

Singita Sabi Sand

Ebony & Boulders Lodges
Castleton House
South Africa

Singita



Wildlife Report

For the month of July, Two Thousand and Thirteen

Temperature

Average minimum: 07.3°C (45.1°F)
Average maximum: 22.7°C (73.0°F)
Minimum recorded: 02.0°C (35.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 27.5°C (81.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 10 mm
For the year to date: 938 mm

Introducing the Othawa pride cubs *(Images and article by guide, Marlon du Toit)*

After months of huge anticipation and many attempts at getting a glimpse at these young cubs, the day finally arrived, and boy did I soak in all the goodness! To see eight little bundles of lion fluff bounding towards your vehicle across the white beach-like sand of the aptly named Sand River is an absolute dream come true. These lion cubs remained well hidden within the thickets along the banks of the river for many weeks, a useful method of protecting them, especially in the absence of their mothers. We would get a glimpse of a cub every now and

then, but to see all of them right there in the open was incredible. These lionesses are over five years old and are yet to raise a litter successfully. Male lion coalitions have been too unsettling in the past, killing previous litters and preventing the lionesses from entering oestrus for longer periods than usual. The resident males, known as the Selati Coalition, are now well established and thanks to that the Othawa Pride has grown to eleven in total.



The cubs now need protection from the rival males, known as the Majingilane Coalition. Their survival depends on the Selati Coalition's strength and the ingenuity of their experienced mothers. As it stands they rarely venture far east into their territory for fear of an encounter with the Majingilane Coalition. Male lions are well known for ending the lives of young cubs fathered by other males, and this would be disastrous. Let's trust that these cubs will all make it safely to adulthood.



Introducing the resident hyena clan's cubs *(Images and article by guide, Marlon du Toit)*



Often the first thing that jumps into a guest's mind when I mention the word “hyena” is the gang from the epic Disney cartoon, *The Lion King*. They were depicted as noisy, dirty and utterly cowardly and they did not do any justice to a species far removed from a Hollywood screenwriter in need of villainous characters.

Imagine an animal with a courage-filled heart and a mind so set on accomplishing its goal that not even a fierce lion could deter it. Imagine animals so powerful and united in teamwork that they are capable of killing prey the size of Cape buffalo and young elephants. Imagine a team so intimidating that often even the strongest lion's nerves are rattled and even broken when trying to defend a kill from these spotted beasts. Then imagine these same marauding hyenas as gentle, protective and caring mothers, often patiently allowing their cubs to nurse for over an hour.

Yes, there is so much more to “cowardly” hyenas than one thinks. They are highly intelligent and have an intrinsic social system still not fully understood by today's behavioural experts. Most of the images depicted here were taken around the area hyena mothers keep their cubs, a central den site. Most clan activity is based within the perimeter of the den, with adults returning to the den during the day after an evening of hunting, feeding and territorial patrols. In hyena society, females call the shots and the clan is led by a single matriarch, the most dominant in the clan. Male hyenas rank the lowest within the clan due to less testosterone production than their female counterparts. Females enjoy first choice at meal times, and males are not all that welcome around the dens, with even cubs holding rank over them.

Activity around the den can often leave one in awe as hyena cubs almost immediately bury their way into your heart. They are very dark in colour and shatter any idea that hyenas are the ugliest in the African bush. They constantly enjoy playing with one another and chewing on the closest object, often the ear of their mother or another's tail. Next time you see a hyena on safari give these incredible animals a chance to creep into your heart. You may be pleasantly surprised...



Encounter the Painted Wolf *(Images and article by guide, Dylan Brandt)*

Wild dogs within southern Africa are the rarest of the predators to be encountered and regarded in many ways as the “holy grail” of safari goers. To encounter these creatures is always a special experience. The name “wild dog” is misleading as these predators are more wolf-like and if you were to trace their family tree you would discover the modern day grey wolf is a direct descendant. The wild dog’s Latin name *Lycaon pictus* means “painted wolf.”

