

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 22.2°C (71.9°F)
Minimum recorded: 19.0°C (66.2°F)
Average maximum: 30.3°C (86.5°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.0°C (98.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 57.3 mm
Season to date: 307.3 mm
(*Season = Oct to Sep)

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:40
Sunset: 18:35

Less rain for the month of February compared to that of January but a consistent drizzle throughout the day on a few days in February. Everything remains very lush and green. Late afternoon thunderstorms are accompanied by the most beautiful rainbows (sometimes even a double rainbow) and that late afternoon glowing light! The sun is also starting to come up later on and before we know it the sunset has crept up on us during the afternoon game drive. It certainly feels like winter is just around the corner. The river has come up on several occasions and we can observe some of the islands in the river disappearing, over breakfast at the lodge! New lion and leopard cubs have been found on the reserve north of the river so it is exciting times!

A snapshot of the sightings for February follows:

Elephants

- Large breeding herds of 60 or 70 elephants have been observed in the grasslands of the south! Almost like scenes out of the Serengeti for us here in the Sabi Sands. They seemed to have turned their attention the silver cluster leaf trees, and most days there are new obstacles across the roads for us as we go out searching for animals.

Buffaloes

- The large herd seemed to have splintered off into smaller pockets of around 50 to 100 buffalo. Still frequenting the southern grasslands and as far north as our airstrip. Maybe with all the lion activity in the reserve the herds have fractured somewhat.

Lions

- The Mhangeni Pride have been trailed once again by the older Tumbela male whose condition has worsened a lot over the last while. Their movements have been erratic over the central/southern parts with the Nkuhuma and Talamati males frequenting the area.
- The Plains Camp males have been seen with the Othawa Pride and their new litter of cubs in the north, as well as the Ximungwe Pride and their new litter of cubs!
- Other lions observed over the month have been the Tsalala lioness and the Nkuhuma sub-adults who all seem to be doing really well given their tough circumstances.

Leopards

- The Thamba male has been frequenting the Sand River very close to the lodges, making the most of the thick vegetation. He has been targeting the bushbuck in the area, and providing us with some great leopard viewing. Considering he has been seen a lot further east of his usual territory we haven't seen much of the younger Ntomi male.
- The Nkuwa female also seems to elude us and then surprise us at the best of times when we need a leopard the most. There is speculation as to whether or not she is heavily pregnant at the moment.
- The Ntoma female and Xipuku males have also been seen a handful of times this month.

Cheetah

- The Makatini female has been off our radar for a while this month but was found towards the end of the month with all three of her cubs looking happy and healthy.
- The male cheetah was found in the south on an impala ram kill. Guide and guests had initially stopped to watch a rainbow and enjoy the scenery when guinea fowl alarm calls alerted them to something equally as special just around the corner.

African wild dogs

- The Othawa Pack of wild dogs have been a crowd favourite. Consistently hunting, and successfully at that, several times in a morning or afternoon session. They are still 13 members strong and we are hoping again for a strong number of puppies this year.

Unusual sightings

- An afternoon spent with the wild dogs for some of the guides out on a tracking team led them to a pangolin! Kayla writes more about it this month in her article.

Bird list

- We have added five more species to the list taking the total to 251 birds. Capped wheatear and white-backed night heron being the highlights for the month.

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the February Gallery of images.

An unexpected safari surprise: A rare pangolin sighting

Article and photos by Kayla McClelland

Even though we didn't have any guests to take out, we decided to go for a drive ourselves - partly for the love of the bush and partly in the hope of finding something special. We soon came across a pack of 12 wild dogs resting in the afternoon heat. Knowing their usual routine, we decided to sit with them and wait for the action to begin.

After about an hour, the alpha stirred. Instantly, the energy shifted - the pack snapped awake, excitement rippling through their ranks. Within moments, they took off, running down the road with us in hot pursuit. For the next three kilometres, we followed their swift, synchronized movements, knowing they were on the hunt.

