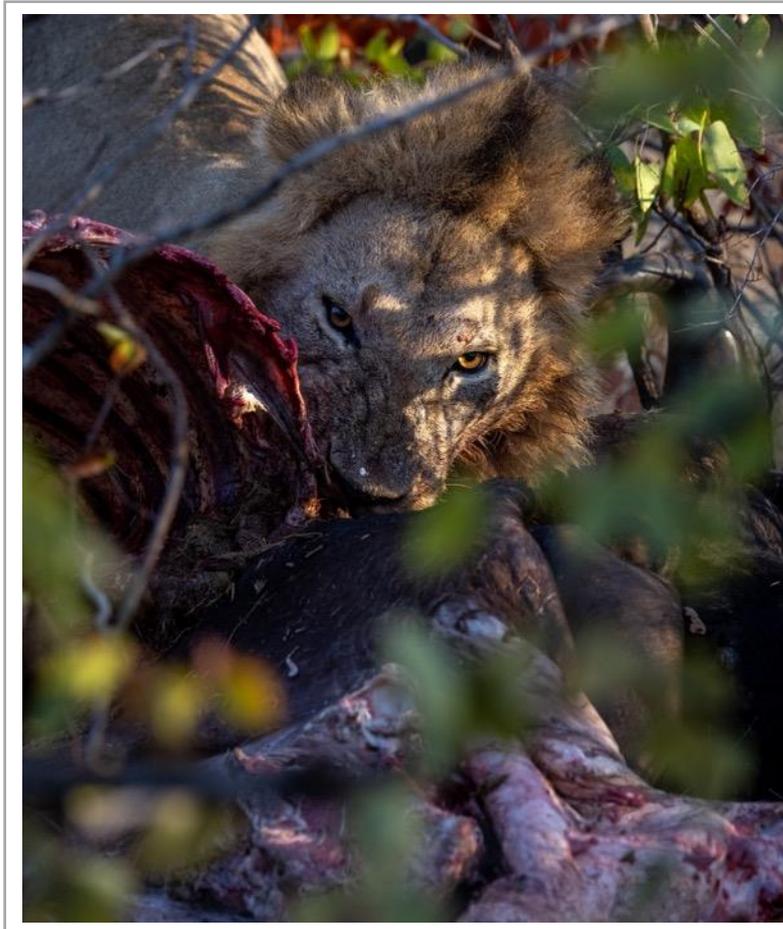


Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT
SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE
For the month of October, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 18.9°C (66.0°F)
Minimum recorded: 13.6°C (56.4°F)
Average maximum: 33.0°C (91.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.6°C (100.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 5.5 mm
Season to date: 10.5 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:10
Sunset: 18:04

The blossoms are out, and green buds wait to burst, although it is still extremely dry. We've had a few really hot days where the mercury has crept over 100°F, as well as some cool overcast mornings with some showers. Bring on the real rain! This weather and the dusty skies have resulted in some of the most jaw-dropping sunset scenes.

It's also a time when sightings are at their zenith, because of the open dry landscape. This is one of the many descriptions from our guides' sighting reports: "On the open plains of Banyini were two bull sable antelope having a fight, under the watchful eye of a spotted hyena. A pack of wild dogs, looking well-fed, relaxed at Banyini Pan, while a crash of five white rhinos enjoyed the shade in the mopane woodland north of the pan."

Here's an overview of the month's sightings:

Lions

It has happened several times this month where guests have seen more than one sighting of lions on a game drive. One afternoon drive even clocked up three different lion sightings.

- Wildebeest, zebra and buffalo have been the main prey items. Some impressive kills have been made by the joint effort of two lionesses.
- Interesting news from the Nduna Pride is that there is a mating pair among them. A Nduna lioness and her cub were seen feeding on the skull of a warthog, at Madope Pan.
- Ten members of the River Pride were viewed sleeping in the shade of thorn bushes. A few days later nine members of the pride tried to hunt giraffe, but the sub-adults lacked experience and gave direct chase.
- A delightful sighting on the Hippo Valley side of the Chiredzi River was of a lioness with three cubs. The cubs were playing while the mother dozed in the shade.
- There have been excellent sightings of territorial males. Two were sleeping in an open area on a cool overcast day. Two were seen feeding on a buffalo carcass near Nanga. One male dined on a buffalo carcass all to himself at Simbiri Dam. Possibly the most impressive was seeing three males feasting on a zebra carcass, west of Old Chimize Pan, with three hyenas hovering in close proximity before being taught some manners and chased by the lions.