The wild dog pack of nine members have been crossing in and out of the property for several years now and we have on the odd fortuitous occasion sighted them and watched the pack going about their seemingly rushed business. Wild dogs are highly energetic creatures. One record of a wild dog covering 150 km in a 24 hour period continues to astonish researchers in the Kruger National Park. It is no wonder they are so difficult to find!

On this morning’s encounter we set out from the lodge and heard that the pack of wild dogs had been seen near Boulders Lodge and were heading toward Ebony Lodge. We found them and realised they were looking to hunt. The chase was on and within a minute the alpha male had caught a bushbuck ewe in the Sand River. We viewed the pack feeding and socialising in the riverbed for a long while before they all started off away from the river.

We followed the dogs for 30 minutes before we discovered a group of warthogs feeding on top of a crest in a large open area. The adult warthog paid little attention to the dogs as they approached but the youngsters’ nerves broke and they all ran. The adult sow ran in tow but one of the young piglets broke away from the group and ran for a termite mound close by. At first we all thought there was a hole in the mound but there wasn’t. We watched the most amazing scene unfold as this little warthog put up a valiant fight when the odds were so highly stacked against him. Sadly he did not make it, however his fight was admirable.



The alpha female is heavily pregnant. The wild dogs continue to dig wherever they go, looking for a suitable den site and we are hoping they will den here on Singita. We look forward to seeing the alpha female’s pups.

Three is a crowd... *(Images and article by guide, Marlon du Toit)*



There is a contest brewing that needs settling. A dispute of epic proportions looms around the corner. For months now the male leopard pictured above has been making inroads into the territory of the large resident leopard known as the Khashane male. They have encountered one another on more than one occasion, but it has always ended in peace with Nyaletshi male, pictured above, always backing off. This won't happen for long anymore as he is extremely confident and it's only a matter of time before he will challenge the Khashane male head-on.

Caught in this three-way battle is the late Ravenscourt female's 17-month old cub pictured below. His brother and mother were killed by the male above, and after two months on his own he has done very well to stay off the radar of the Nyaletshi male. How long he can keep this up for will be key to his survival. He is growing fast and comfortably kills prey up to the size of adult female warthog, a sign of his growing strength. Is this enough to save him from the relentless Nyaletshi male, or will his father Khashane male end the persistent onslaught of the Nyaletshi male for good? Only time will tell as this saga unfolds...



Injured speedster *(Images and article by guide, Marlon du Toit)*



The last thing the world's fastest land mammal needs is an injured leg. We are not exactly sure how this female cheetah obtained this injury, but reports surfaced that she had interactions with both wild dog and hyena the day before we noticed it, and that a leopard also chased her! Due to their small and lightweight frame they are not equipped to defend themselves from larger predators and they need to do all they can to avoid direct confrontations.

The good news is that the wound has healed very well. She has hunted successfully on three occasions following the injury, and shows no signs of obvious pain or limping. We will keep an eye on her but for now nature has once again proved just how resilient her kingdom can be.

Stumbling over new legs *(Images and article by guide, Ross Couper)*

Giraffes have class. Long legs, slender bodies and graceful movements - we never see them thumping to the ground in an ungainly lump, unless there are lions on top of one's backs bringing it to its knees during a hunt.

Giraffes adapt at such an early age to their surroundings. They instinctively know how to survive. One of the most incredible survival techniques is the strength to stand, walk and run within a few minutes after being born. Some animals take a little longer to develop their skills, however within a few weeks, they all become inquisitive to find out just how fast and quick they can be, by running around and frolicking on cool early mornings. It's not often that you encounter a sighting of youngsters strengthening their agility, particularly in the middle of winter, as there are generally not many young animals at this time.

Giraffe can give birth throughout the year, this is based on their long gestation period. They are extremely adaptable to the seasonal changes.

On the morning we set out it was cool with overcast conditions. We had just seen a fleeting glimpse of a leopard crossing the river. Seeing a journey of giraffe is always a highlight and I can vouch that on more than one occasion a giraffe sighting has been higher on the list of 'wanting to see' than a leopard. I think that it's their elegant gait as they move gracefully, without haste, through the bush.

