

Singita

WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of January, Two Thousand and Nineteen



Photo by Brian Rode

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.8°C 71.2(°F)
Average maximum: 33.9°C 93.0(°F)
Minimum recorded: 18.0°C 64.4(°F)
Maximum recorded: 44.0°C 111.2(°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 29 mm
For the year to date: 29 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05h30
Sunset: 18h44

The bush is looking stunning now! The trees and shrubs are in full leaf and the grasses have grown up tall and are presently flowering. The diversity of life is almost at its greatest now that the migrant birds have all arrived and the reptiles, amphibians and small invertebrates have come out of hiding and have been showing themselves. The dark purple clouds have been accentuating the bright emerald-green of the vegetation, turning the concession into a "Garden of Eden". As the sun drops at day's end the clouds light up bright golden, like flames burning vividly in the sky, and many of the sunsets have been absolutely spectacular.

Unfortunately, we have not had as much precipitation as we were hoping for and the major portion of the N'wanetsi and Xinkelengane Rivers have not flowed yet and are still dry in many places. At one point we did receive a bit of rain in the area around Xinkwenyana Crossing and this water filled up Dumbana and Puff Adder Pools, but there was not enough water to cause the N'wanetsi to flow beyond the pools. The water level at the weir is therefore still below the wall and the road crossing the river here has not flooded yet. We are hoping that we will still receive more rain next month and that the weir will still flow over the road.

The Sweni River (which passes in front of Sweni Lodge before joining the N'wanetsi River and then flowing out of the concession into Mozambique) has flowed at least three times this summer season and there is therefore, a fair bit of water in the N'wanetsi River east of the confluence with the Sweni. Unfortunately, the Sweni River only flows a short way through the concession. The little bit of rain that we did receive has allowed many of the forbs to come into flower and we have found scattered patches of crinum lilies and sore-eye lilies blooming. The seeding grass has encouraged the return of the red-billed queleas and we have started to see large flocks of these birds gathering in the basalt grasslands. We have noticed that they are flying east to the hills at the end of the day, but have not yet found the locations where they are roosting at night. Due to the lack of any serious rainfall this month the grass has started to change colour again and there are quite a few golden patches amongst the green. There is still very good grazing and browsing for the animals in the concession and the general game sightings have been great. There have been large herds of giraffes, kudus, zebras, wildebeest, impalas and waterbuck seen in the area, particularly in the central and southern areas of the concession. Summer is the time for baby animals and we have seen many cute babies this last month. Although most of the impala ewes gave birth last month there have been a few sightings of "late lambs". There are also quite a few baby wildebeest in the area. The young calves are quite different in colouration to the adults (the youngsters are a golden caramel hue, whereas the adults are a dark blackish-brown colour). We have also seen quite a few fluffy zebra foals in the area. Game-viewing, in general, has been spectacular this last month.



Photo by Brian Rode

Our Sightings Snapshot for January is as follows:

Lions:

The Singita Kruger National Park concession is often justifiably referred to as "Lebombo, Land of Lions". This is definitely lion country and there is no shortage of these impressive creatures here. The vast majority of guests that visit us get to see lions during their stay.

- Shish Pride:



Members of the Shish Pride

Photo by Brian Rode

The Shish Pride is possibly the best known pride in the area and is the pride of lions that is famous for having the “white lion”. Unfortunately for us only approximately a quarter of the territory of this pride lies within our concession and, therefore, there is a lot of time that these cats spend outside of our area and we do not see them then. We can go for weeks without seeing these particular lions and then suddenly they return and we see them for a few days before they disappear again. We have not had many sightings of these lions this last month. Towards the beginning of the month they were seen for a day or two in the concession. It appears that the pride has split again. A portion of the pride consisting of eight lions (including two females and the white lion) were found near Puff Adder Pool in the first week of the month. Another portion, consisting of seven lions, were seen at the same time hunting zebras in the northern part of the concession. Both portions then left the area and were not seen for the rest of the month.