Leopards

- The best sighting of the month was of a female frequenting the area around Croc Creek and Nyari. She caught an impala, hoisted it safely in a tree, and fed on it over a couple of days while hyenas lay drooling at the base of the tree.
- It was great to see an adult female leopard looking very relaxed at a dried natural pan, west of the Mahiyani pool, on the Hippo Valley side.
- There was no sighting of the predator, but at Kim's Crossing an impala had been stashed up a tree by a leopard.
- Then, there's the ridiculous situation of guests viewing a leopard for over six minutes as she sat on a rock at the base of the lodge's driveway, seconds after they'd departed from the carpark.

African wild dogs

- Packs of wild dogs have been seen, numbering between 16 and 21.
- A pack of 19 have been seen resting between hunts, with various animals in the same visual including hyenas, a black rhino, and four white rhinos.
- A pack was spotted in the morning north of the Nyamasikana Bridge, looking full and relaxed. Checking on them again in the late afternoon guests got to see them wake up and successfully hunt a Sharpe's grysbok.
- Wild dogs were relaxing in the shade of a fever tree on the Bhanyini before four lions appeared, making their way to the water for a drink. The dogs wisely took off with their pups.
- Battles as old as time were repeated between wild dogs and hyenas, with the hyenas trying to scavenge kills from the dogs.
- A pack of 21 provided fascinating viewing when the pups all started making a particular sound simultaneously, and some of the adults regurgitated meat for them.

Elephants

- A breeding herd of elephants and a breeding herd of buffaloes were observed grazing together in the swamps - a striking scene of two large herbivore species peacefully sharing the same habitat.
- A breeding herd of more than thirty elephants was seen crossing into Hippo Valley through the umbrella tree forest, moving toward the open swamp area as the sun set, their silhouettes outlined against the evening light.
- At Makeche, six elephant bulls were sighted, two of which were impressive tuskers.

- Along the edge of the dam, a group of 25 elephants, including ten calves, were viewed. The young calves were particularly entertaining, playing and mimicking the adults as they fed. At one point, the herd entered the water to feed on aquatic plants, creating an unforgettable scene.
- A funny sighting was that of a bull elephant navigating a steep riverbank. He carefully descended halfway with his legs astride, then lay on his stomach, stretching his front and back legs like a frog, before sliding the rest of the way down.

Buffalos

- About 700 buffaloes converged at Hwata Pan to drink. It was an experience of a lifetime for the guests.

Rhinos

- On several occasions this month white and black rhinos have been seen together or in close proximity, which is most unusual: At Hwata Pan five white rhinos and one black rhino drank together; two white and one black rhino were together at the swamps; while watching lions at Nduna Dam a white and a black rhino arrived to drink; two whites and one black rhino were seen along Buffalo Fence Road.
- On a morning walk a group saw a mother white rhino with a newborn calf.
- A drive got off to an incredible start with a black rhino and her little calf that was about two months old. When the mother noticed the group's presence she took off with her calf following behind her.

Spotted hyenas

- A hyena did itself no PR favour by biting an endangered vulture on the wing amid a feeding frenzy surrounding a carcass.
- Ten hyenas were sleeping close to the road north-east of Nyari. One of the young ones began to make an usual sound, asking for milk. Eventually the mother responded by allowing the cub to suckle. Other youngsters indulged their curiosity and approached as close as possible to the game viewer.

Brown hyenas

- A brown hyena was glimpsed in the Nduna area.

Plains game

- There's no better time than now to see large gatherings of zebras, wildebeest, impala – even groups of 20 giraffes. Spotted in smaller numbers are kudu, eland, sable and Litchenstein's hartebeest. They have no choice but to drink from the last remaining permanent waterpoints. As soon as the rain comes the shy species will melt away again.

Unusual sightings

- A delightful and extremely rare sighting was that of a nyala female with twins!

Birds

- Some of the specials included a pair of racket-tailed rollers flying around the Miombo woodlands, martial and black-chested eagles, and a palm-nut vulture close the hippo skull area on the dam.

Photographic hide

Our guests have been delighted with the closeness of animals and their interaction while viewing them from the sunken photographic hide.

