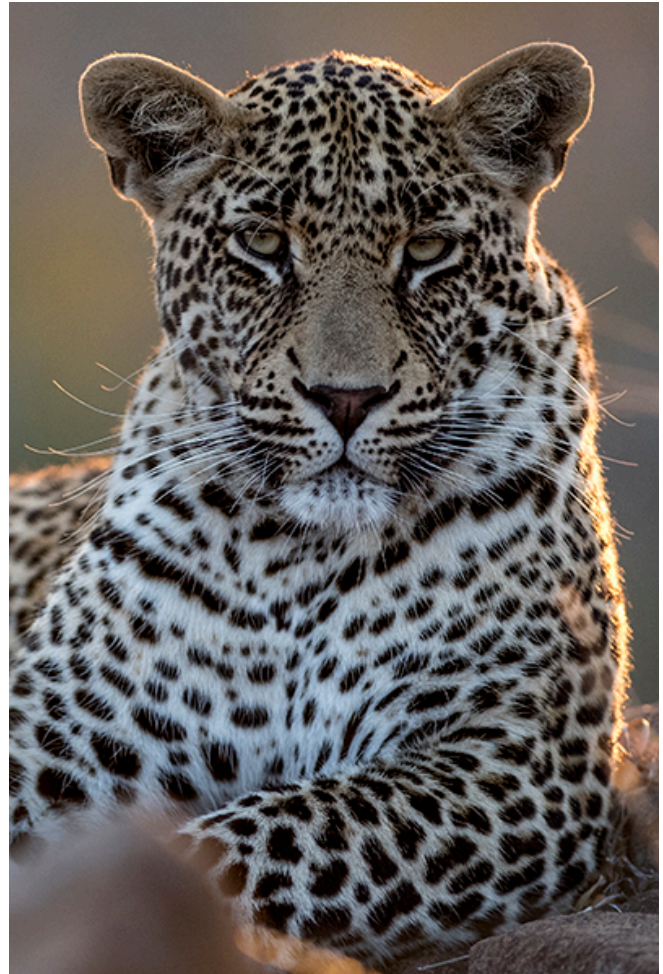
We have a name! Last month we were deliberating on a fitting name for the Hlaba’Nkunzi female’s young son.

Some rangers and trackers wanted to keep the tradition of a Shangaan name that most of our leopards have been given, while the staff who have seen him in the lodge areas on a frequent basis wanted his name to be of a more familiar term as he is so frequently seen at both the lodge and staff village. Tradition is tradition and through weeks of discussion, we are proud to announce his new name:

The N’weti male

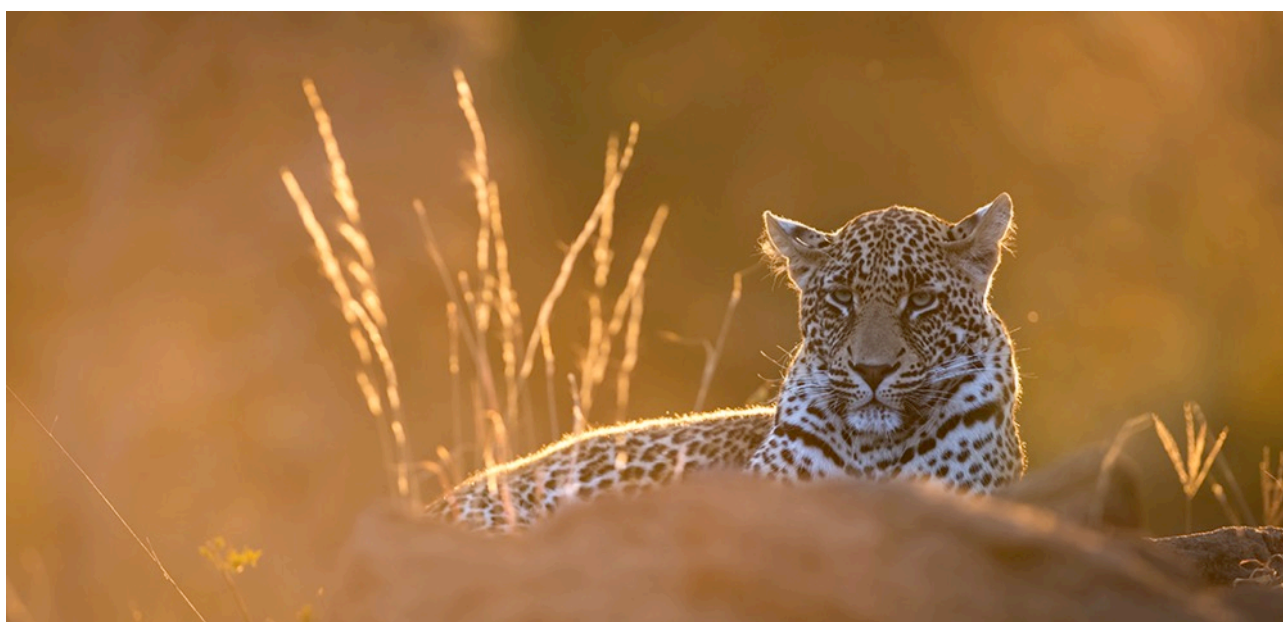
'N’weti' in Shangaan is the name for 'moon'. We thought this would be a fitting name, considering his father is the Nyelethi male leopard and this name translated would be 'stars'.

