

# Singita Kruger National Park

Lebombo & Sweni Lodges  
South Africa

# Singita



## Wildlife Report

For the month of April, Two Thousand and Fourteen

### Temperature

Average minimum:	15.6°C (60.08°F)
Average maximum:	29°C (84.2°F)
Minimum recorded:	12°C (53.6°F)
Maximum recorded:	38°C (100.4°F)

### Rainfall Recorded

For the period:	15 mm
For the year to date:	262 mm

A continued bloodline... Article by Danie Vermeulen

As the cool, crisp autumn air flows over the Lebombo valley in the far eastern reach of Kruger and the cherry sun sets over the escarpment, we wait in anticipation for the newly established kings to announce their presence with their ancient soul piercing roars.

The time of autumn and approaching winter is most probably one the most vocal times of the year for lions, due to the cool dense air being able to transport the sound of a roar a lot further (up to 7 km away), but this is not the only reason why the rulers are belting out their assuring dominant presence...

The five Shishangaan males have recently fought their way in and have taken over the territory from the two previous males. This has led to copious mating activity and will result in an exciting new bloodline in our N'wanetsi section of Kruger.



One of the more dominant males who has earned his stripes by the fact that his right eye was completely removed in a fight to assure his reign with his brothers, has been seen constantly with lionesses as he waits for their full oestrous cycles to set in, and he takes every opportunity to measure oestrogen levels in their urine. When the time for conception is right they'll give him the green light to start copulation.

These new warriors are staying put for the moment but it's not long before they'll expand their territory, once the females have all been impregnated.



They have calmed down immeasurably since first arriving on our concession a few months ago, but you can still see their clear wariness of our vehicles and us.

As for the notorious Mountain pride, new cubs were briefly seen in the Xhikelengane drainage, far north in the concession, which puts the pride at 13 new cubs, all sponsored by the bloodline of the Northern males.

Witnessing new generations of lions being born into this unspoilt wonder of Africa will always leave anticipation of what the future holds for individuals.



Our new leaders of the prides will stay as pillars and security to the mothers and cubs, and perhaps their sons will follow in their footsteps as the kings of the African plains.

## Southern ground hornbill

Article by Jani Lourens

The flocks of southern ground hornbills are being monitored on our concession. Although they are very shy and not fond of either vehicle or human presence, we have managed to identify at least four flocks that move through the area.



The 'S100' group are mostly found in the northern part of the property consisting of seven individuals, one of which is a brand new addition this year. The 'Central' group was also fortunate enough to have a successful fledgling and they are often found in the central open areas of the concession. The 'N'wanetsi' group is possibly the most exciting because although they are the smallest of the groups they seem to have established themselves close to the lodge - they consist of only the alpha pair with their one chick! There is another group along the eastern border with Mozambique but there is little known about them as they tend to spend most of their time outside our concession.

The Kruger National Park protects about 40% of this bird's population within South Africa, but numbers have declined outside of protected areas and the southern ground hornbill is in serious trouble. They are a species that are listed globally as vulnerable and will soon be up-listed to endangered in South Africa.

How we help to protect this species is by providing photographs, locations of new nesting sites, habitat preference, group size, (a photograph of the whole group can help to age and sex the birds) and any interesting behaviours like vocalization, foraging or mating. With all this information conservation programmes can be



undertaken in those areas to help to slowly increase their numbers. We email this information to Bird Life at: [sightings@ground-hornbill.org.za](mailto:sightings@ground-hornbill.org.za) and we recommend you do the same if you see any of these endangered birds.

## Cape hunting dogs make a long-awaited visit to the concession

Article by Nick du Plessis



For only the third time in my 18 months here have I been fortunate enough to see wild dogs. A pack of six of these extremely rare animals spent a few days on the concession, along our western boundary. We believe that the reason we don't see them often is due to the fact that we have the largest lion density compared to anywhere else in the Kruger National Park. What this means for the wild dogs is very high levels of competition, and this they can avoid by moving elsewhere.

What got us all very excited is the fact that wild dogs are one of the few mammals that have a set breeding season in the winter/dry season. The idea behind this is that the prey they hunt most regularly, being impalas, are at their weakest during this time and this increases the dogs chance of running them down - an already high success rate is increased even more. Seeing them here and now means that they could be scoping out a possible den-site in the area. They are notoriously nomadic, but we can only hope! How exciting would that be to

have one of the rarest carnivores in the world, second only to the Ethiopian wolf, choosing our concession as a place to raise their puppies?



### The commensalism of a blue waxbill nest

Article by Nick du Plessis

Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. This example we found on the concession, is a very small but perfect example of a symbiotic relationship.



This relationship in particular is something known as commensalism, whereby one species is helped and the other is not affected or harmed in a negative manner.

Blue waxbill birds (*Uraeginthus angolensis*) go in search of a nest made by wasp and, once they find one in a suitable location, they begin the construction of their own messy-looking grass nest very close by. The wasps act as a

security system for the birds and the eggs or chicks in the nest. If any of the birds' predators come too close and disturb the nest they'll disturb the wasps' nest too and be driven off by the furious sting-armoured insects!

In the photo above you can see the "messy" nest of the waxbills, and just below it is the white and brown nest of the wasps.



Photo by Jenny Hishin

Speaking of armour here's another insect species that carries effective armour - just look at that spiked defence shield! Armoured ground crickets (*Acanthopplus discoidalis*) are also known as corn crickets.

Other interesting facts about these crickets are that they have adopted a "dog eat dog" behaviour, one whereby they have the ability to attack and subsist on other insects, a term known as hyper-parasitic. They have an organ situated at the base of their antennae that they use to interpret information they receive via vibrations. They produce a calling song that lasts for minutes and consists of verses with two pulses. When they are threatened they ooze a foul smelling liquid which, in fact, is their own blood called haemolymph. They extrude this haemolymph liquid from one of the leg joints - a behaviour called reflex-bleeding.

Photo highlights of April



Africa pygmy-kingfisher



Cheetah mother and cub



Waterbuck bulls fighting

By Chris Belo, Danie Vermeulen, Jani Lourens and Nick du Plessis  
Photos on site by Collen Sibuyi, Barry Peiser and Nick du Plessis  
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