

Singita Kruger National Park
Lebombo & Sweni Lodges
South Africa

Singita



Wildlife Journal For the month of January, Two Thousand and Fifteen

Temperature

Average Minimum: 20.1°C (68.1°F)
Average Maximum: 31°C (87.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 17°C (62.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 37°C (98.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 33.5 mm
For the year to date: 33.5 mm

Bitten off more than they can chew...

The Shishangaan male lions brought down a fully-grown female giraffe in the middle of the month. They seem to have perfected a hunting technique of late, with it being their third giraffe kill in as many months.

The biology of a giraffe is an interesting bit of evolution. With a giraffe's build being as elongated as it is, it needs an extremely large heart to pump the necessary blood all the way up the long neck. If you compare it to adult humans our hearts weigh about three kilograms, but an adult giraffe's weighs in excess of 12 kg! What the lions seem to have learnt is that the height of the giraffe is its biggest defence, and the normal way of getting around the throat or back of the neck is simply not possible. Instead they use a technique that involves chasing a giraffe into a rocky or uneven area, in the hope of it losing its footing or eventually colliding with a small tree. Once down it's almost impossible for the giraffe to get up again, and the two males close in. Added to this the large

heart, now in line with or below the head, causes a build-up of pressure that's simply too much and renders the giraffe unconscious.

Within two days there were hundreds of vultures perched in the surrounding trees waiting their turn and, as a result, it drew the attention of a third male lion from the same coalition.

Unfortunately by this time there was not much left for the third male, other than skin and bone, and all three left the area the following morning.



More than you could ever count!

Red-billed queleas (*Quelea quelea*) are nesting again on the concession, after a two-year absence because of the heavy rains we experienced. That, however, doesn't seem to have had any effect whatsoever on the population - they are flying in plague-like numbers, really looking like a 'feathered locust' swarm of biblical proportions! It's reached that stage where they are starting to eclipse the sun, and some flocks in other areas have been recorded to take hours to pass!

It is known to be one of, if not the world's, most numerous bird, and definitely the most abundant bird in Africa - which is quite a title, with an estimated population of 1 500 million queleas on the continent at the end of a typical breeding season. (Reference: [http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/africa_birds/ABB04\(4\)52-61.pdf](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/africa_birds/ABB04(4)52-61.pdf))

The Kruger National Park is estimated to have up to 33.5 million queleas moving seasonally in and around the Park.

They appear to have at least three nesting colonies that we know of on the concession, one around the Sticky Thorn thickets, the Mangwa block and the last one on our northern boundary called Mbatsane. These colonies simply can't be missed when driving past, not just the sight of them but also the deafening noise that comes with having such large flocks. With such a large population of anything it is only a matter of time until the predators arrive in their droves. We have already started seeing lesser spotted, tawny and Wahlberg's eagles hunting in the area of the nesting sites. Other predators like storks, owls and even shrikes have been recorded eating the chicks in the past.



With the habits of the birds and speed that they move at they have very quick metabolisms they need to eat half their body weight on a daily basis. Imagine the numbers then, 1 500 million eating 10 g a day!

As impressive as they are at the moment it is something that we really need to enjoy while it lasts. They have a very quick nest building to fledging time, in total it may take as little as 40 days for them to come and go! Males build nests in two to three days with the incubation between 10-12 days of two to four light blue coloured eggs - and within three weeks the chicks are fledged and off they go.

Burn recovery and thriving game

Article & photos by Barry Peiser

It has taken some time for the grass to grow after the fires and we are seeing many different species returning to the grazing areas as the grass has grown in various places from a foot tall to other places over a metre tall. Plentiful birdlife can be seen feeding on the new grass seeds too, and insects that have been drawn to the plants and beautiful wild flowers that have popped up.



This lush long grass however does pose a problem with seeing the smaller species of antelope, and should a feline predator be lying in the grass fringe next to the road, it will be very easy to drive right by them. The white rhino and buffalo are just large dark 'rocks' in the grass until they put their heads up to see us approaching.

