

# Singita

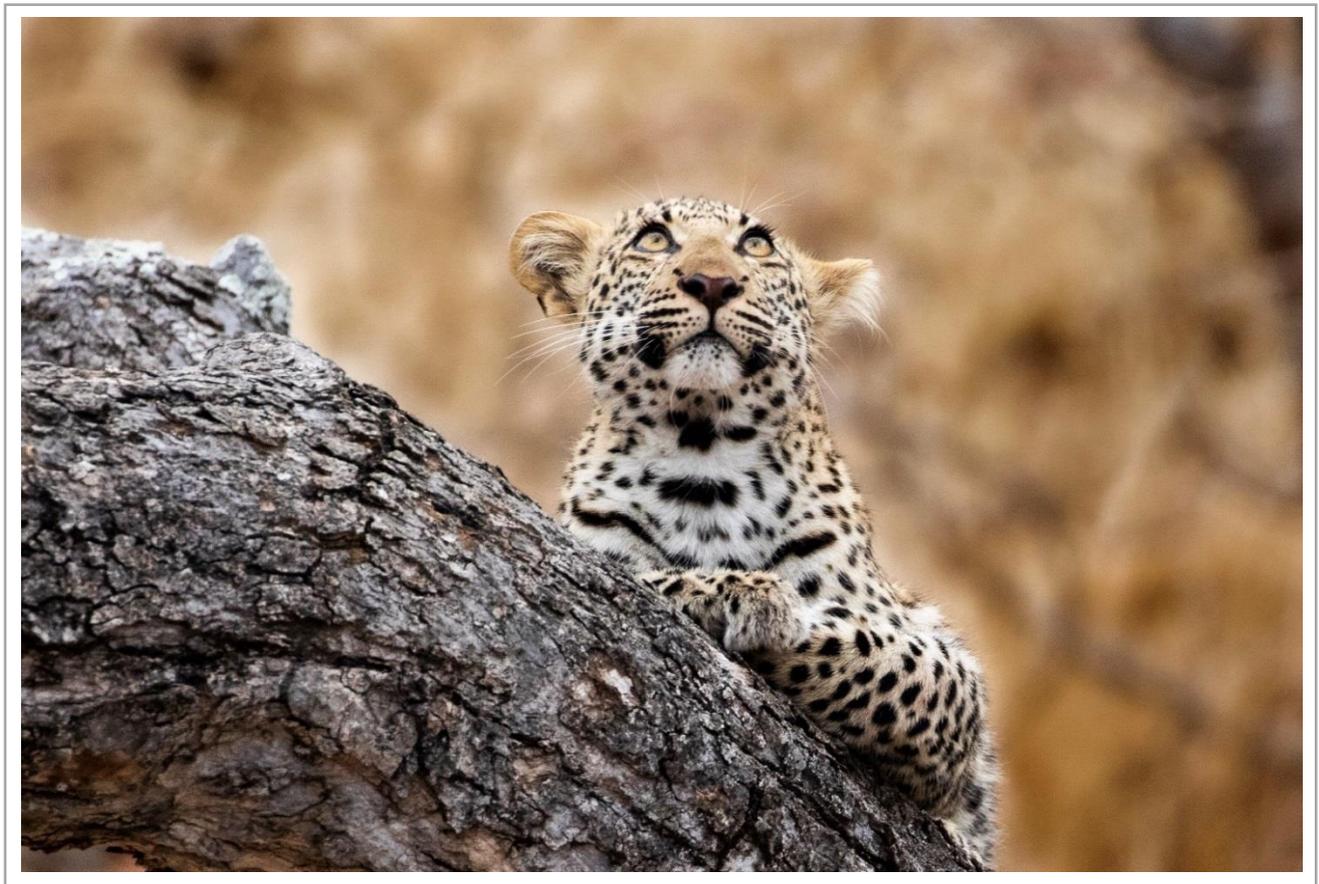


Photo by Benjamin Ackerman

## **WILDLIFE JOURNAL** **Singita Kruger National Park** **For the month of October, Two Thousand and Nineteen**

### **Temperature**

Average minimum: 19.13°C (66.7°F)

Minimum recorded: 12°C (53.6°F)

Average maximum: 34.39°C (93.9°F)

Maximum recorded: 44°C (111.2°F)

### **Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 8.5 mm

For the year to date: 266.5 mm

### **Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:06

Sunset: 18:05

This month of October has seen a huge rise in the temperatures. This caused the majority of the surface water to rapidly dry up, due to increased evaporation as well as having to quench the thirst of the increasing wildlife moving into the area. Along with this, we have had some of the first rains, which made a dramatic transformation to the areas in the far north east. The animal numbers up north are staggering, with massive herds of zebra, wildebeest, elephants and buffalo moving into the area.

