

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA SABI SAND, SOUTH AFRICA
For the month of April, Two Thousand and Twenty

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.5°C (58.1°F)
Average maximum: 23.3°C (73.94°F)
Minimum recorded: 10°C (50°F)
Maximum recorded: 33°C (91.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 44.5mm
For the season to date: 591.2 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:17
Sunset: 17:25

In a time of complete change and uncertainty in the world, one thing can be certain and that is that the natural flow of wilderness remains constant. We commence our day with mornings filled with blankets of mist which settle over the trees and a beautiful, golden light streams across the bushveld. Although the seasons are changing and vegetation is beginning to wither, there is new life on the property. Young leopards bounding and exploring away from their den-sites, gaining confidence in the wild world around them, juvenile birds are taking flight and soaring the skies and as water becomes scarcer the larger water courses are filled with life. This has been a month of transformation for all of us. We find ourselves in a quiet place with nature, where our senses have intensified and the connectivity with wilderness has become more important than ever.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for April:

Lions

- The lion dynamics on the property have been quite interesting as of late. Each and every night we have heard lions roaring from the camp in all different directions which for us is very exciting!
- The Othawa male lion was seen mating with one of the Nsevu pride females which comes as a complete surprise after spending so much time with the Mhangeni pride. It seems as though he is mating with the one female from the Nsevu pride who has been, so far, unsuccessful in bearing her own litter.
- With impala rutting season in full force, the Mhangeni pride have been using this opportunity to hunt around Castleton Dam, as this is the perfect central source for food and water.
- There were no sightings of the Othawa pride this month as they appear to be spending a lot of time in the west, this includes the Matimba male lion.
- The Styx pride have made a few appearances in the northern part of the property and the single Nkuhuma young male has also been viewed making his way through the area just south of our lodges.

Elephants

- With the change in seasons, you will always find that large numbers of elephants come and go, moving to where the vegetation is suitable and where it allows other areas to regenerate. We are finding that a lot more elephants are moving toward bigger water sources now as the rains are slowly diminishing.

Wild dogs

- The Sands pack of wild dogs took a bad turn earlier on in the month, six members were brought down to five when one of the Mhangeni lionesses unfortunately killed a pack member. This is a natural occurrence as a way to eliminate predatory competition. However, the pack is still holding up well and are currently moving into the breeding season.
- Our larger pack who have denned on Singita for the past three years have also been moving through the property over this past month and appear to be thriving!

Leopards

- It has been a month for leopard cubs as three of our dominant females have been bringing them out of their dens to feed.
- We have been spoilt with sightings of the Schotia female and her two male cubs over the past few weeks. They are growing ever more confident and we are beginning to notice their different personalities.
- The Hukumuri female leopard was seen on the northern bank of the Sand River with one cub who she was leading towards a kill. We are hoping to spend more time with her as the cub spends more time away from the den.
- One of our more elusive female leopards, the Mobeni female was seen twice over the past month with her two young cubs. Mobeni female is very secretive and in the past we haven't had too much luck in seeing her youngsters but her behaviour has been much more relaxed and so we hope to see more of them.
- Hosana male leopard has been seen more frequently and has been expanding his territory, moving slightly further south. However, he still appears to have settled in to the entire north eastern portion of the property and is growing bigger by the day.

Cheetah

- It has been some time since the female cheetah has been sighted, however we have still enjoyed a number of sightings with two different male cheetahs who have been in and out of the southern end of the property.

