



The Bush Telegraph

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"I think sometimes we need to take a step back & just remember we have no greater right to be here than any animal" - Sir David Attenborough

Happy new year from all of us to all of you!

We take this opportunity of wishing you a healthy & prosperous year ahead & we thank you for your support & friendships.

This summer our heat has been turned up full blast! We have experienced some extreme temperatures of early-mid 40°C on many occasions. As you can see from our rainfall figures below, we have been blessed with some rain, but we are still far off the mark.

We have had some incredible electric storms to tease us too. However, nature is easily forgiving & our barren bush has thick lush foliage on all the trees, but sadly not a lot of grass cover. It is not the end of our rainfall season yet, so we hope for a lot more.

In Nov, the Klaserie catchment area, parts of the southern reserve & the escarpment had incredible rain, resulting in the Klaserie River flowing strongly for a few days & again towards end Dec we also had the river rise slightly.

But it is mostly running very low.

The Olifants River has risen nicely, which is great news for hippos & crocs.

Photo: Alvin Loh



Photo: Norman Allard



Rainfall figures (mm)	Oct	Nov	Dec
2016: Nyeleti	10.5	72	64
Nzumba	25	76	97
2017: Nyeleti	46	17.5	29
Nzumba	35	21	34
2018: Nyeleti	6	33	65
Nzumba	6	25	66

GENERAL GAME SIGHTINGS

Photo: Danny Seymour



Photo: Alison Reeve



Photo: Trevor Matterson



Photo: Werner



Our general game sightings never disappoint & summer season is the time for all things small & cute – the nurseries of baby impalas are adorable. The moms started dropping even before we had good rains. We have also enjoyed good hippo sightings at the Olifants River.

Some non-frequent sightings included honey-badgers, porcupine, African wild cat, Sable antelope, large grey mongoose & a white tailed mongoose.



Photo: Alvin Loh

BIRDING



Photos: L - R: Alison Reeve, Bob Reeve, Vicki Pilcher

As usual, our Woodlands Kingfisher made his vocal comeback in Nov, slightly earlier than usual. But due to lack of food & females around, he kept his beautiful call to himself until the rains, food & females arrived. With the river having pools of water & flowing slightly, the Fish Eagles are back in the area. Nyeleti has prolific & colourful birdlife again, the male paradise flycatcher being the one most eye-catching. All migratory birds are back & some wonderful varied birdlife is being seen on drives. There have also been 3 sightings of ground hornbills, which are always special to see.

BIG GAME SIGHTINGS



Photo: Danny Seymour

(love the bird in his ear)

Majority of our guests have seen buffalo during part of their stay.

Most sightings are of dagga boys.

However, there have been numerous wonderful sightings of small breeding herds, as well as herds of the size of 40 (around Nzumba) up to 100 seen on the Olifants property.

Photo: Trevor Matterson

Our hyena sightings are frequent, with usually more than one sighting during a guests' stay, throughout our properties.

It is always interesting seeing them lurking around lion or leopard kills, waiting for the moment.

We had a hippo die at Hot Spot, close to Kitara, which made interesting viewing with 7 hyenas feeding on the carcass for a few days.

Regarding dens – there was an active den on a neighboring property & at the end of Dec, there was an active den on Mopani Drive.



Photo: Vicki Pilcher

Our elephant sightings are prolific again, with guests seeing these wonderful creatures daily throughout our properties, if not twice a day, as well as in front of camps.

The increase is due largely to the increase in food & water again.

There are a lot of breeding herds, very relaxed, up to 30 in a herd.



Photo: James Twidale

The dogs & their pups were still denning on Pumphouse Pan Drive, at the beginning of Oct, still making for amazing sightings, including seeing adults feeding pups by regurgitation.

Towards middle-end Oct, the pack left their den as the pups were big enough to move around & hunt now.

We are still seeing them relatively often (15 sightings in 3 months).

The pack are doing well but sadly they have lost 1 pup.

Most sightings are on our neighbouring property.





Photo: James Twidale



Photo: Danny Seymour



Photo: Bob Reeve

We have had 17 different sightings over 3 months, a drop from last quarter but still a good number of sightings compared to first half of the year.

Sightings are on our KPNR properties, our Bach/Thompsons/Bernitz neighboring properties, as well as our Olifants property.

The make up of the sightings is still very varied, with numerous views on which lion they are. To date, there is no set coalition again in any areas.