My tracker noticed several tracks heading in a southerly direction, which we continued to follow as the road veered in the same direction. Within a short period of time, we found the giraffe herd still gradually moving south, feeding on the trees growing out of termite mounds.

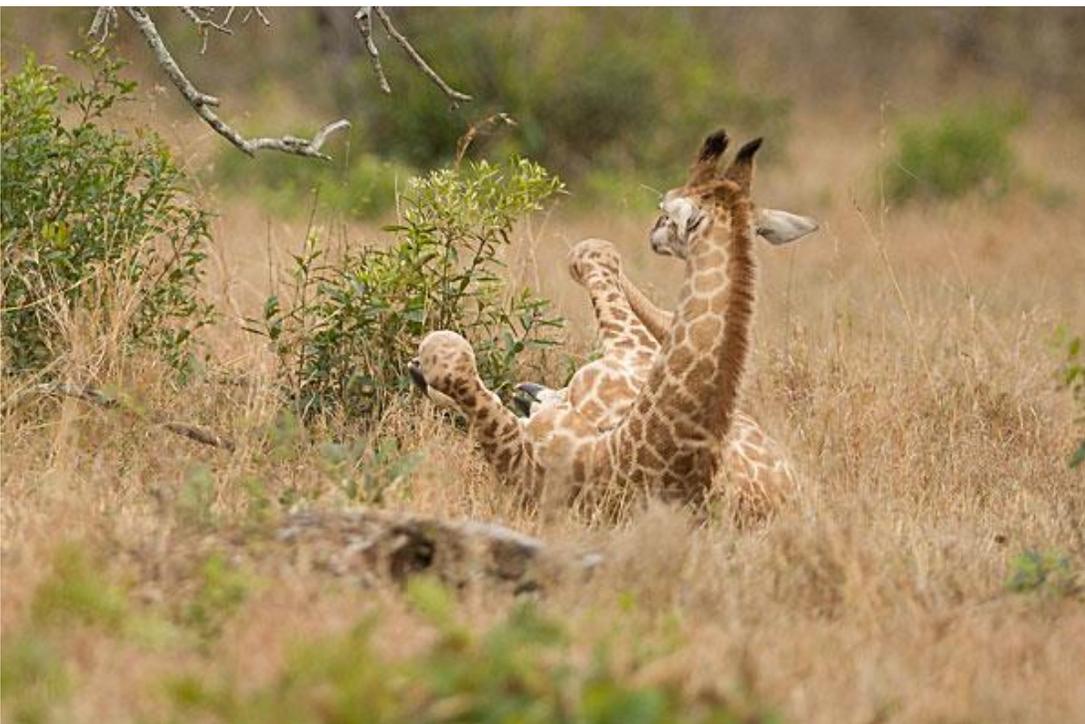
In the herd we noticed that there were two young giraffes, approximately 3 weeks old. One of the younger calves decided that this cool day was perfect to test her running ability. After a few short spurts of energy she bolted left and then right, stopped, and looked relatively surprised to know just how quick she was. We all gleamed with smiles, knowing that this was a unique sighting. After about 5 minutes of running back and forth around the herd, the last sprint ended with a tumble. Long legs are not built for quick turns and she tumbled over, head first, rolling onto her back.

The mother giraffes both came running over not realising what had happened and instinctively acted as if the young giraffe was knocked off its feet by a predator. I think their quick reaction alerted the young giraffe to roll



backwards and forwards and eventually balance herself on her hooves. Embarrassed, she scrambled up on her stilts and then sashayed past the other calf as if to say 'I dare you to do a drop and roll like that.'

Giraffe calves are born weighing approximately 100kg. A newborn giraffe is about 1.8 m (6 ft) tall. Within a few hours of birth, the calf can run around and is almost indistinguishable from a one-week-old. However, for the first 1 to 3 weeks, it spends most of its time hiding, its coat pattern providing camouflage. The ossicones (horns), which have lain flat while it was in the womb, become erect within a few days. The bond a mother shares with her calf varies, though it can last until her next calving. Let's hope this little girl stays on her hooves until then.