On the third of the month we found another pride of lions (consisting of seven lionesses) in the Central Depression. These lions were looking very healthy and due to their relaxed nature the guides are under the impression that these lions may be from a previous split of the Shish Pride. This group of lions were seen a few more times during first half of the month. During the first week of January these lionesses were seen in the company of the three dominant Shish Males near Gudzani Dam (which is still completely dry). It appeared that one of these lionesses may have been coming into heat and the males were very interested in her.

- Shishangaan Males:



Two of the Shishangaan Males

Photo by Brian Rode

The Shish Males are the dominant male lions in the concession and consist of three large male lions with big black manes. They are very handsome fellows. As with the Shishangaan Pride, these males also spend a fair amount of time outside of the concession patrolling and defending the rest of their territory from other males. One of these Shish Males – the male with the largest mane – does, however, spend more time in the concession than his two brothers and he is often seen in the company of the Mountain Pride. This male lion is often referred to as “Xihamham” (named after the growling sound that he used to make when he encountered vehicles). He has relaxed a lot with the vehicles recently and tolerates our presence much more now. On the sixth of the month this male was found in the central area of the concession with a female wildebeest that he had killed.

- Mountain Pride:

The territory of the Mountain Pride falls almost entirely in our concession, and as such, these lions are seen more regularly than any of the other prides. At the moment this pride consists of three adult females, one sub-adult female and three youngsters. Unfortunately, the three younger cubs died towards the end of last month. Towards the end of the first week of the month we found the Mountain Pride resting with full bellies near Warthog Pan. The next day we found the lions very close to where they had been seen the day before. One of the females was lying separate to the others and when she stood up we could see that she was in a lot of pain. Her right front leg was very swollen and there was a major swelling near her shoulder. Initially we thought that she may have broken her leg (possibly while hunting), but a few days later we found them again and the swelling had subsided and she looked better. We believe that she might have dislocated her shoulder and that it managed to pop back into place again.

Towards the end of the second week of January we found the Mountain Pride feeding on a young elephant. When we found these lions the carcass was already covered in maggots and we therefore believe that the

lions did not kill the elephant, but rather found the elephant after it had perished. The three Shish Males came to join them at the carcass.

Later on in the month we found the Mountain Pride feeding on a young giraffe. At the same time the three Shish males were found nearby, feeding on another young giraffe.



Members of the Mountain Pride

Photo by Brian Rode

- Northern Pride:

The majority of the territory of this pride lies outside of the concession to the north. On occasion they push south and we find them in the northern grassland areas. This pride has numerous sub-adult lions that will soon have to seek out their own areas. It appears that they may be pushing southwards and we have seen a coalition of seven sub-adult males in our northern areas a few times this month. On one occasion five sub-adult males and a young female were seen chasing wildebeest in the Cassia Open Areas and on another occasion seven sub-adult males and three young females were seen feeding on giraffe.

- Xhirombe Pride:

The Xhirombe Pride only consist of two lions viz. an adult male, who is looking quite handsome now with a fully-grown mane, and his old mother whose teeth are worn-down and she is physically showing her age. The Xhirombe male is presently looking after his mom and assisting by hunting with her. We mainly see these lions along the Mozambique borderline, where they utilise the old fence to ambush prey, and in the steep N'wanetsi Valley to the east of the lodges. At the beginning of the month we found the two lions feeding on an adult male waterbuck at the bottom of the gorge, right where the river enters into Mozambique. A few days later the male was seen on his own and then later on in the month both were seen walking together near the camp, heading northwards.



The Xhirombe Male

Photo by Brian Rode

Leopards:

The Dumbana Male is probably the most relaxed leopard that we see regularly. He is a young male who is just becoming an adult now. His mother is known as the Dumbana Female. She is slightly shyer than him, but we have seen her a few times this last month. She was seen towards the end of the month with an impala kill at the base of a leadwood tree near Monzo Fourways. We have seen the young male leopard on at least 12 occasions in January. He tends to like the area just to the north of Lebombo Lodge, along the river or near the small ridges close to the western border. He has taken a liking to cooling himself down on the moist sand inside one of the water-pipes under a road in the rhyolite hills to the north-east of the lodge, and we saw him there on a few occasions this last month. On one occasion we found him stalking buffalos (this sighting is detailed in the "buffalo section" of this journal) and on another occasion we found him with an impala kill that he stashed high up in a leadwood tree.