Sightings range from 2 females/7 sub adults, 3 females/3 sub adults/2 youngsters, 5 females/2 cubs, 2 females/3 males, 1 female/2 males, 1 female/1 male/2 sub adults, 5 females/4 sub adults, 5 females/2 young males/4 youngsters, 4 males.

All mixed & interesting – keeping us guessing.

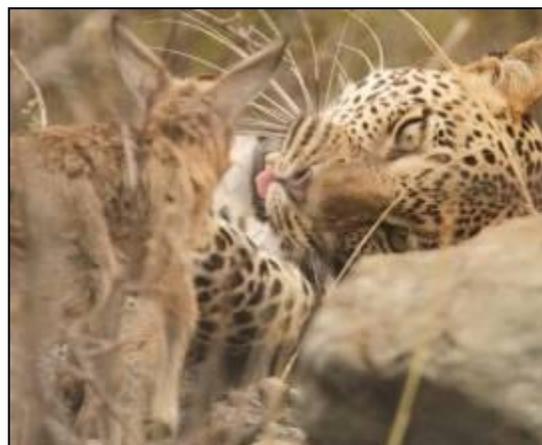
Photo: Werner

Photo: Norman Allard

Photo: Stefan



THE LEOPARD & BABYDUIKER by Stefan



Photos: Stefan

Nature is full of surprises, and every now and then it throws us a curveball, that just shows us that we do not know quite as much as we think we do.

As I always say..... The animals out here don't read books.

As was the case with a once in a lifetime sighting of interaction between predator and prey: While out on game drive with Julian Geerts Safaris, we got a call on the radio from Werner, that he had found a well-known young male leopard from the Dundee area.

We headed in their direction and were fortunate enough to catch up with the leopard as he was moving through the bush. He stopped to scan and sniff his surroundings every now and then, to see if a potential meal was around.

Suddenly he darted into a small shrub. We could hear the moans of an animal inside the shrub, and we knew he had got something. The moaning stopped. We thought that the deed was done.

The leopard lifted his head and walked out from the shrub with his prize in his mouth.

Much to our surprise it was still alive, without a single drop of blood on it:

A baby duiker stood up, after being released from the leopard's grip.

Something so small and vulnerable would be no trouble for a leopard to finish off, but something else was happening here.....

The leopard rubbed his face all over that of the duiker and gently and playfully pawed at it as he rolled onto his back. The duiker stood there frozen. We were lucky enough to see the duiker getting used to the leopard, and we were all in awe about this unusual (actually quite cute) interaction.

They eventually moved on into some thick cover, and we left the sighting.

We did return a while later and could not see either of them again.

We suspect that they kept moving into the thicker area which was inaccessible to us.

This was not the first time that such interaction was seen out in nature.

There are a few theories on this type of interaction:

Sometimes with female leopard or even lion, the maternal instinct could be so strong that they would rather try and take care of a young animal that was chased down or found, than to eat it.

With younger leopards, they could be playing with the young prey, as they are not quite sure what to do yet. This experience will sharpen their hunting skills for future kills.

Another theory is that they keep the young alive to see if the mother would come back for it and then try a hunt her.

Although this was a young male leopard, we know that he was a fully capable hunter, as we have witnessed him make a kill previously. He has been on his own for a long time, and would not have survived this long, if he was not a capable hunter.

It is still unclear as to what the outcome was, but I would suspect that hunger would have set in after a while, and the "friendly" interest in the duiker might have disappeared.

It was a sighting that would be remembered by myself, Julian & his guests for many more years.

Photo: Werner



I have so many incredible photos to choose from, I could fill a newsletter just of leopard pics – thank you everyone! We have had 25 leopard sightings this quarter, compared to 43 from last quarter. The decrease in leopard sightings has resulted in an increase in lion activity.

The necklace-male that I wrote about last, has moved off onto a neighboring territory we don't have traversing on.

Majority of sightings have been with incredibly relaxed leopard & throughout our properties. Stefan's one sighting was 2 females having a dispute. One of Werner's sightings was a male, female & 2 cubs on the Bach property.

Photo: Alvin Loh



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Photos:

Thank you, Werner, Stefan, Alvin Loh, Alison Reeve, Bob Reeve, Danny Seymour, Trevor Matterson, Norman Allard, Rene & Chiara, Vicki Pilcher, James Twidale, Sandy & Sally – for sharing your photos with us, much appreciated!

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