Bird List

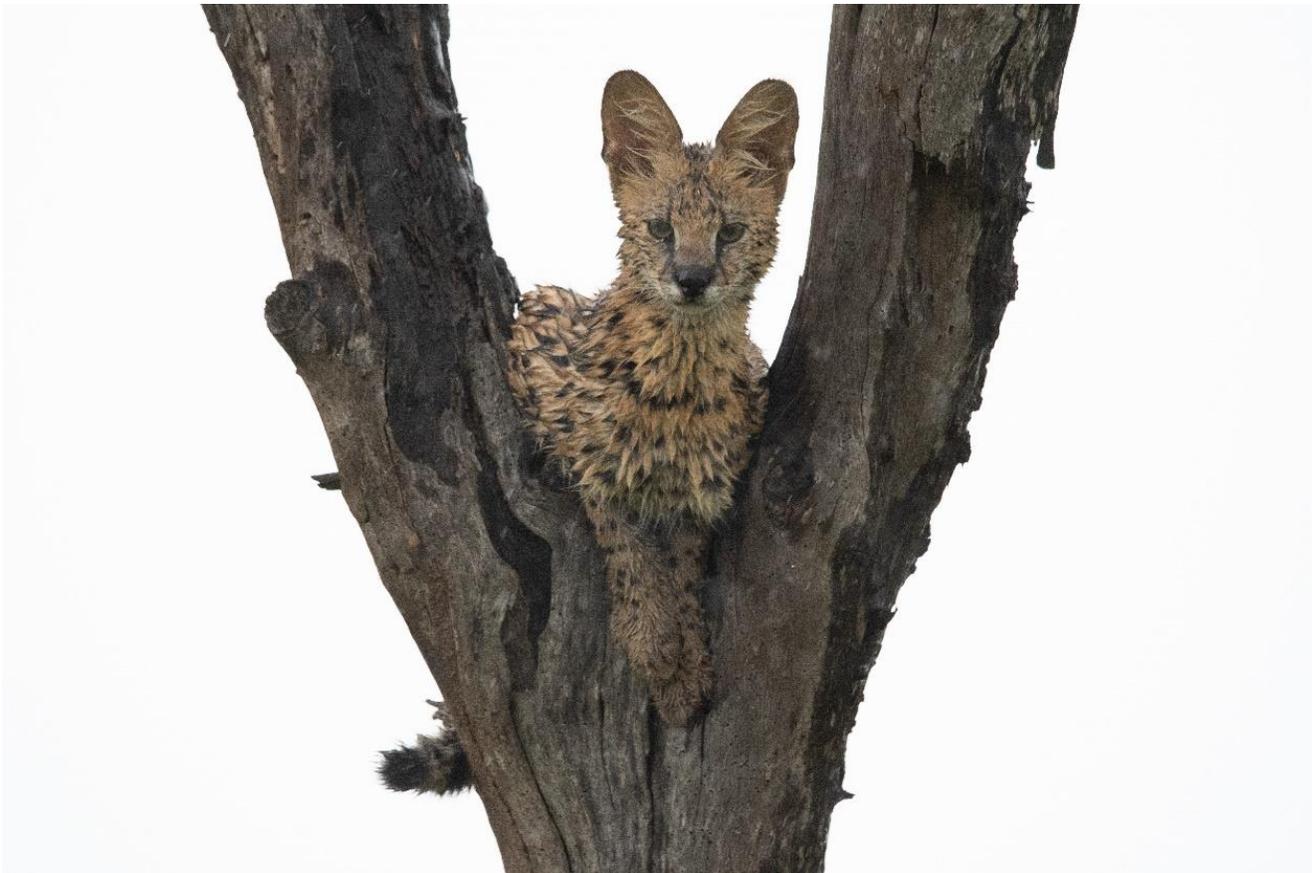
The bird list for April includes nine new bird species, bringing our yearly total to 256.

Special bird species include: red-billed teal, mosque swallow, Jameson's firefinch and violet-eared waxbill.

An unusual feline in a predicament

Article by Paul Josop

I could never have imagined that my first ever sighting of a serval in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve would be of one in a tree! There it was, resting in a perfect 'V' of a dead knob thorn tree, whilst getting drenched in a downpour.



The chances of seeing a serval are seldom because these cats prefer areas where grass is abundant, and they are predominantly nocturnal, making it difficult to spot them. They have golden-brown coats, black spots and have black rings around their tails, making them easy to differentiate from other cats. In a predator dense area like the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, these felines sometimes fall prey to larger predators like hyenas, leopards, and lions.



They expertly hunt small rodents and other prey by using their acute sense of hearing and their ability of leaping into the air and then pouncing on top of their prey. A slender build with long legs and a short tail make it possible for servals to travel through dense marshes, open grasslands, and reed beds.

On this particularly wet day, the serval was very relaxed with our presence! It descended the tree as we made our way into the sighting, but luckily climbed back up just before we arrived to give us the most perfect view. Blasted with rain from the south east, the small cat sat and remained in the tree watching us and scanning over the grass below. Later on, we learnt that there was in fact another serval on the ground. We therefore believe that there was likely an altercation between the two and this one took refuge in the dead tree!

The Sand River

Article by Nick Du Plessis

It is one of those sayings or phrases that everyone has heard a million times, but it is paramount for the next few months at Singita Sabi Sand. "Water is life!" It is slowly creeping to that time of year where the days are getting shorter and cooler, we have had our last decent rain of the season and with it the vegetation is really starting to thin out. Pretty much all game viewing really starts to revolve around fresh and clean water, and where to find it. In saying all this we are extremely fortunate to have such an impressive stretch of the Sand River that runs directly in front of both Ebony and Boulders lodges, frequently providing some incredible sightings, often even in between game drives, viewed from the decks during meals or even from your suites!