- Animals photographed include white rhinos, elephant bulls, buffalos, impalas, zebras, eland, kudu, wildebeest, a herd of 20 sables, a hartebeest, warthogs, black-backed jackals, hyenas, and three lions.

Rock art

- Visits to rock art sites have been incorporated as resting points on walks, to gain insight into the lives of those that survived and thrived here hundreds of years ago.

Walks

Now, because of the open sparsely vegetated landscape, is an ideal time for conducting bush walks. It's a time to take in the smaller fauna and flora. However, our guests have also seen, while on foot with their guide and tracker team, impalas, zebras, kudus, hyena, wildebeest, giraffes, white rhinos, a lone elephant bull and lions.

Boat cruises

- Boat cruises are a wonderful way to end the day, but we've also done some beautiful morning cruises with atmospheric light and sights.
- You can always expect to see an abundance of birds, and crocodiles and hippos, but because so much of the wildlife is drawn to the permanent water at this time we've also had sightings of buffalo, waterbuck, impalas, nyala, warthogs, elephants and lions.
- A black egret was a special sighting - it performed its umbrella fishing technique.
- Etched in our guests minds forever is the scene of four lions on the shoreline. They started roaring and their thunder was answered by more lions hidden in the thickets. The sound was deafening as it bounced and echoed off the surrounding hills.

Fishing

- The fishing has been great, especially for tilapias. However, the predatory tigerfish have given many bites and fights, but only a couple have been landed.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- Our young guests loved these visits the most – showing their parents how the village elders had just taught them to make fire, pound grain, extract salt from the soil by filtration, divine water, and participate in traditional dance.

Gonarezhou National Park

Daytrips have been made to our neighbour in the south.

- One of these incorporated a tea break at Masasanya Dam, with a herd of elephants drinking there. At Chilojo Cliffs a delicious lunch awaited, framed by the iconic striated sandstone cliffs.

Some bush stories follow, as well as the October Gallery.

Dust on the horizon



*A cloud of dust drifts on the horizon,
Kicked up by a mass of Africa's bison;
Horns curve, dark hides heave,
Oxpeckers dance and flutter with ease.*

My first thought was that a dust-devil was blowing down the track, but then realised it was the classic sign of a large herd of Cape buffalo approaching. When on their way to and from water they herd themselves together and march steadfastly to and fro, kicking up the dust that inevitably surrounds water sources. By the time they are back at their grazing grounds the dust has settled, and they spread out a little more to graze the grass underfoot, not causing as much of a disturbance to the soil.

This roadblock gave us such a good opportunity to observe them. A couple of the older bulls would stand in front of the herd crossing the road, and just fix you with a stare. They were highly efficient traffic police, making sure their kind were protected from the oncoming vehicle. Upon the backs of these wardens were some oxpeckers taking advantage of the stationary beasts and feasting on the insects and arachnids they attract.

Only after the last buffalo, of a herd of well over a hundred had crossed, were we able to continue on our drive. What a spectacle to see, and listen to, as they shuffled along and bellowed to one another.

Dust is such a wonderful element for wildlife photography. It adds drama, depth, movement and atmosphere. Dust particles catch and scatter light, enhancing that golden effect and the mood. Backlit dust gives a halo effect around animals, emphasizing shapes, muscles, and movement — perfect for silhouettes. While dust is the enemy of many a photographer, it is the wildlife photographer's friend!

Continuing the dust theme the elephants on the following page were having the most wonderful dust bath – throwing up great trunkful's of gold and letting it cascade over their skin as a soothing body powder.



Sunset boat cruise

There is something profoundly soothing about cruising on the Malilangwe Dam in the late afternoon - the way the light softens, glows and folds over the water. The warm air whispers on your skin, and the meditative stillness feels almost sacred. Every boat cruise, like every game drive, is different – but you are guaranteed of seeing hippos, crocodiles and birds.

As we approached a pod of hippos individualas broke the surface, their wide nostrils puffing little bursts of mist into the amber air. Every few moments, one would “yawn” an enormous display of teeth, and trying to catch that moment on camera is a challenge.



Shortly after seeing the hippos we spotted a large crocodile lying motionless and mirrored in the shallows, its rough hide blending perfectly with the muddy bank. Ancient and patient it was waiting for the day's last warmth to fade before slipping without a ripple back into the river.