Towards the beginning of the month a male and a female leopard were seen feeding on an impala kill just north of camp. The male could possibly have been the Dumbana male. The female was unidentified, although she was seen a few times afterwards in the following days in the same area. Towards the middle of the month we started seeing a female leopard in the vicinity of Mbeki's Crossing, close by to Lebombo Lodge. She was seen almost daily, hunting and resting in the same area for almost a week. It was a great place for her to be as there were puddles of water in the drainage line and lots of impalas around. We watched her stalking impalas and then one morning we found her with an impala kill in a leadwood tree. On another occasion we watched as she came across a spotted hyena that was lying in a puddle in the gully. She hissed and snarled at the hyena, but then relaxed and lay in the grass only a few meters away from the hyena. The guides have started to refer to this female leopard as the "Lebombo Female".



The Lebombo Female leopard

Photo by Brian Rode

Cheetahs:

We have had a very successful month of cheetah viewing in January. All in all, we have had at least ten recorded sightings of these beautiful cats this last month. Most of these sightings have been in the basalt grasslands in the western side of the concession and in the open plains of the Central Depression, and the majority of the sightings have been of a particular female cheetah and her five youngsters.

Right at the beginning of the month we found this family of cheetahs in the plains, just north of Gumba Crossing and opposite the huge large-leaved rock fig that grows on the rhyolite cliffs of the Lebombo Hills. We had a fabulous sighting of the mother cheetah as she climbed up on dead, fallen trees to look out over the grasslands while her youngsters who were a little bit shy of the vehicles remained below and followed after her as she moved on. The next morning they were seen leaving the concession to the west.

Towards the end of the first week they were found again. This time in the area of Cassia Pan, in the far north-west of the concession. They were drinking water and then lay nearby with full bellies, obviously having eaten something earlier on in the day. They were seen again, in the same area, the next morning. The female was walking steadily, looking for prey, while the youngsters chased each other around and played.

A few days later we found them again on our western boundary road feeding on an impala that the mother had caught. They were not seen the next day, but the day after they were found on the western boundary road again. They were being followed by two hyenas and the cubs hissed and arched their backs as the hyenas approached them. The mother then took the youngsters away and the hyenas, realising that the cats did not have any food that they could steal, headed off in a different direction. The path that the cheetahs took led them into the concession and they were found again just north of Gudzani Dam, where the mother successfully chased down an impala and killed it. Two days later they were found hunting in the Central Depression area. The mother attempted to chase a male impala, but he got away. The next day the

mother and her youngsters were found resting in the grasslands with full bellies as the vultures descended to feed on the scraps of an impala carcass a few hundred metres away.



Photo by Brian Rode

Spotted hyenas:

The Singita Kruger National Park concession is a great place to see these mysterious, misunderstood and often poorly perceived denizens of the darkness. Spotted hyenas are creatures about which numerous superstitions have formed. They are often thought of as the criminals and scavengers of the bush society, stealing from others and they are often associated with the dead. There are stories of hyenas being familiars of bad witches and other stories of their maniacal giggling and laughter echoing in the night as the light of some unfortunate creature's life is snuffed out. The hyena's endurance and cunning are legendary, as is their clan loyalty. They are known for their persistence and patience. They are revered by many and yet abhorred by others. Nonetheless, they are very interesting creatures and we are fortunate to see them regularly in the concession.

