



Wildlife Journal

For the month of June, Two Thousand and Fourteen

Temperature

Average Minimum: 10.2°C (50.3°F)
Average Maximum: 27°C (80.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 5°C (41°F)
Maximum recorded: 32°C (89.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 0 mm
For the year to date: 262 mm

Cub update on the concession

Article & photos by Nick du Plessis

The wet summer months are always times associated with young animals, with major factors like food and water being plentiful then. With our current dry season it's proved quite the opposite - the permanent water sources have been a great place to find predator and prey species, and cubs in particular are being seen on most days. What has been extra special is the amount of cubs seen of so many different species. Exciting, from our point of view, is how calm the mothers have been with our presence. Without trying to push the situation and viewing as sensitively as we can, we would like to spend as much time as possible with these little cubs. It is great seeing



them and spending some quality time with playful cubs and, importantly, getting them used to our being there and building a tolerance while their calm and relaxed mothers show them we are not to be feared.

The Xhikelengane female leopard, who has successfully raised two sets of cubs in the past, has had another litter of three new fur balls! At this stage we age them at roughly four months old. Unfortunately we believe she has lost one of the cubs already, but this is not unusual for a litter of this size. The harsh reality is that this gives her a greater opportunity and a better success rate to raise the other two cubs to adulthood. She has been hiding them in the eastern half of the concession along the Ntsibitsane drainage and the N'wanetsi River. This section has countless den-sites in the Lebombo Mountain range where she can stash the little ones while hunting or performing her territorial duties. With both of these areas following drainage systems with water they

have high concentrations of game and small antelope like impala, duiker, steenbok and grysbok. With this abundance of food it is a great place to raise her latest litter.



The Mountain pride of lions is, and has been for a while, growing at a rapid rate. To date we've seen a total of fifteen cubs in the northern half of the Xhikelengane drainage, with a couple of adult females still looking very heavily pregnant - and cubs from them are imminent. The pride at this point is still fairly fragmented, which is by no means unusual, with most of the cubs still being too young to leave den-sites and follow the pride. This should all change once the cubs reach the age where they are introduced to the rest of the pride, at which point they only have a couple of months before they are weaned and the pride needs its strength in numbers. With the small pans and waterholes slowly drying up, water is becoming less readily available with the defining change of the season. With all the general game concentrating where there is still a place to drink it won't be long before all the pride members will converge at this point.

There are now also two active hyena dens that we know of. Both have been used in the past and have been providing us with great quality sightings. Hyenas are one of those interesting species when it comes to denning. They are one of only a few predatory species that bring food back to a den, this meaning less chance of the little ones being caught out in the open around other predators. Especially with the habit of scavenging, this behaviour then keeps them away from potential conflict. What it does do though is potentially bring competition to the den.

A hyena's build facilitates bringing food back to the young cubs because its shape helps it to lift up as much of the carcass as possible and stop it from dragging on the ground and leaving a scent trail behind which other predators could follow. They also use a couple of different den-sites and rotate between them to try and avoid too big a scent build-up around an active den.



A walk amongst 'fire-fossils'

Article by Chris Erasmus, with photos by Barry Peiser

No visit to Singita Kruger National Park will be complete without a view of our famous 'granophyre' rocks. These ancient monoliths provide the perfect backdrop for the ultimate bushwalk – exploring on foot together with your guide.

Home to a vast array of unique plant and animal communities, just the sheer beauty and almost 'extra-terrestrial' structure of these rocks will mesmerize and intrigue for years to come.

A typical walk along this ridge in the morning will eventually climax on a lookout over our beloved N'wanetsi River, and the gorge below, where the echoes of the local hippo pod breaks the morning silence.



A very peaceful and tranquil setting - yet it is hard to imagine that this very place once was the epicentre of some of the most violent volcanic activity the planet has seen! The name of the rock granophyre (from granite and porphyry) is an igneous or volcanic rock similar to granite in which irregular crystals of intergrown quartz and alkali feldspar are embedded in a groundmass of these minerals. This sounds like a mouthful, but means that ages ago (roughly 90-180 million years ago), massive cracks opened up in the earth's crust, resulting in immense quantities of magma being pushed up from deep below, to the surface via these cracks. It was a raging inferno - just imagine a violent sea of lava washing over the area.

