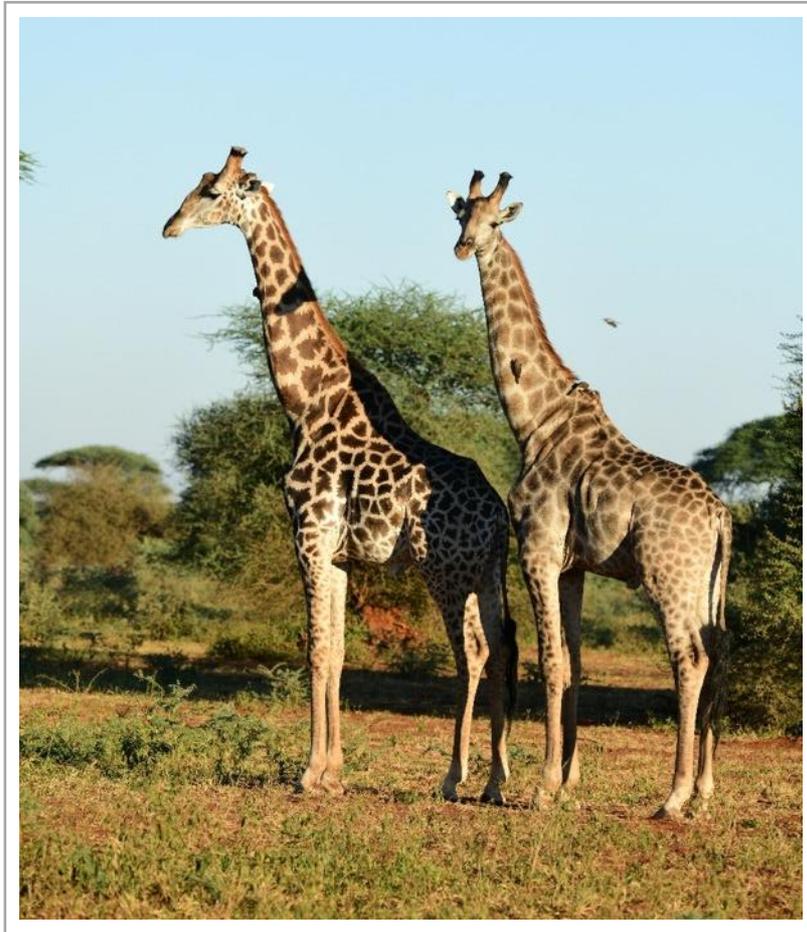


# Singita



Giraffes at Banyini. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko

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

### **Temperature**

Average minimum: 20.0°C (68.0°F)  
Minimum recorded: 17.0°C (62.6°F)  
Average maximum: 32.0°C (89.6°F)  
Maximum recorded: 39.0°C (102.2°F)

### **Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 101.00 mm  
Season to date: 111.5 mm  
\*Season = Sep to Aug

### **Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:04  
Sunset: 18:23

Always a highlight of November, and something we all look forward to, is the arrival of the first impala lambs. We were delighted to welcome our first impala lamb during the second week of this month.

Notwithstanding the prevailing weather change and summer rains, our game drives have been productive with very good sightings of the different species of mammals. The permanent waterholes of Banyini and Hwata have still been frequented by different crashes of both white and black rhinos, mostly at sunset, making sundowner stops extra special.

With the year coming to an end, we were rewarded by the arrival of the summer migrant birds after the first showers of rain. What a joy it is to welcome these friends back!

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

#### **Lions**

- The River Pride has been seen frequently around the swamps, west of the Chiredzi River, and traversing that area from Ngwenyeni Pan all the way south to Chikwete. We were delighted to see a lioness introduce her three cubs to the rest of the pride, resulting in the total number of lions in the River Pride rising to 16.
- East of the reserve, the Nduna Pride has been seen often, feeding on zebra and buffalo carcasses.

#### **Leopards**

- An adult female leopard has been seen on numerous occasions in the peripheral area of the lodge. She is becoming more accustomed to the game viewers. Her latest cubs are now weaned, and we spot them mostly within the area along Ultimate Drive, past the big baobab at the bush diner site.
- We have had sightings of an adult male in the area around 02, on the Malilangwe side. Though shy, he can be viewed if given plenty of distance.

#### **African wild dogs**

- The sightings of the wild dogs this month were fantastic. We had the opportunity to see the big pack which, sadly, has declined from 24 to 15. We observed them on different occasions hunting impala.

#### **Elephants**

- The swamp area across the Chiredzi River has been home to the breeding herds of elephant as they enjoy grazing on the lush vegetation, and browsing in the forest of the umbrella tree woodland.