In January there were at least 35 different sightings of these amazing and intriguing animals. Due to the rocky, hilly habitat in the eastern half of the concession there are quite a few small caves that can be used as den-sites and we know of at least ten different places that have previously been used by or are presently being used by hyenas as clan dens. One such den-site is under some fallen rocks in the beautiful and picturesque granophyre ridge, surrounded by candelabra trees and with a view stretching out west over the Kruger National Park. It is a stunning location. Another den is in a narrow valley in amongst the hills. The den is in a set of small caves half-way up a cliff face and the entrance to the den mouth overlooks a beautiful jackalberry tree that grows at the edge of a small pool that fills up with water from the summer rains. In the grasslands, far north in the concession, another hyena den-site is in a hole in the ground, probably initially dug by an armadillo, with inter-linking tunnels to various exits - a veritable underground warren. The various clans of hyenas in the concession often move from one den-site in their territory to another and the dens are only active if there are young that are hidden there. At the moment

we do not know of any small hyena cubs in any of the dens. There are however a few individuals that are almost old enough and ready to start exploring, wandering and walking the moonlit hyena pathways of their clan's territory, looking for treasures and opportunities provided by the bush around them .



Photo by Brian Rode

We have had quite a few interesting sightings of spotted hyenas and their interactions with other clans or other predators such as lions, leopards and cheetahs during January. We watched as a clan of hyenas cleaned up the scraps of a giraffe carcass after the lions had left it. We saw how another clan of hyenas stole an impala carcass from a leopard, which resulted in a clash between two different clans. We witnessed two hyenas following around a mother cheetah and cubs hoping to steal scraps. We saw how a single hyena appeared out of the darkness of the night's shadows into the road ahead with an entire, enormous back leg of a buffalo in its mouth as she headed south, determined to take the meat back to a den and to the cubs left behind there; somewhere deep in the wilderness of Africa. We are lucky to see these fascinating characters. They are the lead actors in the mysterious world of "The Game of Bones".

Elephants:



Photo by Brian Rode

For most of the month we struggled to find elephants in the concession. Even though there was a drop in numbers of elephant sightings in comparison to previous months at least one of these magnificent creatures was seen almost every day. The green, expansive, lush grasslands near Tshokwane Public Picnic Site, south of our concession, has attracted many elephants and we assume that many other elephants that often move through our concession have headed west into the park, seeking a feast of ripe, fallen marula fruits in the sandy, granitic areas (where these trees are more common than in the eastern half of the Kruger Park). Most of our sightings of elephants this last month have been of lone bulls or small breeding herds. One morning we came across a magnificent male with long tusks in the far north of the concession. He was in musth and was on the move. In the afternoon he was found walking steadily in a southerly direction and the next morning we could see that his tracks led all the way out the southern side of the concession towards the Tshokwane grasslands. He literally walked right across the length of the concession (which is much longer than it is wide), from north to south, in a single day and night. Right at the end of the month there was a sudden change in elephant numbers in the concession and during the last few days there were herds of elephants all over our central and southern areas (to the extent that one guide saw over 150 elephants on a morning drive). It is great to have these magnificent creatures back.

Buffalos:

There have not been any large herds of buffalos in the concession this last month. This is probably due to the fact that during December the lions were constantly harassing them when they came into the area. The basalt grasslands to the west of camp are also green and lush and there is a lot of grazing and puddles of water available for them there. We have seen large herds on the H6 public road on some of the transfers from and to the airstrip. We have been fortunate enough, though, to have regular sightings of three big bulls that have been hanging around the area of Euphorbia Crossing and Ostrich Open Area. They have often been seen wallowing in the pans and pools in that area.