Along the way, we watched some of the dogs pause to snack on millipedes scattered across the road, seemingly enjoying the crunchy treat. After the recent heavy rains, puddles had formed in low-lying areas, and the pack took quick breaks to lap up the fresh water before continuing their sprint.

Then, suddenly, they stopped. Their noses pressed to the ground, they sniffed feverishly, jumping and circling a spot next to the road. Their curiosity was undeniable, and we watched closely, wondering what had caught their attention. I initially thought it might be a tortoise, but as the dogs eventually lost interest and moved on, we approached for a closer look.

To our absolute amazement, there it was - a pangolin! One of the rarest and most elusive creatures to encounter in the wild. Seeing a pangolin is like spotting a mythical creature, especially for us guides. Though I've been fortunate enough to see a handful in my career, many guides go their whole lives without such an opportunity. Given that pangolins are the most heavily trafficked animals in the world, this sighting felt even more significant.



Without hesitation, we called it in on the radio. Word spread fast, and soon, guides from all over came rushing in, bringing their guests to share in the once-in-a-lifetime experience. What started as a casual drive turned into an unforgettable moment - one that reminded us why we do what we do. Out here in the wild, magic can happen when you least expect it.

When out on game drive you never know what is around the next corner. I have been guiding for the past 13 years and I know that every day, every drive will be different in some way, and never knowing what the next topic of conversation will be.

While out on an afternoon game drive I had guests that were very interested in the smaller creatures. I had stopped on a road to view a flap-necked chameleon crossing. Once it had crossed the road and out of harm's way, I got my guests out to have a closer look. After chatting for a few minutes about them my guests asked what predators would be interested in eating a chameleon? I answered saying birds and snakes. As I said snakes the topic began, we got back in the vehicle chatting about snakes and as we turn the corner, I notice something dark in the middle of the road right in front of us. I stopped the car and suddenly a black mamba rears itself into the air and across the road - but something was still on the road. I had a quick look with binoculars and notice it's a small scrub hare that the mamba must have killed just before we arrived.

I asked the guests to try stay quiet and I reversed my vehicle a good distance away. I said there is a great chance the black mamba will come back for its food if we stay still and quiet. We waited and observed, and before we knew it the head of the mamba came onto the road and by using its tongue to collect sent, it



managed to find the scrub hare again. The mamba started to position itself to feed. It started at the head with the hare being a lot larger than the body of the snake. Snakes have to dislocate their jaws when swallowing their prey whole. After watching more than half the hare disappear into the snake's mouth it looked as if it was getting really difficult for the snake to get it all down. The snake eventually lifted the hare into the air and with all the movement of the muscles contracting in its body it started going a lot quicker. Shortly after this we lost view of it in the grass.

My guests and I were truly amazed and shocked at what we just witnessed. Black mambas are typically very shy snakes and extremely quick when frightened or threatened. I personally have never seen a black mamba feed - usually it's a quick glimpse and they are gone. My guests had never seen a black mamba and we had the privilege of watching it for an hour doing what it needs to survive. It was very much the right time, right place, and right topic of conversation!

Image by Andrew Taylor

Those who are fortunate enough to experience a stay at Singita will often make mention of the incredible shift of sounds, smells and all-round sensory experience that one can enjoy when changing the approach from a drive to the humbling sensation that is walking or being on foot. As with most aspects of nature, there is often a caveat to every "rule" or "law" of the wild, so to speak. One "rule" in particular that comes to question is the rule of "Don't run."

Now although that is the case in most circumstances, there is an approach to work around that for those who cherish a morning fitness routine, for those that want to experience the sounds, smells and dawn chorus whilst in the safe company of their guide, with their tracker not far behind, in a game drive vehicle, constantly maintaining a vigilant eye for the incredible creatures we are privileged to walk amongst.

There is something truly magical about the early morning hours in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve. As dawn's first light breaks over the horizon, the world awakens with a symphony of sounds that transport you into the heart of Africa's wilderness. For those seeking a unique way to experience the bush, a morning run through the reserve offers a thrilling and healthy start to the day - one that is as invigorating as it is unforgettable.