Pause to watch and enjoy the agile klipspringer *(Article by guide, Leon van Wyk)*

While many of our guests understandably wish to see and spend time with so-called “high profile” animals, it is also very important and, indeed, rewarding, to take time out to appreciate some of the little treasures that could so easily be overlooked. In a short series, I am going to give brief visits into the lives of some of our smaller antelope, and my subject for this month is the klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*).

The term “klipspringer” is Afrikaans for “rock jumper,” which quite accurately describes how well these dainty little ungulates are adapted to life in their chosen habitat of rocky outcrops, known in South Africa as koppies. In Singita Sabi Sand, one does not have to travel very far in order to have a great chance of seeing klipspringer, as there are several ideal koppies within a few hundred metres of Boulders and Ebony Lodges. For those who know the area, Boulders Koppies, Tavungumi Koppies, Millennium Koppies and Makhubela Koppies all offer great potential as klipspringer havens. (Tavungumi can be translated as “hill of the klipspringer.”)

The best time to view klipspringers is in the early morning and late afternoon, when they are most active. Most typically, they occur in monogamous pairs, frequently with at least one offspring nearby. Single lambs are born after a gestation period of approximately 6 months, and they reach sexual maturity within a year. Territories are small, typically under 50 hectares, and are marked and defended by the males. A close look (through a good pair of binoculars) at a klipspringer will show that it has large, prominent pre-orbital glands, which it uses to rub on twigs, leaving behind a sticky, tarry secretion, with a characteristic scent. This will dry and harden as a bead on the end of a twig.



To assert his dominance, a male klipspringer will arch his back (to increase his apparent size) and emit a strange humming sound. The other sound, which one sometimes hears from a klipspringer, is its alarm call, taking the form of a short, sharp buzzing sound. As with many other antelope, the alarm call is made by expelling air quickly through the nostrils.

A male klipspringer typically has a mass of approximately 10 kg, while a female is about 20% heavier. They are extremely vigilant, and sometimes seem to take turns in keeping watch for predators. In this area, their main predators would be leopards, but pythons could potentially also be a threat, as could large eagles such as a martial eagle.

Young klipspringers in particular can be very playful, and it is not unusual to find one tearing around on the koppies, bounding from one boulder to another, evidently just loving the fact that it is so agile and sure-footed! This sure-footedness is partly due to the structure of the foot, where the terminal joint is rotated such that it hops around on the very tips of its hooves. The horny outer part of the hoof is largely worn away, leaving a stiletto-like tip that is of similar texture to hard rubber, giving it superior grip on the rocks.

The main diet of the klipspringer is leaves and fruits of certain trees and shrubs. Very seldom would they graze grass. Some moisture is obtained by ingesting succulent plant parts, but they will also take in water in the form of dew, as well as drinking from puddles on the rocks.

While very sure-footed on rocky terrain, they are probably not very fast on flat ground, and would normally seldom leave the koppies. If, however, a klipspringer is ousted from an area, and needs to find a new suitable habitat, it is able to walk from one rocky outcrop to another, even as far as 10 kilometres away. This would allow for a good opportunity for genes to be spread.

“Quiet please, hippo’s resting” *(Images and article by guide, Ross Couper)*

Most guests that visit a Singita lodge are bound to hear an iconic and impressive hippo honking sound at least once during their stay.

The honking sounds like someone told a bad joke and a few men are laughing in a very sarcastic manner. Hippos will often bellow this sound at various times, but most of the time being in the evening hours and early morning as they depart and return to the water. The honking serves to advertise territorial status to other hippos in the nearby area. The sound often changes to a squeal or even a growl. Two large male hippos fighting over a territorial status often are misinterpreted as lions.



In the midday, during winter, these giant mammals can often be found resting on the banks of the Sand River basking in the warmth of the sun.