Photo by Brian Rode

On one occasion the guides found the three dagha boys (old bachelor buffalos) wallowing in a small seasonal pond near the “Fig in the Leadwood”. While the guides were looking at the buffalos they noticed a leopard hiding in the shrubbery nearby. This was a shy leopard and it disappeared from view quite quickly. A second leopard then appeared! This leopard was the Dumbana Male, who is one of the most relaxed leopards in the area. The Dumbana Male had not seen the other leopard, but did notice the buffalos that were now climbing out of the wallow and starting to graze nearby. The cat was quite curious of these large black bovids and started stalking towards them. At one point the leopard was hidden in the grass only a few meters away from one of the large bulls. The buffalo had not noticed the close proximity of the cat and was busy rubbing his horns on a nearby bush while the inquisitive cat stared at the creature who probably weighed more than ten times his weight. The buffalo was slowly moving closer and closer to the leopard. We wondered whether the leopard was going to be foolish enough to try and attack the big bull. If this was the case the saying might have proven to be true (“curiosity killed the cat”), but as the buffalo rounded the bush that he was horning he noticed the leopard that was lying hidden in the grass only a meter or two in front of him. The buffalo immediately charged the feline who jumped up and ran towards a large tree growing on the bank of the N’wanetsi River nearby. He narrowly made it up the tree and out of reach, just in time as the buffalo (and his two comrades in arms) chased towards him. The buffalos loitered around the base of the tree for a short while before realising that they could not get to the cat that was perching precariously on a branch above them. The buffalos soon lost interest in the cat that was safely out of their reach and headed into the dry riverbed where they grazed on the lush grass growing on the river bank. As soon as the buffalos had moved away from the tree, the leopard quickly descended and disappeared into the thick undergrowth and left the three bulls grazing peacefully on the grass. It was an amazing sighting indeed!

Towards the end of the month one of the guides found a herd of approximately 40 buffalos in the far north of the concession. We look forward to possibly seeing the larger herds returning to the area next month.

Birds:

The birdlife has been fantastic this last month. We have recorded at least 232 species. The majority of the migrants, both the palearctic (from Europe) and intra-African (from central Africa) migrants, have arrived back for the summer now and the numbers of queleas have increased as the grass has come into seed. The thick grass layer is providing a good place for ground birds such as francolins, spurfowls, harlequin quails, buttonquails and korhaans to nest relatively safely, and we are seeing more and more of them. Many of the migrant raptors, such as the Wahlberg's and lesser-spotted eagles have returned. The Amur falcons have also arrived and can be seen perched in the dead trees and hawking insects over the grasslands, along with the southern carmine and European bee-eaters. Possibly the sightings highlight of the month was of a golden pipit (*Tmetothylacus tenellus*) that was seen for a few days, on the H6 public road, when taking guests to or from the airstrip. This stunning, brightly coloured bird has only been seen a handful of times in the country and is a vagrant species that generally occurs in central-east Africa (near Kenya and Ethiopia). Unfortunately, this bird did not hang around for long and only a few guides and guests got to see the rarity.



Photo by Margaux Le Roux



Nile monitor

Summer is the time that the reptiles become active and we are definitely seeing more of these fascinating creatures now that the temperatures have increased and the rains have arrived. The rains and new plant growth have increased the numbers of insects present and this has provided more food items for the lizards.

The Kruger National Park has a great diversity of lizard species. Almost 60 different species of lizards have been found in the Kruger National Park. The rocky ridges of the Lebombos provide great habitat for lizards and in the Singita Kruger Concession we have recorded numerous different species.

Taxonomically, lizards fall into the Kingdom “Animalia”, the Phylum “Chordata”, the Class “Reptilia” and the Order “Squamata”. The Order Squamata includes all lizards, snakes and amphisbaenids (worm-lizards). The Order “Squamata” is easily the most species-rich order of living reptiles and includes nearly 8 000 species worldwide.

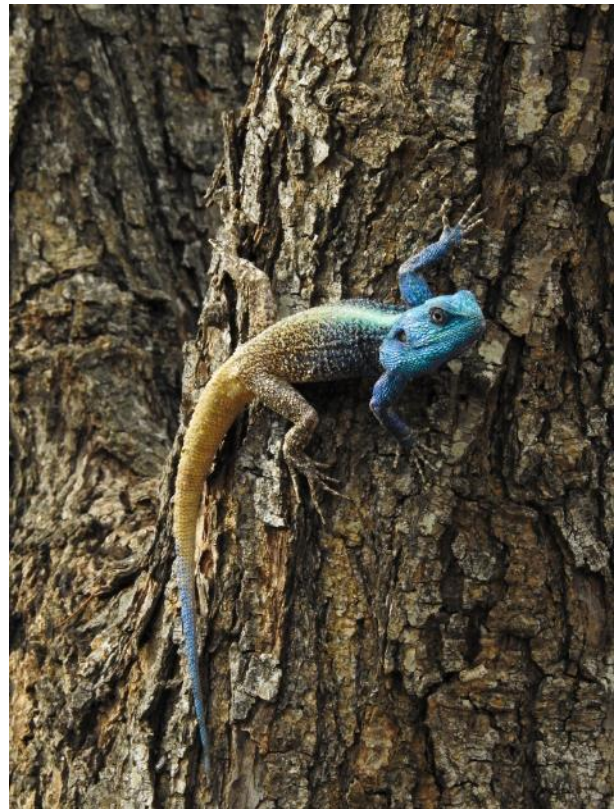
Lizards fall into the Sub-order “Sauria” and have the following characteristics:

- Most lizards have four limbs (even limbless lizards generally have internal vestiges of limb girdles).
- The body is covered with scales, which are usually overlapping.
- Most lizards have external ears.
- Most lizards have moveable eyelids (although in most geckos and some skinks the eyelids are transparent and fused, forming a “spectacle” over the eye).
- The halves of the lower jaw are fused.
- The tongue cannot be drawn into a sheath (although in some families, such as Varanidae, it is retractile).

- Most lizards (except chameleons, agamas and monitors) can voluntarily shed their tail and grow a new one. This is known as autotomy.
- Most lizards do not produce venom (although agamas, monitors and chameleons have been shown to have salivary glands that produce toxins that have a venomous action. The southern African species are not considered dangerous to humans).
- Most lizards are carnivorous / insectivorous, although some such as the giant plated lizard will feed on a limited amount of vegetation.
- Most lizards lay leathery eggs, although some species lay hard-shelled eggs (e.g. geckos) and some give birth to live young (e.g. many skins).



Southern rock monitor



Southern tree agama (male in breeding colours)

There are eight families of lizards that occur in southern Africa (excluding the Family Amphisbaenidae, which are considered to be closely related to lizards, but are often referred to as a separate suborder).

These are:

- Agamidae : Agamas
- Chamaeleonidae : Chameleons
- Varanidae : Monitor Lizards
- Lacertidae : Lacertids / Old world lizards (bushveld lizards, sand lizards, rough-scaled lizards, mountain lizards)
- Scincidae : Skinks (Burrowing skinks, snake-eyed skinks, writhing skinks, typical skinks)
- Cordylidae : Cordylids (Sungazers, girdled lizards, crag lizards, flat lizards, grass lizards)
- Gerrhosauridae : Plated Lizards
- Gekkonidae : Geckos

Agamidae: Agamas

Agamas tend to be plump, short-bodied lizards with thin tails and triangular heads, which are relatively distinct from the rest of the body. Although the eyes are relatively small they are quite obvious and prominent. The eyelids are movable. They have an enlarged occipital scale on the head, under which lies a pineal eye (a light-sensitive area, which is thought to control seasonal breeding). The females and juveniles are usually fairly well camouflaged. The males are often brightly coloured, particularly in the head and neck region. In some species the breeding males may develop blue heads or necks. Agamas tend to be diurnal

and spend the nights in their retreats e.g. burrows in the ground or holes in trees. During the day agamas tend to be quite alert and run away from danger. Certain agamas become quite territorial and males might fight or display to one another. Many agamas feed exclusively on ants.

The southern tree agama (*Acanthocercus atricollis atricollis*) is commonly found in the Singita Kruger Concession and are seen regularly on the trees in and around Lebombo and Sweni Lodges.