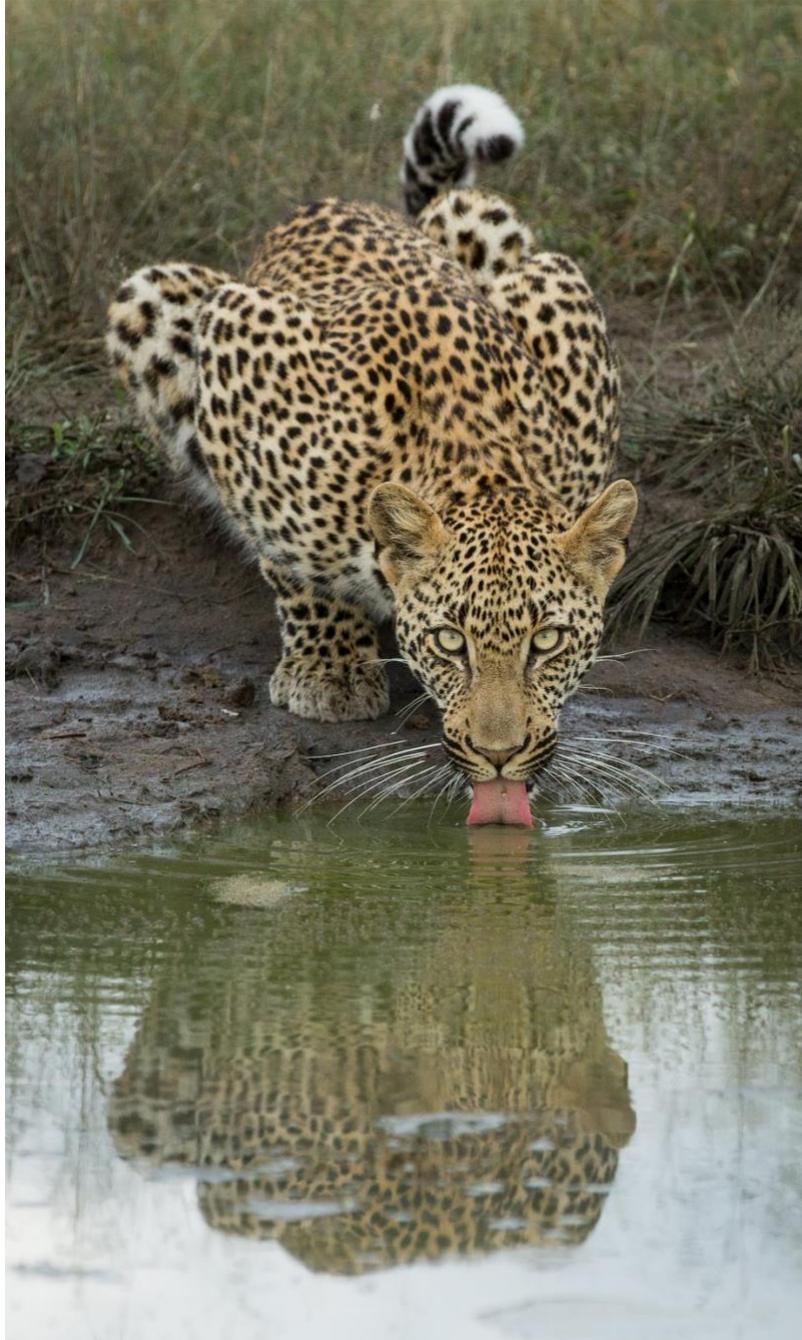
The source of the Sand River is located to the west of us in the most northern parts of the Drakensberg Mountains some 60 kilometres away. Interestingly from us it continues to flow all the way to the Indian Ocean. After our area it next enters the Kruger National Park where it flows into the Sabi River, which continues eastwards into Corumana Dam in Mozambique before joining the Komati River, which in turn runs into the Indian Ocean at southern Mozambique at Maputo Bay.

These rivers and the abundance of life that come with them was seen as so significant to the reserve that the naming Sabi Sand Wildtuin in 1948 (of which Singita is a part) revolves around the two rivers. The reserve has always been known for its phenomenal game viewing and it is in no small part due to these rivers and the abundance of wildlife and beauty they sustain, especially in the dry season.

Adding to that the fact that we have an open system with the Kruger National Park, meaning no unnatural barriers like fences, means we often have an influx of animals from the Park during these times. In general, we notice an increase in number of large buffalo herds and elephants which tend to be more water dependent species and not territorial. The combination of predator density on the reserve and the large number of species filtering down towards the water is always an exciting prospect.



I find these parts of the property along the river some of the most beautiful. It nourishes and quenches not just the big game but a magnificent array of flora that grows parallel to the river. This really is the lifeblood of our property!



Pride on the runway

Article by Gareth Poole

During this lockdown period part of my day requires me to head out onto the reserve, not only to keep up a presence and to monitor the property, but also to find sightings to share with our guests who cannot be with us during this time. It truly is a privilege for me to be able to do this during a lockdown where so many others are confined within their homes.