## Here's a Sightings Snapshot for October

### Lions

- The majority of the lion sightings this month have been of the Mananga Pride. They have mainly been seen in the Gudzane Dam area where they had a den-site for their seven cubs. Large numbers of general game were moving through the area and were forced to drink there, thus providing a hunting ground for the pride.
- The three Shishangaan males have been moving between the Mananga Pride and the Mountain Pride.
- The Mountain Pride have moved more into the area of the Lebombo hills, where there is plenty of food for them to hunt, as the grass and leaves are starting to show signs of new growth, attracting a lot of general game. Their two young cubs are doing well and growing day by day.
- The number of Shishangaan lionesses has been fluctuating. We started off the month seeing seven of them, and now we only see five regularly, hopefully as a result of the other two lionesses denning.
- The Southern Pride weren't seen this month.
- The three Kumana males have been seen a few times with the Shishangaan lionesses and can often be heard roaring at night, from the lodge.
- The young nomadic Shish males also seem to have lost a member as their numbers are down from five to four. It's great to see that the white male is growing strong and looking healthy. We had some great views of them very close to the lodge after they had successfully hunted a large buffalo bull.

### Leopards

- We had 24 sightings of leopard this month.
- The Nhlangulene female was seen on two different occasions. We managed to get great views of her resting in a large Jackalberry tree, before she spotted a herd of impala approaching, and stalked off after them.
- The Dumbana male was seen near the area of Green Apple Hill hunting impala, and remained in the area for a few days.
- An adult female leopard and her cub were also seen just north of the lodge playing with each other in a tree.

### Cheetah

- We had incredible cheetah viewing this month with 51 different sightings recorded.
- The coalition of four young males were seen over 20 times during the month of October, and we managed to follow them hunting impala on a few occasions, including watching them set off on a high speed chase after a steenbok.
- Other cheetah found in the area were a coalition of two adult males, a lone male who has the distinctive feature of having lost one eye, and an adult female with three small cubs.

### Elephant

- Due to the surface water diminishing, the elephant sightings have been phenomenal! Multiple herds have been viewed daily moving to and from the remaining water points. There has also been great viewing of lots of playful calves, rolling around in the mud to cool off, after quenching their thirst. We have also seen a few bulls considered as large tuskers trailing after the herds of females.

### Buffalos

- Buffalo sightings have been incredible this month. Due to the long grass and a little bit of rain we received, the buffalo herds have been moving in very large numbers, of up to a thousand between the grazing areas in the north east and Gudzane Dam.

### Wild dogs

- We were fortunate to have a sighting of wild dogs this month. It was after sunset, and we only saw them briefly, but exciting none the less.

### Plains game

- The sheer numbers of plains game is astounding at the moment with barely a few minutes going past without passing a herd of zebra or wildebeest. The giraffes numbers have also been overwhelming and the excitement of the masses of impala around with all the pregnant females looking as if they are about to burst leading up the green season, is all very exciting!

### Rare sightings

- We had a few unexpected sightings this month, with all three of the small cats being found, namely serval, caracal and African wild cat. One very exciting sighting of two wild dogs moving through the concession at last light one afternoon. And probably the most unexpected of all a beautiful eland bull has been sighted three times.

### Birds

- The bird numbers have started to rise again, as opposed to our winter months, and the migrants have started returning. The pale-morph Wahlberg's eagle and its darker partner are back and have been seen collecting sticks for this seasons nesting. Altogether we have recorded 197 species of birds this month. Some of the special birds seen include a few sightings of the rare melanistic form of Gabar goshawk, yellow-billed oxpecker, white-backed night-heron, eastern nicator, squacco heron, red-capped robin-chat, lappet-faced vulture, white-headed vulture, Cape vulture, goliath heron, martial eagle and saddle-billed stork. The broad-billed roller, an aggressive central African migrant, arrived midway through the month, as well as the dark form Jacobin cuckoo, who too arrived unseasonable early. Small flocks of red-billed quelea have started to form in anticipation of the rain and the subsequent grass growth that follows that they so heavily rely on.



**Some Bush Stories follow, as well as an October Gallery of images.**

## Kori bustard (*Ardeotis kori*)

By Chantelle Venter

We find ourselves at the height of the dry season. The vegetation has died back, allowing us great views of the open savanna woodland. Conditions like these, create the perfect habitat for the largest bustard found in our area, namely the Kori bustard. We have been fortunate enough to have had great sightings of these majestic birds over the past few months.

The Kori bustard is said to be one of the heaviest flying birds in the world, weighing in at around 11-19kg. The big variation in weight, is due to the male being 20% larger than the female. The size difference helps to distinguish male from female, as they look similar in appearance.

Bustards and korhaans belong to the family Otidae. The grouping is known for its elaborate breeding displays, which range from flight displays, plumage changes and unusual calls. The male Kori bustard lives up to his relatives' displays by puffing out his frontal neck feathers, and inflating his throat pouch. Additionally, he will have a raised crest, and hold his tail in an upwards position in order to display white under-tail coverts. If this is not enough to impress any potential suitors, he adds to this by giving a deep booming call!