Southern tree agama

Chamaeleonidae: Chameleons

Chameleons are unmistakable as a family. The head and body are laterally compressed and the neck is not well-defined. The eyes are turret-like with a small round opening at the top to expose the pupil. The eyes can move independently (one can face forward while the other faces backward). The limbs are long and well developed and the toes are in bundles and zygodactyl. The tail cannot be shed and is long and prehensile. It is often carried rolled up in a spiral. The tongue is club-shaped and extremely long. The tongue is shot out to capture prey (usually insects). Nearly all species are arboreal and diurnal. Chameleons are famous for their ability to change colour. This enables them to have great camouflage. They also change colour when stressed or when courting, often exhibiting brighter or darker coloration (bolder) in these cases. They move slowly, almost swaying (like leaves in the wind), when hunting. When harassed they can move quite quickly. When acting defensively they often blow up their throats (showing off the bright colours), hiss and may even bite. Most species lay eggs, although some are ovoviviparous.

The only example of a chameleon that occurs in the Lebombo Concession is the flap-necked chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*).

Some people believe that if a chameleon bites a person, that person will change sex. This is physically impossible and definitely not true!



Flap-necked chameleon

Varanidae: Monitor Lizards

The monitor lizards are the largest lizards in southern Africa. They tend to have relatively long necks and their heads are distinct from their necks. Monitor lizards are quite robust in shape and have long, laterally compressed tails. Their tails cannot be shed. The scales on the upper part of the body are small and bead-like. They do not overlap. The scales on the underside tend to be more rectangular and are arranged in transverse rows. Their legs are well-developed and strong. They have re-curved claws on each digit and their toes are reasonably long.

They are predominantly predatory, with the southern African species feeding on various small creatures including insects, other invertebrates, birds, bird eggs, mice, smaller lizards, crocodile eggs, snails etc. They will feed on almost anything that they can overpower. They can climb well and are sometimes found in trees. They swim well, but water / Nile monitors prefer moister habitats than rock monitors. They are oviparous and lay soft-shelled eggs in holes in trees or buried in holes underground.

Only two species are found in southern Africa and both can be found in the Singita Kruger (Lebombo) Concession. The two species are the rock / white-throated monitor (*Varanus albigularis*) and the water / Nile monitor (*Varanus niloticus*)



Southern rock monitor



Nile monitor

Some people believe that monitor lizards can insert the tips of their forked tongues into the nostrils of unwary people (possibly while they sleep) and suck out their brains. This is not true! These animals use their forked tongues to “smell” their surroundings. They pick up particles of air on the tips and insert it into an organ on the upper side of their mouths, known as the Jacobson’s Organ. With this organ they are able to chemically analyse the air and thus are able to “smell/taste” the air.

Lacertidae: Lacertids / Old World Lizards

The Lacertids are small to medium sized lizards. They tend to have a slender body and a long tail (usually longer than the body). They have well-developed limbs. The scales on the tail are often keeled and whorled around the tail. The tails can be shed and regenerated again. Most species are terrestrial and diurnal. They tend to forage actively and can be quite territorial. They feed predominantly on insects and small invertebrates.



Juvenile bushveld lizard

Photo by Chantelle Venter

Although we do not find many Lacertids in the concession we do, on occasion see bushveld lizards (*Heliobolus lugubris*). Juvenile bushveld lizards are very interesting in that they have dark black bodies with broken yellow-white lateral and dorsal stripes (typical aposematic coloration), and have light-brown tails. It is thought that the coloration of the hatchling is an imitation of the colours of the ground beetle, which is able to deliver a nasty bite and can squirt formic acid for a distance of up to 350 mm. The bushveld lizard hatchling has a very unusual stiff-legged walk that also suggests that it may be mimicking the ground beetle.

Scincidae: Skinks

This family includes the burrowing skinks, the snake-eyed skinks, the writhing skinks and the typical skinks.



Rainbow skink (male)



Rainbow skink (female)

The typical skinks are generally small to fairly large lizards. The body is usually covered with rather shiny, overlapping scales. The typical skinks have long, tapering tails (usually in the region of the length of their bodies). The tails are easily shed and regenerated. Many skinks have longitudinal light coloured stripes on their body, running from the head to the tail. Skinks are usually diurnal and either actively search out their prey, which are usually small invertebrates, or lie in strategic positions and dash forward to capture passing prey. They can get quite habituated to humans. They often bask in exposed positions and will allow one to approach them fairly closely before they flee. Typical skinks often occur in fairly dense numbers and individuals often posture to one another in order to establish a form of dominance. Most of the skinks in southern Africa give birth to live young; although some lay eggs (some individuals of a species may even lay eggs while another of the same species may give birth to live young). Typical skinks tend to grow quickly and some can reproduce within a year of being born / hatched. Rainbow skinks are very commonly encountered around Lebombo and Sweni Lodges.