On a misty afternoon a few weeks ago, my fiancé and I headed out for an afternoon drive searching the banks of the Sand River for tracks of a pride I had heard calling the night before. Currently there are several prides that hold territory on the concession, however, the Mhangeni pride in particular tend to spend most of their time in closer proximity to the lodge.

Kate and I switched the Land Rover off under a massive jackalberry tree, which I would imagine is likely five times older than I am, and watched as the river raged past us. Below us lay a vast stretch of white sandy beach where we could clearly see the large paw prints of the cats which had crossed through the deep water to explore the southern section of their territory.



After following the tracks for some time, I stopped the Land Rover again to admire a herd of elephant drinking from a pool of water so close that you could hear the water moving down their throats. A peaceful and serene moment was suddenly interrupted by the cackling and laughing of hyenas. We started up the engine and raced up toward the Singita airstrip. A clan of six spotted hyenas were arguing with each other over the remains of a zebra that had been killed by lions the previous night. Hyenas are good hunters, however in the Sabi Sand region where there are so many other apex predators, they tend to take the easier route and scavenge for their meals.

We figured that the lions couldn't be too far away so headed further up the airstrip and, to our amazement, found them - the entire Mhangeni pride as well as the resident dominant Othawa male lion all sleeping with enlarged bellies right in the middle of the airstrip! The lions had brought down and eaten the adult zebra in the space of one evening, a truly impressive feat. Interestingly it happened right there on the tarmac. I asked myself whether it might be a coincidence or do lions perhaps understand that by chasing prey across such a surface it could lead to the animal slipping, and ultimately making their job a lot easier. I can't really be sure however I have witnessed similar sightings in the Kruger National Park on a few different occasions so there may be some truth to it.

We sat with the pride as they slept, in the hope that they might all at some point get up and head towards the nearby waterhole. Thankfully our patience was rewarded and the entire pride started to stretch and yawn, which more often than not is an indication that they are likely to start moving. One by one the animals began to stir and then move until they were all striding down the centre of the airstrip straight towards us. When in the presence of these magnificent creatures so many emotions come over you, particularly when they pass

quite literally within two feet of your vehicle as if you weren't even there. It was a truly powerful experience and one that will not easily be forgotten.

Watching this incredible sight unfold on the airstrip made me think of the traffic that usually frequents the tarmac – our guests from around the world. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been six weeks since the last guest arrived and they have been sorely missed. We cannot wait to have them return and to again share with them these incredible moments.



“There is no greater way to connect back with the wild soul, than by returning to our most ancient roots, in nature.” – unknown

As the world takes a much needed breath and we begin to slow our daily routines, there becomes a sense of stillness and understanding in our lives. I have had the incredible privilege of being at home in the Sabi Sand game reserve over the past five weeks of lock down in South Africa. This has been a time where personally I have realized how truly important it is to have a deep connection with nature.

Rather than being consumed by television, social media and technology I have chosen to break away in this time to nourish skills and to embrace the quiet. This has also meant separating myself from my Land Rover and setting my feet on the ground more often.

There is something incredibly special about being on foot in the wilderness, the sound of the sand and the grass crunching beneath your feet, the fresh smell in the air and the acute feeling of heightened awareness, stimulating one’s intuition. If there is any way of reconnecting with nature, it is through being immersed in it with no attachment to the modern world.

One day recently I came across the Tavangumi male leopard lying in a dry riverbed. I crept slowly closer to him as he relaxed in the soft sand enjoying the shade of a large sycamore fig tree. I could feel his eyes drawn to me, watching my every step, and yet he remained calm and content in his resting place. A leopard is a very secretive animal, one with unbelievable beauty and mystique. These qualities are what intrigue me so profoundly when it comes to leopards. They are an animal with which I feel a spiritual bond.



As I moved closer onto a clear area of sand, with the utmost respect, I stopped to watch the behaviour of this magnificent cat. Grasping my camera and my walking stick, I too sat in the sand of the dry river bed where Tavangumi male and I continued to observe each other. He yawned, multiple times, a sure sign and

behavioural trait which signals that he was ready to get up and move. With a short stretch, still nonchalant to my presence, he moved a few steps closer toward me and once again lay down.

In the stillness of this picturesque riverbed surrounded by ancient trees, a completely wild and beautiful creature shared its terrain with me and in this moment, I felt a complete connection to nature.



We went our separate ways and I was left with a lesson learnt that wilderness is an incredibly sacred place. If we can grasp the importance of breaking away from modernity and busyness, we can discover our wild souls and heal through our ancient roots, in nature.

Do yourself a favour today and put away your phone, get out of the confines of your vehicle or home (if possible) and find a place in which you can find a connection to nature, even if it means being close to a pot plant or soaked in the warm sunlight. Breathe deeply, be still, and observe how wonderful you feel in that moment.