

Singita Kruger National Park

Lebombo & Sweni Lodges
South Africa

Singita



Wildlife Journal

For the month of August, Two Thousand and Fourteen

Temperature

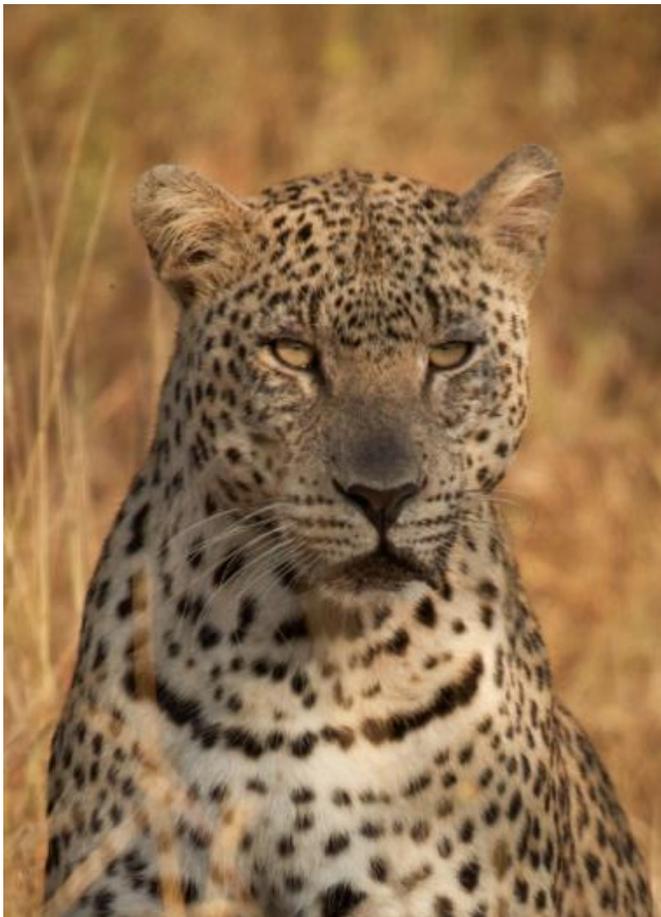
Average minimum: 11.6°C (52.8°F)
Average maximum: 27.0°C (80.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 07.0°C (44.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 33.0°C (91.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

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

Introducing the N'wanetsi male Article & photos by Nick du Plessis

We try as best we can to identify all of the larger cats on the concession as individuals, it always adds an extra dimension to a safari and discussion on drive when you are introduced to the 'story' of an individual. It is amazing how often the questions, "How old is he?" and "Where do they come from?" are asked, and it is great to know some of the lineage and where a specific individual or pride may come from, where they were born, where their territorial boundaries lie and what their favourite prey species is and the hunting techniques they may use. All this is done by no means to name them as pets but rather for identification reasons and to keep track of these individuals as best we can from a behavioural and interaction point of view.



How this is most accurately done with leopards is to count the spot pattern on the top whisker line - this male has a simple 2:2 pattern with two spots almost a mirror of each other on each side of the nostrils. This is not always an easy exercise, and can be immensely frustrating in an area like ours when all you may see with a skittish animal is its tail as it runs into a thicket, but that is what has got us so excited with this individual! He seems to have a naturally relaxed and calm demeanour if treated and approached correctly, and gives us an inclination as to where he may have come from. Notoriously any animal from the east has little to no exposure to people before entering our concession and the mere sight and sound of humans is something foreign and usually avoided, where, to the contrary, many animals coming from the west of our property have, if anything, an over exposure to people and cars from the day they were born, and in turn tend to be notably more relaxed. This gives him huge potential in terms of how much he tolerates us in his presence when we limit the amount of vehicles that may view him at any one time.

The naming itself is also done as sensitively as possible - normally a name is given due to an area where the animal is seen most frequently. He appears to be a recently matured male starting to try and form his own territory and has chosen the

southern stretch of the N'wanetsi River which leads towards the lodge as the heart of his territory, hence we are referring to him as the N'wanetsi male. This stretch of terrain is probably some of the best and most 'textbook' leopard territory he could choose, and is well worth claiming. It includes water year round, dense vegetation to lie up in on a hot day or stalk within metres of prey when hunting. It has large trees like jackalberries, figs and leadwoods to hoist kills or sleep in and, most importantly for him, at least four females traverse this region at any time.

In the last two months he has made up almost half of our leopard sightings, relaxing more and more with each day. This probably has a lot to do with where he has settled himself as it is in a part of the concession which is most frequently used. Our trackers are also feeling confident to track him on foot and often find him within the area that he is trying to make his own.

Not only have we seen him regularly but we've had some phenomenal viewing too. A number of kills hoisted, great interaction with a young male lion, hyenas, other leopards and, to top it all off, a full hunt and kill happening right in front of our eyes!

Above are a few examples of photos taken while on drive, and we hope the photo opportunities are only going to get better as we see him more frequently and he continues to be comfortable with our presence.