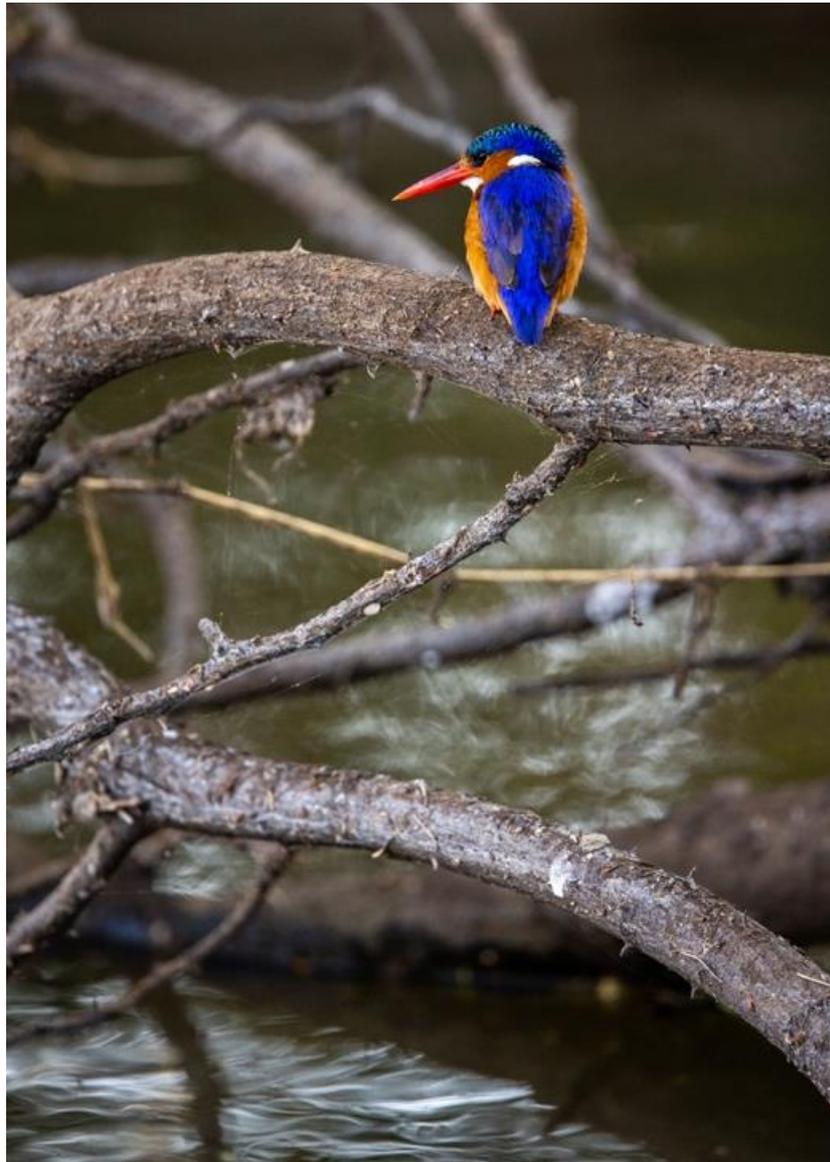


The birds are at their best on a boat cruise and you'll see and hear fish eagles – their unmistakable calls echo across the river valley offering a spiritual soundtrack of Africa.

Our outing coincided with the nesting season of many birds. It was incredible to get a glimpse of these African darter eggs in a nest built in the fork of one of the dead trees that reach up out of the dam. The eggs had a pale green tint to them. Both parents share the incubation of the eggs, which lasts for about one month, and use their feet to warm the eggs since they lack a brood patch. There were several pairs tending their eggs, and the height of the boat as we went past a nest offered us this sneak peek.

Also busy nesting were grey herons. Herons breed in colonies called heronries. Their nests were in the highest of the dead trees in the river. Both parents incubate the eggs for around 25 days, and then both feed the chicks, which fledge when 7-8 weeks old.





The best place to look for kingfishers, is of course during a boat cruise, and we find a kaleidoscope of kingfishers here – African pygmy, brown-hooded, giant, grey-headed, pied, striped, woodland, and this jewel in the crown, the malachite.

Further upstream an anxious Egyptian goose took her clutch of fluffy goslings for one of their first swims.