The humidity has shot through the roof, however the tributaries are almost dry and only scattered pans remain. The antelope have all gained weight and the young are growing rapidly. Many different species of local and migrant birds ensure a choir of birdsong fills the air. Cuckoos have the tendency to see you before you see them and taking a photo up to this point has been impossible! The zebra stallions are play fighting and many a dazzle can be found on the depression with herds of both impala and wildebeest. Now is the time of plenty.

Having just returned from Singita in Grumeti, Tanzania and having enjoyed the different landscapes and the game and many new birds, you begin to appreciate the diversity found not only in southern Africa, but further north too! The different birdlife was the biggest highlight for me and necessitated purchasing a new birds of Africa book. The diversity of birds on the African continent is astounding! The book



is five times the thickness of the southern Africa version and the variety of life is amazing, with so many different forms of the same bird family! Tanzania is certainly a country worth visiting more than once, and the surrounding countries are as appealing regarding diversity and adventure for any keen traveller.

The Singita safari 'circuit' has to be the ultimate wildlife experience with lodges in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania.

Ballerinas of summer

Article by Deirdre Opie, photos by Barry Peiser



Left: Yellow pansy (*Junonia hierta cebrene*) (male) – A relatively common butterfly widespread over the Eastern areas of South Africa. Two of their larval food plants which occur here are from the *Barleria* genus and a wild flower called *Ruellia cordata*.

Right: Common diadem (*Hypolimnys misippus*) (male) – Also a relatively common butterfly widespread over the Eastern areas of South Africa, however there are only three species within this Genus that occur in South Africa. These butterflies mimic poisonous butterflies by having the same warning colours and patterns on their wings, either black, white or orange. The female mimics the African monarch with its bright orange and black colours.



Left: Citrus swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus demodocus*) this particular individual has very tattered wings so the eyespots are unfortunately not visible, which is the distinguishing feature when it comes to identification. Butterflies' fragility is not as devastating as one might think. Although their wings can easily break and the scales can fall off and never grow back, this fragility acts as a survival mechanism. The broken off bits are tasty morsels for predators, and while the predator is eating the morsel the butterfly has a chance to escape with its

life. Some butterflies have been observed with 75% of their wings missing and they are still able to fly!

Birding special: Senegal lapwing (*Vanellus lugubris*)

Article by Deirdre Opie, photos by Barry Peiser

These birds are reported to be nomadic and classed as intra-African migrants. They are non-breeding summer visitors to the Kruger. They move between short and burnt grass areas, in flocks of five to ten birds. Sometimes they can be heard flying and calling at night. They feed mainly on termites and insects damaged by fire.



The ultimate in disguise? By Nick du Plessis

Honestly one of my favourite little creatures and one I've been fascinated with from a young age. It is just a phenomenal little creature, especially with its ability to change colour!

The idea of the ability to change colour is an interesting one, and it is a common misconception that they do this solely for camouflage. Often the main reason behind the colour change is temperature and mood or temperament, basically more to do with environmental factors. How it is achieved is unique - chameleons do this through layers of highly specialized cells called chromatophores, which are 'wired' to their nervous system. They are on the outer layer of the skin and contain various pigments of red, yellow, blue and shades of brown. They are also sensitive to chemicals that are in the blood stream. What then happens is that the colours are locked away in tiny vesicles, little sacs inside the cells that keep them in one place, so the cells don't look coloured. But when a signal comes in from the nervous system or from the blood stream, the vesicles discharge, allowing the colour to spread out across the cell, and this alters the colour of the cell. And by mixing these different pigments they can match to a specific colour, for example yellow and blue to create the green.

How extraordinary and precious life is - and these little colour changers are a constant reminder of that whenever they're seen.



Sightings updates

Lion:

A total of 62 sightings - The Shishangaan pride was seen the most making up 36 of the sightings. Half of the lionesses (5) have been seen with 16 cubs amongst them, this includes the 9-month-old white lion cub which is also looking strong and healthy. They spent a lot of time in the Joes and N'wanetsi area hiding the cubs on the ridges. The Mountain pride was seen 24 times and the sightings consisted mostly of two lionesses with seven cubs between them around Nyaleti / Xhikelengane. There was also a mating pair from the Mountain pride seen over four days. The Shishangaan males were seen on a giraffe kill and later in the month three were seen on a wildebeest kill.