African hawk-eagle (*Aquila spilogaster*)



Article & photo by Nick du Plessis

This eagle is one of many that are well known for forming monogamous pairs that stay together for life. What is interesting is that these pairs are often formed for more than just reproduction reasons - this species has a unique hunting technique that requires a pair of raptors. The smaller of the two, usually being the male (females are normally larger), flies low and slow near the ground inviting mobbing behaviour from other birds. At this point the accomplice, observing from a higher altitude, comes swooping down and attempts to strike one of the preoccupied mobbing birds. The strike rate and successful hunting percentages are amazing and show the benefit of this behaviour. This photo was

taken while the other hawk-eagle flew lower to the ground inviting the mobbing. In this particular instance they missed killing one of the mobbing birds, but it was a great sighting to see and interpret.

Underdog... Article by Danie Vermeulen, photo by Barry Peiser

Between the rocks on the riverbank you may spy something a little scallier than a rock. Your binoculars will reveal a Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) basking on the embankment, regulating its body temperature in a very tranquil, unbothered and harmless way. It's a sighting witnessed dozens of times on a safari along the N'wanetsi River or Gudzane Dam. The population of Nile crocodiles in the Singita Kruger National Park concession hits the triple digit mark quite comfortably. One of our renowned trackers once counted 92 crocodiles basking along the edges of Gudzane Dam alone.

It's been documented, witnessed, filmed and photographed how crocodiles catch prey from the water, but to see this from the comfort of Sweni Lodge's Long Bar is rare.

Unexpected was about the best way to describe this event. As everyone had started making their way to the bar to get a drink before embarking on an afternoon safari, a sudden splash and commotion happened right in front of our eyes. A crocodile had an impala by the leg! The struggle lasted for two long hours before the impala had



absolutely no strength to fight for its life, and slowly got pulled into the deep without so much as a ripple. It ended as if nothing had ever happened.

It is said that 70% of crocodiles calm their appetites by hunting fish, yet the other 30% makes up any living creature that occurs in its environment. It has even been witnessed that crocodiles have caught lions having a drink of water!



So next time you're looking at a crocodile basking in a ray of tranquil light, just bear in mind why it is that they've been able to survive for 83 million years...

Spring is upon us already... Article & photo by Nick du Plessis

Although the mornings are still very crisp the temperatures during the days are absolutely beautiful, with the mercury only rising to the high 20's, making it a great time to be out on an open safari vehicle. It is comfortable for both us and the animals late into the morning and we are making the most of it.



It's still a while before we expect to see huge rain clouds rolling over the Lebombo's, but we've already had scatterings of drizzle on the concession.

It is always fascinating to me to see how quickly nature responds and the change of seasons seems seamless. The most notable sign of spring is the early flowering of knob thorn trees (*Acacia nigrescens*) with their beautiful light yellow flowers that are so distinctive against the bright blue sky. What this is also great is the life that comes with this flowering; the new blooms attract creatures big and small. Giraffe are well known for their association with knob thorn trees but even more so at this time of year are the vervet monkeys and baboons enjoying the sweet flowers after a bland winter's diet.

The birdlife is getting better and better by the day - as many as 15 different bird species can be seen at a time around one of these trees.

Acacias are such striking symbols of Africa. They are associated with a beautiful silhouetted sunset, branches growing in random directions, jagged thorns and abundant blooms - in many ways reflecting the paradoxes and beauty of our continent.

Game viewing

Lions: 99 Sightings - The white lion cub and other cubs of the Shishangaan Pride were not seen in the month. At least two of the pride's lionesses are heavily pregnant and will give birth soon. The Mountain Pride seem to have moved out of the guarri thickets around the northern areas and are spending most of their time out the concession near the Gudzane East windmill. The Xhirombe Pride male seems to have taken on a companion male and one of the male cubs was moving on his own along the river for half the month, scavenging off the male leopard. The Shishangaan Pride was seen on kills of zebra, kudu and wildebeest. The Mountain Pride was seen on an impala kill. The Xhirombe Pride was seen on a zebra kill.

Leopard: 46 Sightings - This must be a sightings record for us! The two males along the N'wanetsi River seem to have the river as their territorial boundary - the N'wanetsi male to the west and the Ndlovu male to the east. Both have been relaxing much faster to the vehicles because we have been viewing them on multiple different kills. The Xhikelengane female was seen a few times and appears to have lost her other two cubs as we have been seeing her on kills without them present. Three different leopards seen on five impala kills in the month.

Cheetah: 3 Sightings - The mother and cubs, but during the month it looks as if the male cub has been killed, as she only has the female cub with her. Lion activity in the north has been very high and this resulted in her not being seen on the concession often, as she likes the Cassia Nyaleti area which overlaps the Mountain Pride's territory.

Elephants: 85 herd sightings and 12 sightings of bulls - Distribution all over the concession, but favouring the silver raisin bushes along the river.

Buffalo: 18 sightings of bulls around Gudzane Dam, Nyaleti and Mangwa area. No herds seen.

Hyenas: The Nyaleti den is no longer active, and it seems to be occupied by some warthogs. The Nyokene den-site still has the two six-month-old cubs which provide great afternoon viewing.



By Danie Vermeulen & Nick du Plessis
Photos by Barry Peiser & Nick du Plessis
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