Their honks, growls and grunts are the true sound of the African bushveld at night. Step outside on your deck and listen to the night sounds carefully, you are bound to hear not only a hippo, but a variety of other animals as well.

A colourful winter butterfly (Article by guide Shelley Alkema)

It is a fact that in the cooler, dryer months of the winter in Sabi Sands there are very few “bugs” around to bother you. Yet during the pleasantly warm daytime temperatures it is glorious to witness the fluttering of colours around the grasses as butterflies go about their daily activities.

There is one butterfly in particular out of the 374 species in the province which often catches my attention and lights up my guests' faces when I point it out, and that is the yellow pansy (*Junonia hierta*).



As showy as its colours are with yellow, orange, blue and black, it can be extremely difficult to photograph. This being so because it intends to catch your eye as it flits about in search of something sweet and juicy to feed on however when it lands to enjoy this liquid meal it tends to close its wings and camouflage itself. This is a clever technique used to flash and startle a predatory bird or lizard and then magically disappear. If camouflage doesn't prove effective then the large blue 'eyespot' is excellent at mimicking eyes on a supposedly larger head, and hence if caught there on the wing it can probably tear itself away leaving only slight damage to its lower abdomen region.

Of course these vivid colours are also used in courtship with the male appearing slightly brighter than the female. Mating takes place most of the year for the yellow pansy butterflies, so the male who is usually solitary is constantly establishing a territory close to open patches of ground. Right now I am frequently sighting this beautiful butterfly engaging in a dance and chase of competing males that is difficult to keep track of. If he is successful over his territory then you may be lucky to witness the female emerge from her secretive life to be courted by the male. Soon after the female will lay single eggs on wild sage, mint, herbs and snapdragon plants close to the ground. The single grub-shaped larva will hatch and seek out food from bush violets, veld violets and fairy star plants until it has moulted 4 – 6 times to allow for growth from its initial exoskeleton.

When the larva is ready for its final and fantastic stage of life it must undergo complete metamorphosis like all butterflies do, inside a specially designed silk cocoon. The emerging butterfly then experiences a whole new perception of its world and seeks out high-energy sugar-rich foods such as nectar from flowers and juice from rotting fruit.

Eventually the adult butterfly will take part in the competitive and dangerous mating rituals in order to complete this important cycle of life.

Capture a moment, Part 2 *(Images and article by guide, Ross Couper)*

What makes a great wildlife photograph and how do you get one during your stay at Singita? It is an easy task that anyone can achieve. Incredible wildlife photographs are a dime a dozen online, in galleries and in magazines. So what will make yours unique?

Firstly, every game drive you will be on will be unique in its own right and your chance of seeing exactly the same animal in the same position and same light is extremely unlikely. Several other elements all contribute to making it different and thus unique.

To get the most out of your photographs and your experience being out in the bush, I have included a few tips below that will guide you to producing some exceptional photographs.

1. Change your view, either from an elevated point or get down low to your subject. There are a number of antelope that move through the lodge, which will allow for great subjects on which to change your angle. Elevated views from the deck or outside your room enable a great perspective to your view and the wildlife that you may have encountered whilst sitting on the deck. Participating on a game walk will also allow you to change your angles on various aspects of fauna.
2. Try and photograph a subject with a depth of field that creates a good blurred background (bokeh).
3. Experiment with your camera settings. The best time to do this is during midday when you are not on a game drive, as you would not want to be changing your settings during a special moment whilst on game drive.
4. Change your settings to AV mode: This will allow you to change your F stop along with your ISO to adjust your shutter speed based on the subject and the available natural light. It controls how much your image is in focus or not (i.e. what is clearly and sharply seen and what is blurred out.) It also controls how much light comes into the lens of your camera when it hits your sensor.



In general:

F2.8

enables high shutter speeds. Great for portraits.

F8

enables slower shutter speeds. Great for landscapes.

ISO

light sensitivity of your camera's sensor. The higher the ISO, the more sensitive your camera will be to light and the grainier your images will be. The lower the ISO, the less sensitive the camera will be to light and the less grainy your images. Higher ISO's allow for faster shutter speeds.