The lava quickly cooled down, and formed what is today known as the Lebombo Mountains, consisting of predominantly a rock called rhyolite. These rhyolites form a cap over the crack that pushed the magma upwards, and sealed it, but the magma trapped within these cracks remained in a magmatic or molten stage, slowly



cooling down and thus becoming solid rock. This led to different minerals dissolved in this magma to accumulate in different densities within the rock. Ages later, as a result of weathering and erosion, these rocks became exposed, and the forces of Nature slowly eroded the soft parts away, and only left the very hard bits of rocks, today known as this impressive granophyre ridge that characterizes parts of our Lebombo Mountains.



A walk amongst this ridge is the most rewarding experience, Next time you are here

take the time to walk amongst these gigantic 'Fire Fossils' that are so unique to our part of the world.

Tallest of the tall

Article & photo by Enos Mngomezulu



A giraffe is the tallest mammal on earth and this iconic giant indicates the health of African savannah ecosystems. The collective noun for giraffes is called a journey. We have very good habitat for giraffes, considering the large numbers that are seen here. The largest journey seen this month was 21 giraffes along the central depression. Typically giraffes will congregate in small numbers of about half a dozen and prefer semi-open areas with small to medium-sized bushes. There are

several open areas in which giraffe prefer to feed and these areas are usually dominated by acacia bushes. There are areas such as Cassia Open Area, Kori Clearing, Golf Course Clearing, Leadwood Open Area and a couple others where you will find large congregations of giraffes.

21 June was World Giraffe Day where people all over the world are made aware of the conservation efforts done for this precious species. This is the day when we celebrate the tallest animal in the world with the longest neck on the longest day or night (depending on which hemisphere you live). The biggest threat now for them is habitat loss, illegal hunting and disease. Giraffe numbers have declined drastically to only 80 000 in the African savannah.

Lilac-breasted roller (*Coracias caudatus*)

Article & photo by Nick du Plessis

Arguably the most beautiful bird in the region and definitely the most photographed with its bright pastel plumage. Colours of lilac, turquoise blue, green, white and black. Not surprisingly it is the national bird to both Kenya and Botswana!



Afrikaans is a language well known for its descriptive nature and naming of animals, and the Afrikaans name for the roller is another wonderful example of this. It is called 'Gewone Trou pant' stemming from the local tradition practiced when two people get engaged to be married. The tradition goes that once the proposal has been made the women needs to be given a bracelet to advertise the event made from the feathers of a roller. It works off the principle of hard work, firstly finding enough feathers, and then time and commitment in terms of making a bracelet that will last until the wedding ceremony itself. The belief is that if the bracelet lasts up until the day of the marriage that the marriage will last for a lifetime!

Golden winters, misty mornings

Article by Nick du Plessis and photos by Barry & Nick



So often photography on a game drive revolves around the perfect light. We are very fortunate to have the

privilege of going off road to position ourselves at the perfect angle for the light, and to be allowed out at such beautiful times of the day. The most gorgeous light is known as the golden hour. Winter is fantastic for photography - you don't get the same bright colours you would in the summer and spring months but what you do get is warm light, less foliage in the way, dusty afternoons and misty mornings which can often create mind-blowing scenes.



Sightings for June 2014

Lion – 83 (Mountain pride with 15 cubs, Shishangaan pride with 7 cubs, Xhirombe pride with 6 cubs)

Leopard – 37 (Xhikelengane female with 2 cubs, Xhikova female with at least one cub)

Cheetah – 5 (Mother and two cubs)

Hyena – (Nyokene den has 2 cubs and Nyaleti den has 3 cubs)

Elephant herds – 61 and elephant bulls – 22

Buffalo herds – 4 and buffalo bulls - 15

By Enos Mngomezulu, Chris Erasmus & Nick du Plessis
Photos on site by Enos, Barry & Nick
Singita Kruger National Park
South Africa
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