Their nests consist of an unlined shallow scrape on the ground. The females will incubate the eggs and take care of the young. If a predator approaches the nest, she will either try to slip away from the nest unnoticed, or fly away at the last possible moment. The clutch usually consists of two eggs, and will be incubated over a period of around 25 days.



The Kori bustard has a varied diet that consists of anything from lizards, chameleons, insects, snakes, vegetable matter and even carrion. They are also known to feed on acacia gum, therefore known as the “gompou” in Afrikaans, which can be translated as the “gum eating bustard”.

Kori bustards are considered as Vulnerable in Africa, and therefore “bird flappers” have been placed on powerlines that cross open grassland in certain conservation areas, in order to prevent the birds from colliding into them.

It has been estimated that the species is likely to decline by a rate of 10% in South Africa over the next three generations. This is largely due to habitat loss, which is aggravated by bush encroachment caused by overgrazing of livestock and an increase in the demand for agricultural land.



Photo by Wess Booyesen

## The great grey beasts

By Charles Ndlovu

We as Shangaan people know the elephant intimately as we have lived together in peace for many years. We know that after an elephant has given birth, she uses her trunk to remove the afterbirth and to help the newborn calf to stand. The calf uses its mouth to drink milk shortly after being born. An elephant birth is something that is extremely rare to see because they usually give birth at night.

We saw an elephant just a short while after she had given birth, and watched as she was eating the placenta. Eating the afterbirth helps to hide the scent from any predators or scavengers that could be close by. In my culture you are considered an incredibly lucky person to have seen this because it is so rare.

Elephant experts who have studied the animals for decades believe that the range and intensity of elephants' bonds with their calves and families closely resemble those of humans, more so than any other animal. It is especially evident when you are privileged enough to witness a new calf and mother, and the joy you can see etched in their eyes.



Photo by Wess Booyesen

## Cheetah viewing at SKNP

By Benjamin Ackerman

The month of October has blessed Singita Kruger National Park with phenomenal cheetah viewing, almost on a daily basis. For us to have seen the cats on such a regular basis is remarkable as the cheetah population of the Kruger stands between 120-170 individuals according to the Kruger National Park census. This past month we have sighted several different groups and individuals: two males, a coalition of four males, a single one-eyed male, a single female and a few skittish individuals. This means that we have had around 8% of the total population of cheetah in the park on our concession this month.

Out of all of the viewings of these cats, the coalition of four young males have provided me with the most action-packed and intense sightings. These four brothers have been moving up and down the central depression of the concession and have been seen almost daily. Watching these four live their lives is quite incredible and it shows the bond of brotherhood to an astonishing degree. One of the brothers has a badly injured back leg - it looks like a hip dislocation that may have happened while hunting. Usually, the African bush is an unforgiving home to injured animals, but his three healthy comrades refuse to let him fall behind or waste away. When the coalition gets up to move, the three stronger brothers move a short distance away then start calling him and wait for him to catch up. One hot afternoon they were witnessed calling for him to catch up from almost a kilometre away. When he did not join them, his brothers turned around and went back to him, lying next to him until he was able to move with them. It is awe-inspiring and humbling to observe. The brothers have such a close bond, and they rely on each other for both companionship and survival.

Spending time with these cats has been a real treat, as we don't always have them on the concession so frequently. This month, I was privileged enough to be on the scene of two amazing hunting sprees by the brothers. At the first, I watched them stalk a herd of kudus in open ground. All four of them went after the

kudu's, scattering them all over the bush. At first, it seemed as if the cheetahs had lost a meal, but two of the kudus lost track of where the cheetahs had dispersed to rest after a full sprint, and while looking for the rest of their herd, walked right back into an ambush. One kudu jumped high over a cheetah who tried to somersault to catch the antelope, but missed. The chase was on again, however, and the cheetah brothers earned themselves a hard-won meal. I was lucky enough to capture a few photographs of this amazing scene of life and death on the savannah.

A few days after that, I came across the brothers actively looking for a meal. There were a few half-hearted attempts at multiple herds of impala, but apparently the cheetahs were looking for something more substantial to satiate them. I watched the four walking through the grassland, climbing termite mounds and tree stumps to scour the horizon for prey. We couldn't see anything from the vehicle other than a large group of giraffes at the base of the ridge. Surely, I thought, they aren't going to try to take down a giraffe, there must be something else out there that I couldn't see. Then they began the stalk. As they got closer to the giraffe they started running and locked onto a baby giraffe - I estimated that it could have only have been about eight months old. There were three cheetahs running full tilt after a terrified calf and we thought it was only a matter of time before the giraffe got ankle-tapped or tripped on something. Suddenly, the youngster, through fear and adrenalin, put on a heroic burst of speed that shocked everyone, including the cheetahs, and pulled away from the jaws of the hungry cats. We did not witness a kill on the savannah that day, but it is a sighting that will stay with me for a lifetime.



October Gallery



All photographs by Benjamin Ackerman Wess Booyen and Brian Rode, unless otherwise indicated.