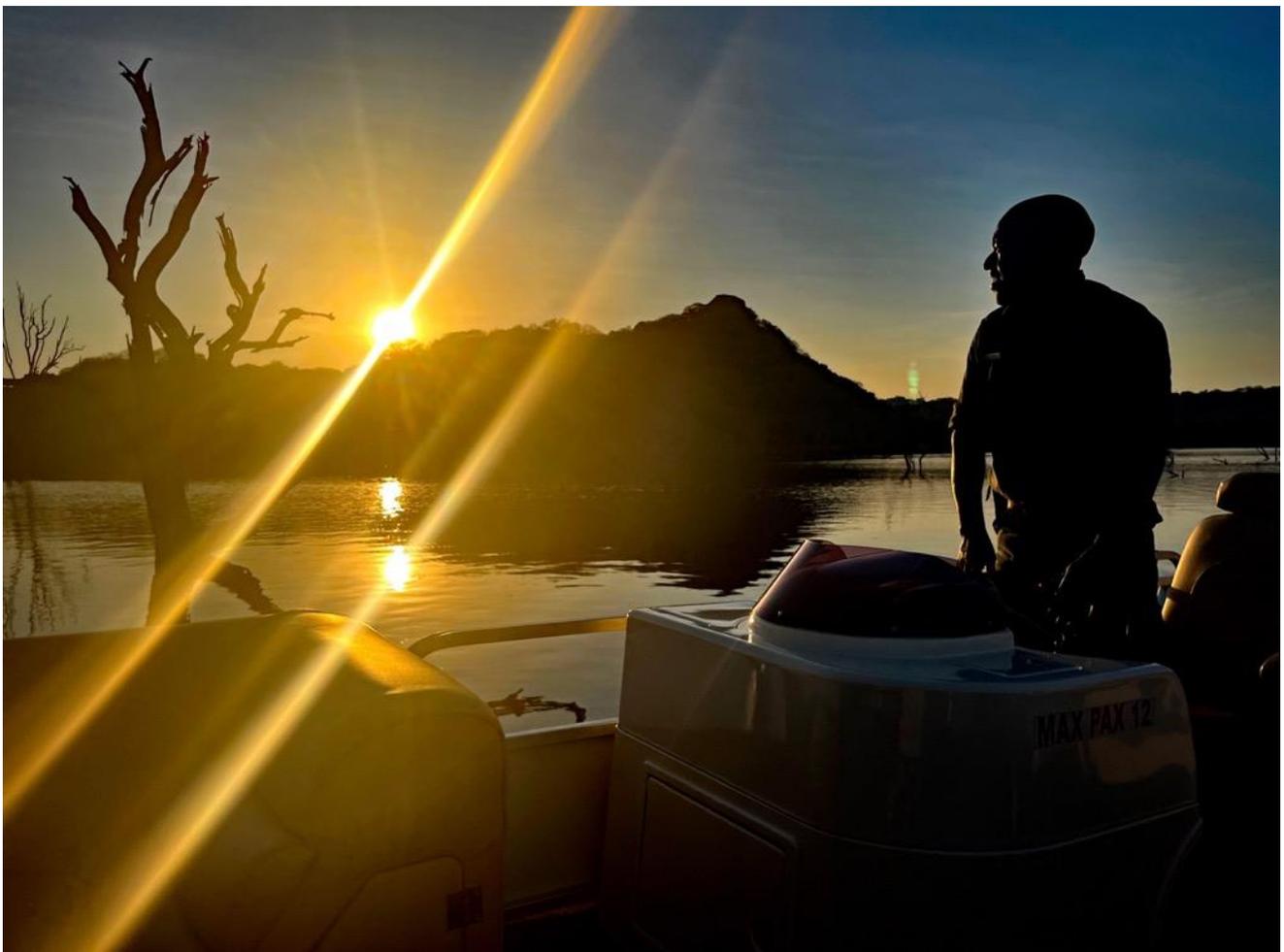
Then we witnessed an extraordinary event, certainly the first time I have seen this here – a bull elephant swimming across the river that flows into the dam, from one bank to the other. It was incredible to see him take to the water! At first he held his tail out the water but as he swam across it was just the tip of his trunk and the area above his eyeline that wasn't submerged. He used his trunk like a snorkel, and his large body provided the buoyancy while his legs paddled beneath the surface. There was no reason for him to cross in front of us at that precise moment, but when he reached the other side he spun around and squirted a trunkful of water directly at us!