Leopard:

A total of 10 sightings - A very low number partially due to the rains and not being able to go off-road into the burnt areas. The best news is that the Mahlangulene female has two cubs, one male, one female which are still a little skittish, and they only allow one vehicle at a time to view them comfortably. The N'wanetsi male and the Xhikelengane female were seen each on two occasions, with the female on a steenbok kill.

Cheetah:

A total of 40 Sightings - With the lion pride movements so restrictive because of their cubs, the sightings and numbers are the best they have been in a long time. Both females with cubs are doing well. The limping male seems to have recovered and has been making successful kills. There is also a single female on the concession which appears to be pregnant so we'll wait and see... There were four sightings of cheetah on kills, one of them was of the mother with the two younger cubs, which unfortunately lost her impala to two thieving hyenas.

Hyena:

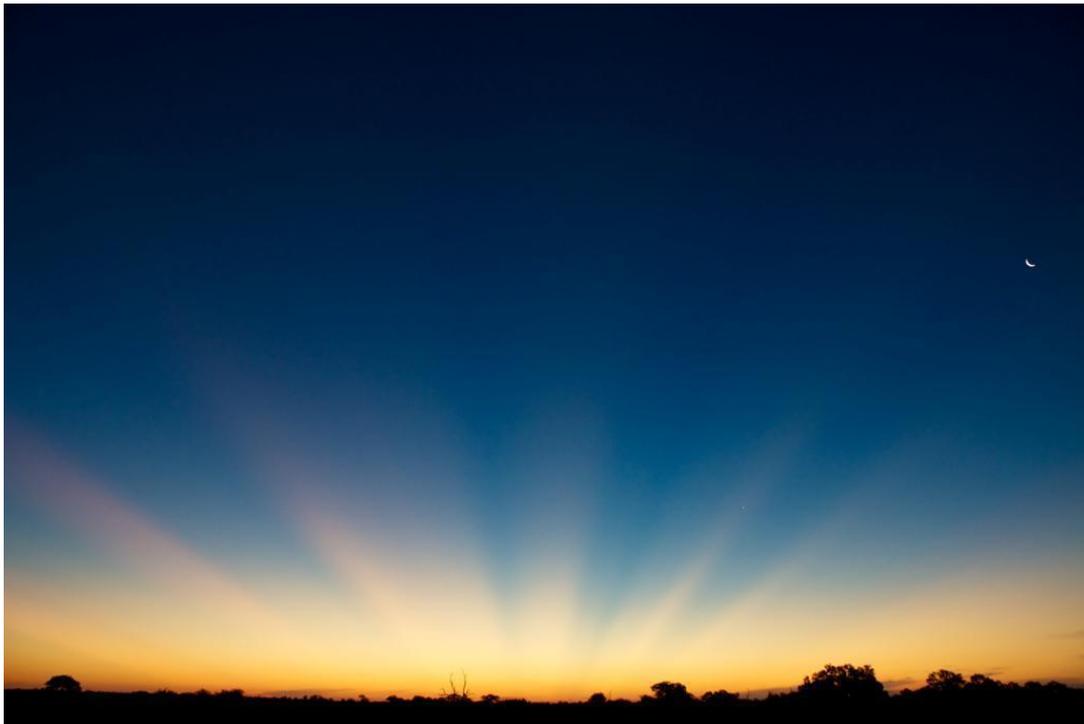
The hyena den-site at Nyokene is active again with two tiny little black cubs.

Elephant:

A total of 86 sightings with 38 being of bulls, and 48 of breeding herds. The herds spent most of their time around the Sticky Thorn thicket as it started to get its new leaves and flowers. The bulls are often seen trailing the herds with only one big tusker seen in the north.

Buffalo:

A total of 15 sightings - Mostly small numbers of bulls together, with concentrated activity up in the North around Pan Link and along the Xhikelengane. There was only one sighting of a herd and they were chased out of the concession by the Shishangaan pride around Basalt Park junction.



Articles by Nick du Plessis, Barry Peiser and Deirdre Opie
Photos on site by Nick du Plessis and Barry Peiser
Singita Kruger National Park
South Africa
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