

*The first rains arrived early this year, greening the Kalahari and triggering new life. Lion cubs, migrant birds, meerkat pups, and flowering plants dotted across the red dunes mark summer's transformation.*

## EARLY SUMMER IN THE SOUTHERN KALAHARI



This month, the first rains fell earlier than in recent years – a welcome shift after previous summers – and, hopefully, it's only the beginning. When typical Kalahari thunderstorms rolled through in early November, they brought not only much-needed moisture but the spectacular sunsets that characterise billowing clouds on the horizon. Scattered showers have fallen across the reserve with characteristic Kalahari unpredictability, triggering the transformation that defines this time of year.

Grasses are greening rapidly now, softening the landscape with fresh growth. Among them, the eland's bean has burst into flower, its yellow bottlebrush blooms tucked beneath the leaves, filling the air with a surprisingly sweet fragrance. Dune bushes are flowering too, different species adding yellows, whites and purples to the reserve. Dubbeltjie (devil's thorn) and everlasting flowers are creating blankets of colour across the red dunes, while blackthorn pods shimmer in the low light of early morning and late afternoon, their developing seeds visible when the sun catches them just right.

The wetlands that formed after last season's late rains remain active, supporting a remarkable microcosm of life, such as fairy shrimps. These tiny crustaceans wait dormant in the sand until there is enough water to kickstart and sustain their ancient life cycle.

New life is everywhere. Springbuck lambs have been seen in substantial numbers, while gemsbok calves are being voraciously predated on by wild dogs. The Mokala meerkat group's pups, now a couple of months old, are venturing further afield, while the Rockstars' alpha female is pregnant again.

Two lionesses have given birth this month, with six cubs between them. Our guiding team will continue to give the mums space to nurture and protect their little cubs as they grow bigger and stronger. Sightings of lion cubs and the offspring of other key species are open to guests at the discretion of our head guide and conservation team – usually after six weeks.

Many migratory birds have arrived, both intra-African and seasonal. Black and Diederik's cuckoos returned first, joined by European bee-eaters, Greater striped swallows, Jacobin cuckoos and Lesser grey-backed shrikes. Less commonly seen species have been sighted too: Purple rollers, Crested barbets, and the stately Ludwig's bustard. Owl activity has increased noticeably, with Spotted eagle owl fledglings indicating breeding success.

Insect life has exploded with the rains and rising temperatures. The summer soundtrack of cicadas fills the air, especially during the warmest hours. Guides are seeing dragonflies and clouds of butterflies, including the distinctive African Monarch. Winged termites (alates) have emerged in their breeding swarms, attracting insectivorous birds and nocturnal mammals. Dung beetles are working industriously, rolling balls across red dirt roads, while large millipedes navigate the terrain after dark. Hundreds of small rodent tracks crisscross the veld in the early mornings, a sign of great activity during the night.

The soundscape has shifted entirely. Frogs and toads call after sunset, adding their voices to the cicadas, the owls, and the ever-present hum of fecundity so typical of summer, a time when the ecosystem seems to bristle with life in response to the arrival of rain.