The N’weti male is a gem of a leopard and we all have a few stories about him that bring fond memories. Currently, as this story is being written, a radio report has just come in that this male leopard is feeding on a bushbuck carcass under the deck of one of the rooms once again. Once he does move off and explore, he is going to be missed by all of the staff. The story that follows is a classic example of his behaviour.



There are certain aspects working out here in the wilderness that make our jobs unforgettable. No matter if you speak to someone working in the kitchen, maintenance, housekeeping, night porter, front of house or guiding department: all of us have a number of stories available about close animal encounters. Of course these tales are often captivatingly told to guests that regularly question us about our lives in the African bush – perhaps some so wild that the tale teller's integrity is doubted at times!

Only recently, however, there has been a recurring visitor to Boulders Lodge that our guests were also able to become privy to. One evening I returned from an afternoon game drive and my guests decided to go back to their rooms to freshen up before we would all join each other for dinner. The lodge team had a special outdoors evening setup arranged, which meant that most of the staff was spread in between there and the kitchen to prepare for the dinner service; for once the lounge and bar were deserted. I was standing on the deck in front of our inside dining room and stared into the darkness of the night waiting for my guests to return from their rooms. There was no moonlight and it was almost silent out in the bush.



Out of nowhere a strange smell caught my attention that I knew too well when being out in the bush. I looked around me, first to my left where the pool deck was, but there was nothing. Then, quickly turning my head to the right towards the lounge, I instantly caught a pair of eyes staring at me across the length of the bar. A large young male leopard, one of the newest additions to our leopard population at Singita, had sneaked into the main lodge area. As soon as he realised that his presence was revealed, he took a long leap onto our sofas and in a second bound onto one of our armchairs of the lounge, where he remained seated, facing me guiltily. I promptly called some of the staff nearby that soon witnessed the scenario too. The leopard, now having a small audience, started collecting large cushions that were spread around the lounge area. While we still couldn't believe our eyes, one of the night porters started telling me that a few cushions had been going missing over the last few days. Evidently we had found the perpetrator.

After a few minutes of us observing the leopard collecting cushions with his mouth and dropping them he eventually jumped off the decking into the riverbed into the darkness of the night – together with an enormous cushion trapped between his teeth. When I returned to Boulders the next morning to greet my guests for the next game drive the night porters let me know the young leopard had come back a few times throughout the night and stolen more of the interior décor. As the sun was rising over the Sand River, one of our brave staff members volunteered to march down the riverbed in order to collect various items that had been carefully selected by the feline thief.

As the next days and nights went by, the Singita Boulders team and our guests observed him coming back again and again; by day often just to take a snooze somewhere in a tree or on the pathways around Boulders, or by night returning to his crooked and playful behaviour.



Feast or famine

Article by Iska Meyer-Wendecker

There are always feasts or famine, highs or lows on the balance scale of the bush - and ultimately it all evens out. There is a shortage of water at the moment. Herbivores have no option but to come to established permanent water points to drink. The predators pick off the weak and malnourished - and it's a time of 'easy pickings' for them. While they are experiencing this 'high' lets take a closer look at some of them:

The Mhangeni breakaway pride, which consists of 8 or 9 sub-adult males and females, has been seen throughout the area of Singita and has proven to be the successors of their mothers as they continue to thrive in the drier conditions and hunt buffalo. The lioness below was photographed just south of the lodges, following a small group of buffalo towards the airstrip that finally resulted in a sighting of the group of lions feeding on a buffalo later in the afternoon.