#### **Buffalo**

- There have been big herds of buffalo drawn to the grazing available within the southern part of the reserve. However, they are stalked by members of the Nduna Pride taking advantage of the weaker bovine members.

#### **Rhinos**

- White rhinos: The open plains of Banyini and Hwata have been the hub for these herbivore species as these are still the best places to drink and mud wallow.
- Black rhinos: The area around Hwata has been very active with different adult females with calves, as well as bulls, coming to drink just after sunset. They've given a couple of mock charges to the game viewers whilst the occupants have been enjoying sundowners!

#### **Spotted hyena**

- The spotted hyenas have been active around the West Valley, Banyini, and Nyari areas. We had the opportunity to see many of them. On one occasion, we watched as they fought with wild dogs over an impala kill.

#### **Brown hyena**

- We had an amazing sighting of a brown hyena on Binya Road near Chikokovele turn-off. It was lying down resting under a tree.

### **Plains game**

- Mid-mornings have been very rewarding at waterpoints with different herds of zebras, impalas and even majestic-looking sable antelope coming to drink. Driving the river loops has resulted in glimpses of Lichtenstein's hartebeest.

### **Birds**

- The summer heat being cooled by the early rains received has resulted in a number of the summer migrants arriving. The reserve is now heaven for these precious feathered species that include broad-billed rollers, woodlands kingfishers, red-chested cuckoos, and red-backed shrikes. The area is alive with their melodies.
- The permanent water sources have also attracted black egrets, black-backed night herons, osprey and bat hawks.

### **Photographic hide**

- We had great sightings in the blind of many animals, especially at the beginning of the month. There were huge numbers of plains game, white rhinos and elephants. However, as soon as we received rain, the animals stopped coming to drink in such large numbers.

### **Rock art**

- Our guests are unfailingly enthralled with visits to the different rock art sites that we have along the sandstone rocks in the reserve.

### **Walks**

- Nature walks have been quite active with observations of different herbivores. We've conducted walks in the open area in the south of the reserve, as well as the rocky outcrops from Chinzwini all the way to Chikwelani.

### **Boat cruises**

- Sunset boat activities have been very popular with great sightings of herds of elephants swimming in the Nyamasikana River, not very far off from the pod of hippos that are resident opposite the Devil's Jungle area. There have also been different sightings of black rhino bulls.

### **Fishing**

- Fishing excursions have brought excitement to our guests with bream fishing being on the top of the list, mostly during the mornings. Predatory tigerfish have kept guests' adrenaline pumping – a few have been rewarded by hooking and landing some big fish after a good fight.

### **Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft**

- We had a few visits to Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft with our guests. They loved interacting with the community members and learning about their way of life. They demonstrated how to make fire by friction, prepare local dishes, make arrow heads, water divining and basket weaving.

### **Gonarezhou National Park**

- The Gonarezhou trips were great, featuring sightings of many elephants and plains game. The main attraction is the magnificent Chilojo Cliffs.

**Some bush stories follow, as well as the November Gallery.**

## The rain season has finally begun

Story by Daffwell Marumahoko

The cracked, dry ground is now filling with water, releasing a sweet, earthy scent as the moisture seeps deep into the soil. Seeds finally received enough water to germinate, and within days the landscape transformed into a soft carpet of green grass. Trees burst into fresh foliage, joining the renewed vibrancy of the landscape.

Impala and wildebeest are giving birth to their young, with plentiful food available for both mothers and calves. Flowers of many colours now bloom across the area, while frogs sing through the night. Migratory birds, such as red-backed shrikes, broad-billed rollers, and European rollers have returned. Hornbills are nesting in tree holes, with males busily feeding the females as they incubate their eggs. Eagles and other birds are expected any day now.

It is one of the most beautiful times of the year, when all plants are lush and green. This is truly a season that must be experienced.



*Scadoxus multiflorus*: Blooms during early summer and adds a pop of colour. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi



Male lion at Chibi. Photo by Nicholas Gaunje

## Interactions with Butch the elephant on a walk

Story by Time Mutema

I had guests who had been on safari numerous times - their preferred destinations being Tanzania and Botswana. This time around they did a circuit starting in the open plains of Tanzania, and adding in Zimbabwe, before going on their way to Botswana.

It transpired that during their safari experiences they had never experienced a “big game approach” so I thought it would be ideal to do one with them. We set out at first light, bright and early, to the south of the reserve, checking for fresh elephant tracks along the way which we came across south of Hwata. We embarked off the vehicle and I gave them a safety talk. As we went out walking, I pointed out some signs of what would have taken place during the course of the night, and after tracking for a good hour we were rewarded with a very good sighting of the giants of the world. “Butch” is an elephant bull we guides have all come to recognise and admire. He is almost a “100 pounder” – a reference to his huge tusks, and very relaxed on foot as long as you give him enough distance, and the wind is in your favour. We managed to get to about 40 meters of him as he calmly carried on feeding in the cathedral forest of mopani along the bank of the Mahande River.