The call of the wild: The moment you step onto the soft earth of the reserve, the world feels different. The air is crisp and cool, a refreshing break from the intense heat that will come later in the day. There's an electric anticipation in the air as the sound of the African bush fills your ears. The rhythmic call of birds echoes in the distance - perhaps the haunting cry of a fish eagle or the melodious trill of a red-billed hornbill. Every footfall on the earth seems to stir something deep within the soul, an ancient connection to the land that has been alive for millennia.

As you run along the trail, your senses come alive with the beauty of the sounds around you. The gentle rustle of the trees, the distant grunt of a hippo in a nearby river, and the deep, throaty calls of lions or leopards echo across the plains. These wild sounds serve as a reminder that, while you are here for the exercise, you are also a guest in a world that exists beyond human control - a world where animals rule and the rhythm of life follows the cycle of the land.

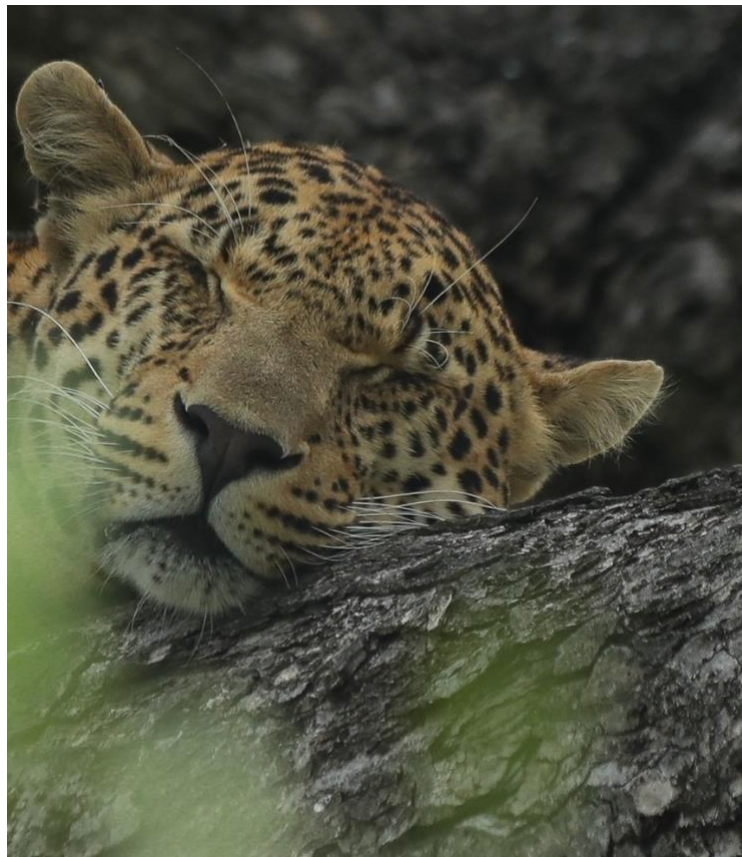
A natural alarm clock: The run through Sabi Sands feels like a natural alarm clock - a gentle but invigorating wake-up call to the start of your day. As the sun rises higher, its golden rays begin to bathe the landscape, turning the savannah into a sea of warm light. The mist that lingers in the valleys starts to lift, revealing the stunning contours of the land. You can't help but feel a sense of awe as the first rays of sunlight illuminate the tops of acacia trees, their shadows stretching across the earth like ancient sentinels.

The sense of freedom that comes from running through the reserve is exhilarating. There's something about the space - the vast, open plains and the thick, shadowy forests that feels boundless. It's just you, the path ahead, and the wild sounds of the bush, all merging into a seamless, peaceful whole. The rhythm of your breath matches the cadence of the sounds, creating a perfect harmony between body, mind, and nature.