Below is a photograph of the rarely viewed Mawelawela male leopard, son of the Mobeni female. It has been noted that he has become more habituated to the movement of vehicles, particularly when he has a carcass in the area. Sightings of the young male have been limited to one vehicle at a time to avoid interfering with the natural movements of the young male.



The wild dog pack that was found north of the Sand River produced a litter of seven puppies, and the eight adults have been actively hunting in the surrounding areas, leading to some incredible sightings of these endangered species.



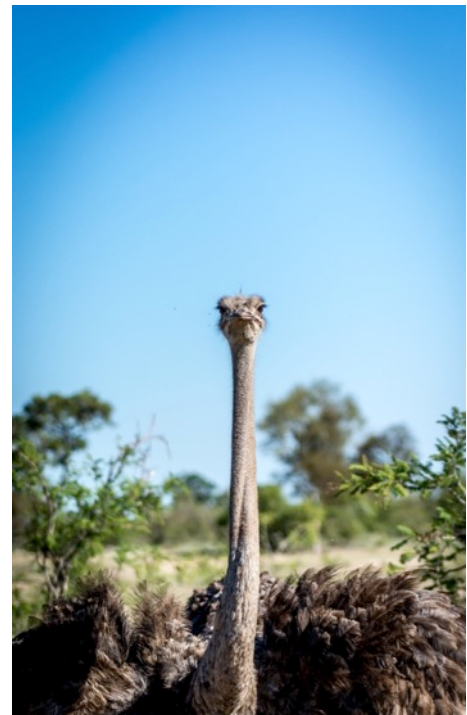
An unlikely friendship

Article by Renain Venter

For a few years a female ostrich has been spotted in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, but unfortunately she is alone. Historically they occurred in the area but due to the high numbers of predators such as lions and leopards, life hasn't been too generous towards this gigantic flightless bird. With no possible mating partners or the simple company of another ostrich, this bird has found comfort in the vehicles and the humans that occupy them. As a result it happens quite often that you stop for a sun-downer and soon this prehistoric looking bird joins you. She means no harm and often displays as if the vehicle was a potential mate, lying down in front of the vehicle facing away while preening her feathers in the hope of being attractive enough that the vehicle might become interested! As we all know, vehicles don't really find birds of this kind attractive. So with the beautiful show of feathers and a really close encounter for good photographic opportunities, we would move on after a while, but often with an ostrich in tow.

I feel terrible about driving away from her without giving any sort of acknowledgement that she is beautiful, but unfortunately I cannot help her - a sad moment indeed. Sometimes she tends to follow the vehicles in the hope that they would stop in acknowledgement of her efforts. Guides have driven off and unknowingly led her into lion sightings, but she is a wise old bird and makes a quick escape, realising life over love.

We are privileged to be able to get to know some of the resident animals around us but it is not every day that you get to know a wild ostrich.



A little bit cuckoo

Article by Joshua Bell

Before coming on safari for the first time, it is probably fair to assume that a guest might primarily assume that the role of the guide is to keep them safe whilst out in the bush and to find and interpret the behaviour of members of the 'Big Five'. Whilst both these elements are certainly part of the job, our training and experience in the field allows us to comment on many subjects and behaviours beyond the usual scope of the higher profile animals. Sometimes these experiences become the highlight of a guest's stay!

Whilst conducting a game drive a few weeks ago, I caught the black and white flash of a Levillant's cuckoo (*Clamator levillantii*) fly just a few feet in front of my face and come to rest on a tree next to my guests and me. The keener birders amongst those of you reading this might think that this is nothing out of the ordinary, but I will add that this sighting was mid-winter, when the migrant bird should ordinarily be in the slightly warmer climes of Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya! This fact, combined with the company this bird was keeping (flying closely with and imitating the behaviour of a small flock of arrow-marked babblers

(*Turdoides jardineii*), led to my realization that we were witnessing an incredible behavioural event that I had read about but never witnessed - brood parasitism!



Brood parasites are organisms that rely on others to raise their young. The strategy appears among birds, insects and some fish. The brood parasite manipulates a host, either of the same or of another species, to raise its young as if it were its own. Brood parasitism amongst birds relieves the parasitic parents from the investment of rearing young or building nests for the young, enabling them to spend more time on other activities such as foraging and producing further offspring.