Shortly after that we turned and headed for home, drinking in the splendour of the scenery and our indelible experiences. Watching the sun dip behind the horizon, you feel an unexpected peace — the kind that doesn't need words or reason. The world continues, quietly and beautifully, with or without our

attention. And yet, by witnessing it, by allowing ourselves to simply be present in its rhythm, we rediscover something essential: gratitude, humility, and a sense of belonging to something timeless.



Ancient rituals

Watching a pack of African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) stir in the late afternoon is like witnessing an ancient ritual of survival. We'd been sitting with the pack in the Madhope area – a favourite spot of soft sand, rocks, and nearby water. The afternoon light was warming up as the temperature cooled down, and eventually the pack began to rouse. This is how the ritual plays out:

The pups become restless and start pestering each other. They are always grouped together but a distance apart from the adults. Then an adult yawns, its large rounded ears swivelling and alert; then another pushes itself to its feet. Sleeping dogs lie no more and soon the lean bodies are up and active.



As the juveniles paw, jump, nip and chase each other around the adults, you sense the dual functions of this moment: both joy and tuition. The pups practise the social behaviours they will need - play-biting, nipping, seeing who's strongest among them. The adults dish out strict discipline which at times looks severe. They might block a youthful run here, and pin a pup down with a soft bite there, reinforcing the hierarchy and pack cohesion that are essential for survival.

Each dog wears its own mosaic - black, brown, buff, white - unique as a fingerprint. Their scientific name "pictus" means "painted," and the patchwork serves more than just aesthetic value. The coloured blotches help break up the outline of a body when they are sleeping or moving through dappled light, tall grasses and bush-shadow. This type of disruptive camouflage helps the dogs move closer to prey and avoid detection.



After this burst of play and social discipline the pack trots off toward departure. The adults exchange soft vocalisations, their big ears flicking, and everything else seems to quieten and listen. Then the adults move off, the youngsters bound after them. The hunt begins. The pack shotguns out, bodies low, long legs built for endurance. Contrary to the popular image of marathon chases, recent GPS-collar research has shown that many hunts are actually very short sprints—averaging about one minute from chase initiation to end—though this may vary by terrain. The white tail-tips serve as visual signals to fellow hunters in the varied vegetation. As the hunt progresses, the patchwork coats come into their own. The dogs’ blotches catch the shifting light and shadow of the terrain—dry grass, rocky areas, broken woodland.

It’s really hard to follow them when they’re hunting and spread out. One silhouette dissolves into the next and the eye struggles to pick out a single shape. It is as though nature designed their coats to let a pack merge with the environment, to become ghosts on the edge of vision.

Once the prey is brought down, invariably an impala, a call goes out to alert the others. It’s a very specific low hooting sound. Dogs from all directions converge on the carcass. The feeding order kicks in: pups first, then the alpha pair, then older sub-adults. By letting pups feed first the pack ensures their survival, and by prompting older sub-adults to hunt harder (since their access is lower) it enhances overall group efficiency.

This late-afternoon vignette - wake-up, play, discipline, hunt, settle reveals the intimate synergy of evolution, behaviour and environment in one of Africa’s most fascinating carnivores. In their unique coats, in their social drama of teaching and learning, in their pursuit of prey, the wild dogs embody adaptation.

To sit quietly in the afternoon with a sleeping pack, then watch as they wake up and get going is to glimpse not just wildness, but the elegant complexity of a species finely tuned to its world.



Twitter



Top left: A Cape turtle dove, grey go-away-bird, and a Meve's starling arrive at a bar...