February Gallery



A splash of colour. Southern carmine bee-eaters and a rainbow. Image by Matt Durell



A leopard catching up on some rest on a warmer summer day. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



A young male lion climbing trees in search of a free meal. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor



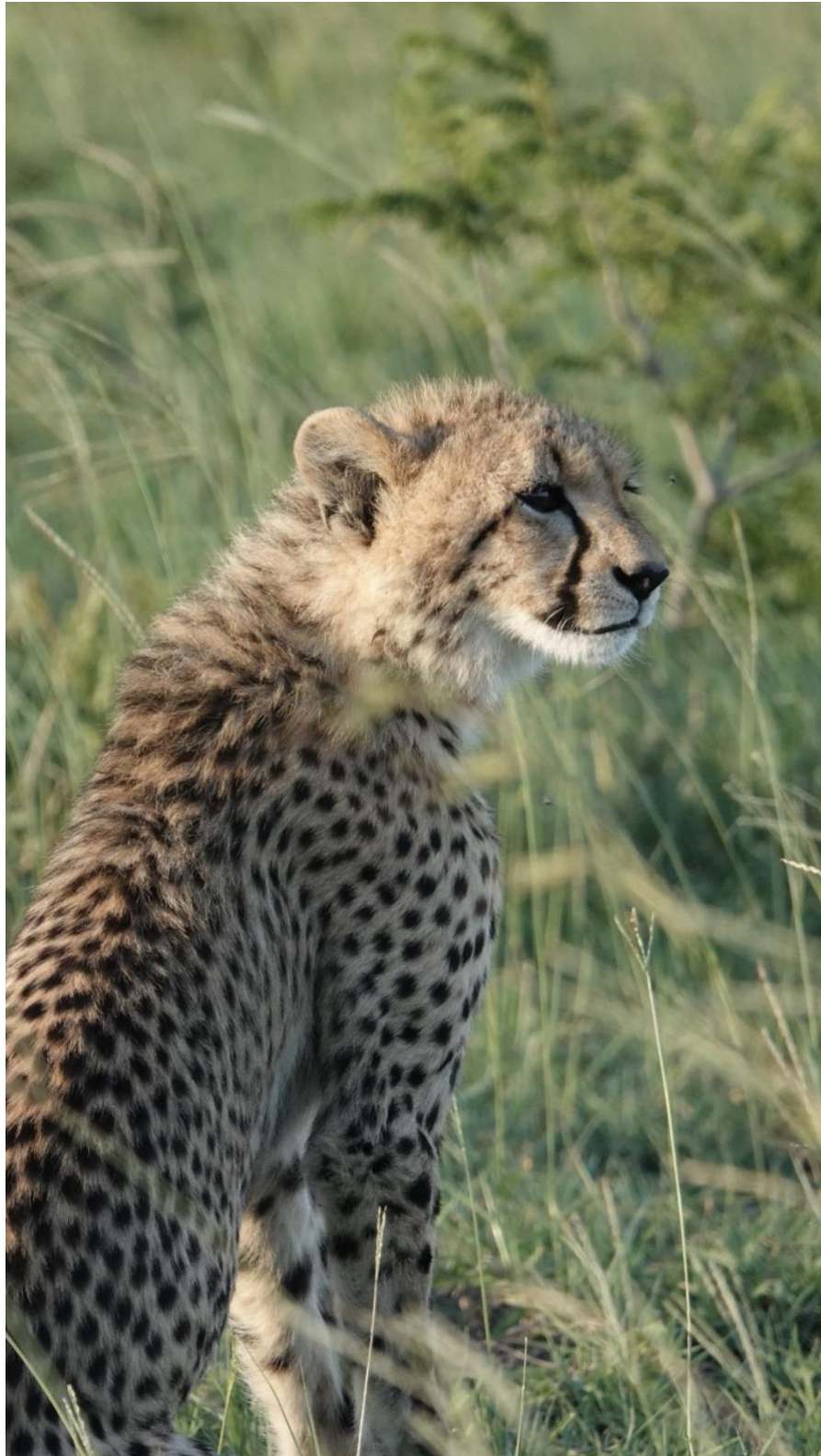
The Xinzele female leopard with her two new cubs. Image by Marc Bowes-Taylor.