About 56 species of cuckoo across the world are brood parasites, laying their eggs in the nests of other birds. These species are obligate brood parasites, meaning that they only reproduce in this fashion and do not make their own nests. The shells of the eggs of brood-parasites are usually thick. They have two distinct layers with an outer chalky layer that is believed to provide resistance to cracking when the eggs are dropped in the host nest. The cuckoo egg hatches earlier than the host's, and the cuckoo chick grows faster; in most cases the chick evicts the eggs or young of the host species. The chick has no time to learn this behaviour, so it must be an instinct passed on genetically- this is called innate behaviour.

In the case of the Levaillant's cuckoo, both the male and female cuckoos fly around the host-nest acrobatically to distract the arrow-marked babblers. The male continues the distraction while the female lays the egg. The chick leaves the nest after about ten days post hatching and becomes independent in four to six weeks (during which time it is fed by the babblers).

Just by chance the cuckoo that we saw must still have been dependent on its hosts for food, and at that early stage probably had no idea that it was a cuckoo! Seeing it behave just like the babblers it was surrounded with was very entertaining and my guests thoroughly enjoyed it too, once they understood the relevance of the situation. It just goes to show that an enjoyable sighting doesn't always have to include one of the Big 5 and that the bush still throws many surprises our way, even though we are out here every day!

The guide / tracker partnership

Article by Leon van Wyk

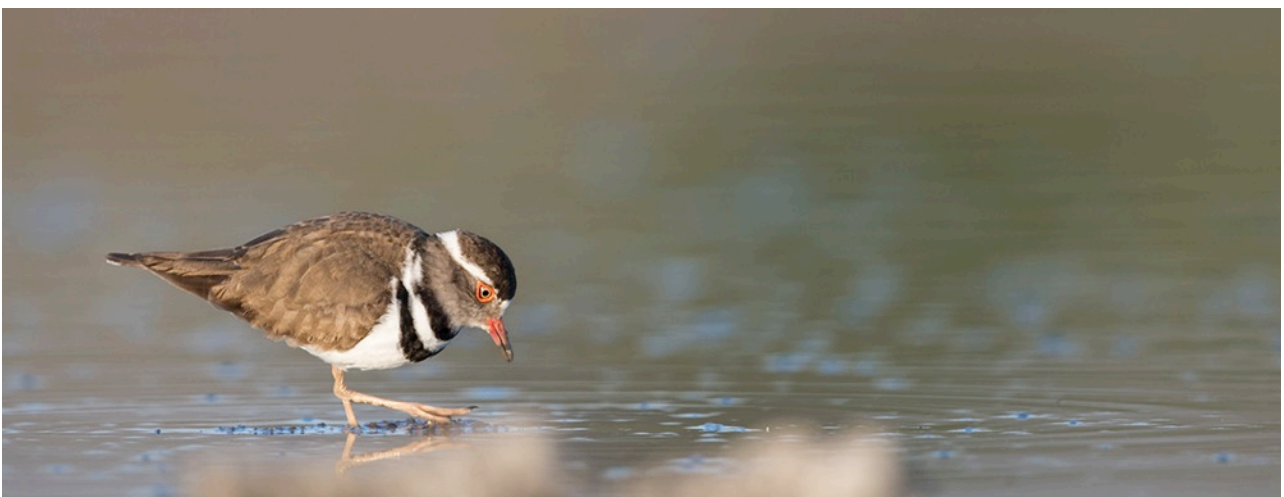
At Singita, we love to give all of our guests the best possible experience, whether it be in their suites, at one of our dining venues, in the wine cellar, out on safari or while participating in one of the various outdoor activities or community visits.

Of all the staff members who contribute towards making a guest experience a memorable and enjoyable one, the guide and tracker are the ones who usually spend by far the most hours in the company of the guests, and therefore they play a very big role in ensuring that their guests do indeed get to enjoy an unforgettable safari experience. As guides and trackers, we are fortunate to have at our disposal a very significant chunk of land, with a rich variety of flora and fauna, which we delight in sharing with our guests. We realise that many of our guests are only able to spend a few days exploring this beautiful wilderness, while we are blessed to have access to it for nearly three quarters of the days of every year! The partnership between guide and tracker is therefore a very key one, and it is based on a high level of communication, teamwork, mutual respect and each one understanding how the other thinks and works.

Each has his or her own set of skills, but they function best when working together in a harmonious relationship. Guests invariably comment on how well their guide and tracker work together as a team, and this can never be faked... it always needs to be genuine!



June moments







Photographs on location (unless stated) Ross Couper, Renain Venter and Joshua Bell
Singita Ebony and Boulders Lodge
Sabi Sand
South Africa
Thirtieth of June 2016