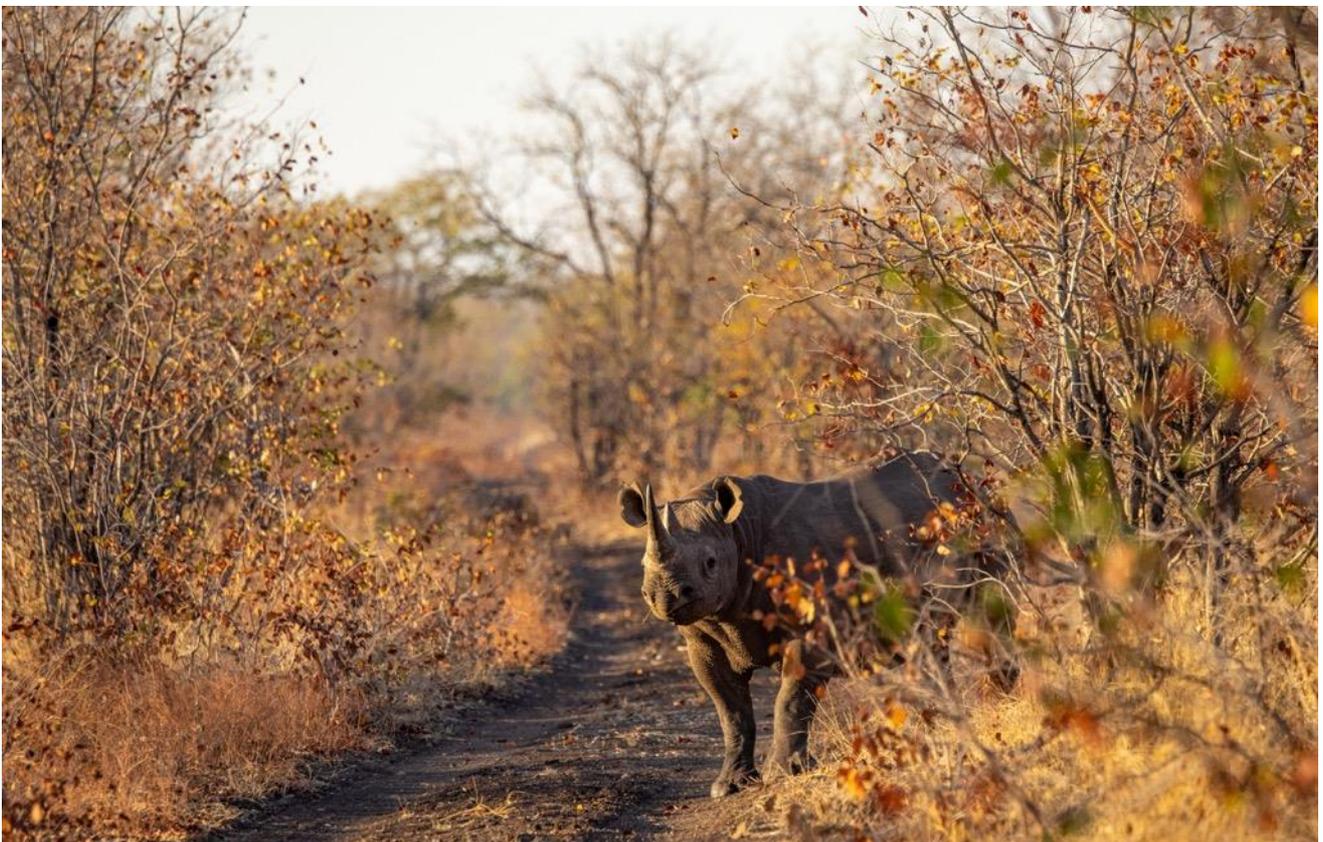
Top right: An African harrier-hawk tries to disguise itself against the lichen-encrusted tree bark.

Bottom left: A brown-hooded kingfisher looking for a meal. They don't only eat fish as their name suggests – this species mainly feeds on insects, and also eats scorpions, reptiles, small birds and rodents, as well as fish.

October Gallery



The change of seasons with blossoms giving way to pops of green: a white rhino and her calf graze on the banks of the Chiredzi; a black rhino steps out of the mopane woodland.





Being ivory-level with elephants from the sunken photographic hide at Hwata Pan. There are many other ways of viewing wildlife at Singita Pamushana – the traditional way is via our safari game-drive vehicles, but you can choose to do walking safaris too, or a boat cruise, or spend a couple of hours holed up in the hide where you can see the wildlife that comes to drink at close quarters, from a low angle, and not disturb their natural behaviour.

The top image is taken with the wide-angle lens on an iPhone, and the image below using a wide-angle 24-105mm lens on a Canon camera. Being so close to the animals offers these wide-angle opportunities.





Nature's nit-picker – the oxpecker, fastidiously combs through a giraffe's coat.
An extremely well-fed hyena bends right down on its knees to have a drink after a night's feasting.





This little punter was dawdling about before making haste to catch up with the rest of the family herd.





The shadows and shapes of *Leonotis leonurus* seedpods polka-dot an elephant's wrinkly hide. The mid-morning comings and goings of impala, zebra and kudu at a waterhole in the far south.



All stories and photographs by Jenny Hishin, unless otherwise indicated.