Gerrhosauridae: Plated Lizards

The plated lizards are generally medium to large, robust lizards. Some species, particularly those that live in grasslands and those that live on sand-dunes, have become elongated, long and thin (and have reduced limbs) to assist with movement through the grass or sand. Most plated lizards have well-developed limbs.



Yellow-throated plated lizard



Rough-scaled plated lizard

The heads of gerrhosaurids tend to be fairly large and covered with large symmetrical scales. The scales of plated lizards are often keeled. There is a distinct fold in the scales that tends to run from the back of the jaw to the front of the hind legs, along the sides of the lizard. Most of the plated lizards are diurnal and all are terrestrial. Some species show a fair amount of parental care for their young. The plated lizards are generally fairly slow moving lizards that are often shy. They feed predominantly on insects and other small invertebrates, but some species will also eat plant parts (particularly flowers and ripe fruit). Plated lizards tend to be fairly long-lived, slow-growing lizards.



Giant plated lizard

Gekkonidae: Geckos

This family of lizards is quite unusual and quite diverse in terms of numbers of species occurring in the southern African sub region. Geckos are generally small to medium sized lizards. Geckos tend to be nocturnal, although some are diurnal (e.g. the dwarf geckos). They tend to be more tolerant of colder temperatures than other lizards and can therefore be found in areas like high mountains and deserts (which get cold at night). Geckos tend to have unusually shaped feet. They are able to climb up surfaces that many other animals cannot (some species can even climb up glass). They do so by having specially adapted feet. Many geckos have pads under their toes that consist of rows of minute hairs. These pads are known as scansors and allow the feet to grip onto almost smooth surfaces. Some species of geckos even have minute claws that lie in between the scansors and are retractable. In many species of geckos the toes are almost spatulate in shape. Geckos eyes tend to be quite large (because many of them are nocturnal) and their pupils tend to have various shapes. Most geckos lack moveable eyelids. Their eyelids tend to be fused and transparent. They thus look through their eyelids. Because they do not blink they often clean their eyes with their tongues. Most geckos are cryptically coloured. The scales on the body of many geckos are small, smooth and granular, giving a fine texture to the skin. In some geckos these scales are interspersed with larger tubercles and spiny scales on the tails. Most geckos are arboreal or rupicolous (living in rocky areas), although some are terrestrial. Some geckos are able to store fat reserves in their tail. Gecko tails are usually easily shed and are easily regenerated.

Some species of geckos are commensal with man and can be found in buildings, particularly near lights that attract insects. Geckos are often vocal and communicate with each other by sound. Some species of gecko are parthenogenic and can produce fertile eggs without mating. Geckos tend to be oviparous and lay clutches of two hard-shelled eggs, which are laid under the bark of trees, in cavities in logs or in holes dug in the sand. They store calcium for their eggs in special neck glands called endolymphatic sacs. Geckos tend to shed their skins in patches, which they eat.



Turner's gecko

Cordylidae: Cordylids

The Cordylids include sungazers, girdled lizards, crag lizards, flat lizards and grass lizards.

The most common Cordylid lizard found in the Singita Kruger Concession is the Wilhelm's flat lizard (*Platysaurus intermedius wilhelmi*). Flat Lizards are generally found in rocky areas and as their names imply they often hide in flat crevasses and cracks between rocks. Most flat lizards are sexually dimorphic and the males are often brightly coloured, while the females are more cryptic with pale stripes running parallel along the back. The male Wilhelm's flat lizard is dark brown, with a black throat and belly and a bright red tail.



Wilhelm's flat lizard (Male)



Wilhelm's flat lizard (Female)

January Gallery:







Articles by Brian Rode
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