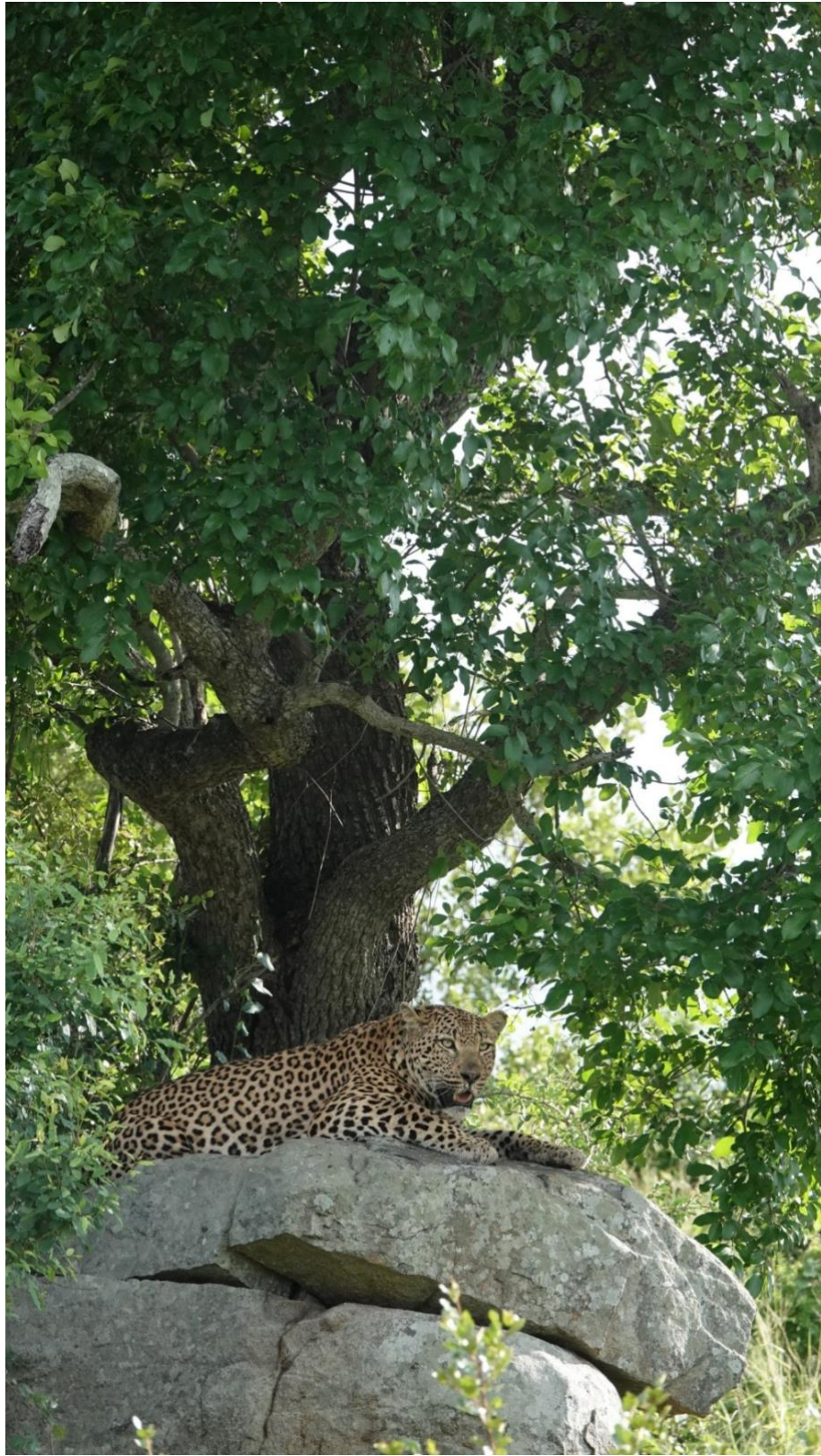
Renneck admiring the new additions to the Othawa Pride. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



The Mhangeni Pride. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



One of the young cheetah cubs. Image by Lucy Stoffberg.



The Hlambela male leopard makes a welcome return! Image by Lucy Stoffberg.