ISO 100

great for daylight use, no image grain.

ISO 400

great for twilight use, a bit more grain.

ISO 800

much more suited towards low light or high action where you need to stop fast movement, like birds in flight.

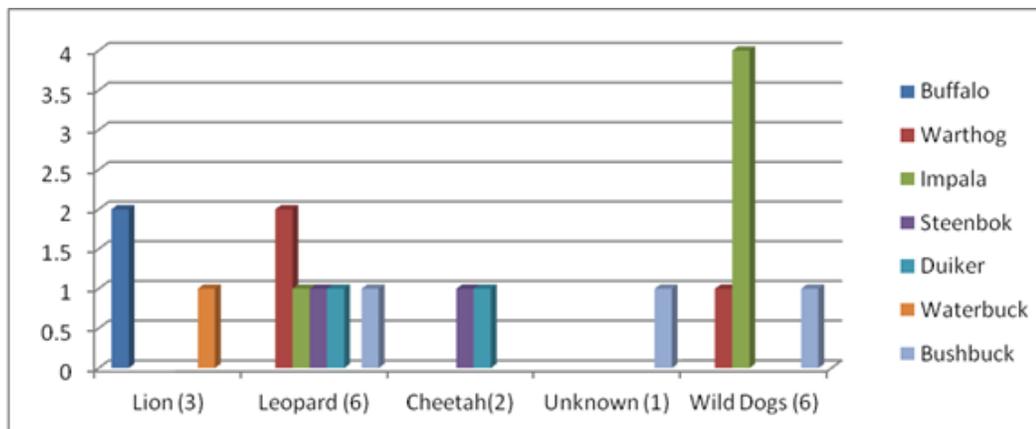
The more time you experiment with your camera the more the benefits will be seen in your photographs. Photographs are memories that you can always revisit and recall your emotions. Keep your camera ready and capture your experiences, you will be guaranteed a smile when you look back at your adventure.



Game Viewing Summary for July 2013

	LION	LEOPARD	REEDBUCK	CHEETAH	ELEPHANT	BUFFALO	WILD DOG
No. of sightings	61	91	1	34	92	57	16

Kill analysis:



Game Summary for July 2013

Bird list:

171 birds for the month of July.

Specials include yellow-billed oxpecker, African finfoot, Whalbergs eagle and Klaas' cuckoo.

Statistical analysis:

- Lion sightings: Slight increase this month from 54 to 61 which is great considering most of the lionesses are hiding cubs that are still very small.
- Leopard sightings: A massive increase of 20 sightings more this month considering we don't have a resident female within the immediate vicinity of the lodge.
- Reedbuck sightings: Sightings remain low. This is possibly from a recording perspective and the fact that we haven't been frequenting their area of the property in recent times. Just a single sighting recorded.
- Elephant sightings: Still incredibly high, but down from previous month of 111.
- Buffalo sightings: Good increase this month, up from 57 to 69, the bigger herds have splintered into slightly smaller groupings of 50 to 110 versus the pervious numbers of 300 to 500 in a herd.
- Cheetah sightings: Slightly down by 6 sightings this month. The cubs are doing well and the female is coping well with her laceration on her right rear leg.
- Wild dog sightings: Up by 4, alpha female is very heavily pregnant and the pack is looking to den.

July highlights:

Amongst the highlights package would have to be seeing a hyena give birth! This is such a private time in an animal's life yet they allowed us in to see this miracle of nature! Another exciting highlight is the addition of the lion cubs into the Mangene pride – a total of 6 youngsters, which we presume to belong to three different females. We are looking forward to some incredible viewing from this pride in the future, as they establish themselves in the north eastern parts of our property.

Articles by Marlon du Toit, Ross Couper, Leon van Wyk, Shelley Alkema and Dylan Brandt
Photographs on location by Marlon du Toit & Ross Couper (except where noted otherwise)

Singita Ebony and Boulders Lodges

Sabi Sand

South Africa

Thirtieth of July 2013