After viewing him for close to half an hour we left him in peace and the guests were quite blown away with the encounter. They said it was like a dream, and have definitely added Zimbabwe to their list of favourite safari destinations!

## Wild dogs

Story by Nicholas Gaunje

Some weeks ago we had an interesting day of wildlife observation that my guests and I were captivated by. We had an amazing sighting of a pack of 21 wild dogs that included several pups.



Wild dog pup checking out the vehicle.

Photos by Stephen Chinhoi

The highlight was witnessing the wild dogs hunt. We were lucky enough to observe them as they coordinated their efforts to take down an impala. It was a breathtaking display of teamwork and agility; their hunting strategy relied on speed and relentless pursuit. Once they had successfully caught the impala, they didn't immediately dismember their prey. Instead, the dogs gave the puppies a chance to feed first. This behaviour highlighted the pack's social structure and the importance they place on nurturing their young.

We spent considerable time with the wild dogs, observing their interactions. The adult dogs were not only focused on feeding but also engaged in play with the pups. It was heartwarming to see how they care for each other, reinforcing the bond that holds the pack together.

Just a few minutes later, the atmosphere shifted dramatically. A clan of eight hyenas arrived on the scene, clearly intent on stealing the hard-earned meal from the wild dogs. The tension was noticeable as the hyenas attempted to seize the kill. However, the wild dogs quickly regrouped and displayed remarkable courage and determination. They chased the hyenas with a ferocity that showcased their strength and pack mentality.

We observed the standoff for an extended period, hardly daring to blink as the drama unfolded before us. The wild dogs employed a combination of strategic movement and vocalizations to protect their hard-won prize. In the end, their perseverance paid off. The wild dogs successfully chased off the intruding hyenas, reclaiming their kill and ensuring that the pups would get their share.



Hyenas fighting for an impala kill with wild dogs.

Photo by Nicholas Gaunje

It is with much sadness that I've now noted that the pack size has reduced to 15. Unfortunately, we suspect that some of the pups may have fallen prey to lions or hyenas, a harsh reality of survival in the wild. It is a vivid reminder of the harsh realities of nature, contrasted with the beauty of cooperation and familial bonds within the wild.

During the first week of November we as guides were privileged to attend a scorpion course conducted by the conservationist and scorpion expert Jonathan Leeming. For some of us it was more of a refresher having first done it about 15 years ago as an introduction. This time the audience was a combination of the Singita guides and our neighbours, the Gonarezhou field guides.

The theme was identification methods of the different species, as well as to try to add more species to the list of those species we had identified in the year 2010. It also involved ways to tell how medically important some of the species are, and the first aid to be applied in case of a sting.

These were the species identified in 2010:

Flat rock scorpion (*Hadogenes troglodytes*)

Tree creeper scorpion (*Opisthacanthus asper*)

Eastern bark scorpion (*Uroplectes vittatus*)

Olive lesser-thicktail scorpion (*Uroplectes olivaceus*)

Ground burrowing scorpion (*Opisthophthalmus glabrifrons*)

South African/Transvaal thicktail scorpion (*Parabuthus transvaalicus*)

Our search through the veld here at Malilangwe and in Gonarezhou resulted in us being rewarded by identifying three more species - two in the *Uroplectes* genus and one more in the *Parabuthus* genus.

They are:

Common lesser-thicktail scorpion (*Uroplectes carinatus*)

Chubb's lesser-thicktail scorpion (*Uroplectes chubbi*)

Mozambique thicktail scorpion (*Parabuthus mossambicensis*)

A total of nine species have so far been identified in our area of operation.



During the course we managed to learn scorpion handling techniques of specimens that are less venomous, such as the flat rock scorpion. The venomosity rule of thumb for the highly venomous and weakly venomous are to look at how thick the tail is and how small the pincers are. Those with thick tails and small pincers are highly venomous, and those with bigger pincers and smaller tails are mildly venomous.

The venom of a single scorpion may include several different neurotoxins, and each is thought to perform a function targeting specific nerve cells. Scorpions use their venom for more than one purpose. The most obvious is prey capture, where scorpions with powerful pincers may simply crush their prey, those with weaker pincers grasp their prey and sting it several times until it is subdued. By using its venom a small scorpion can be ferocious and catch prey much larger than itself. Venom is also used as a defence mechanism against animals such as honey badgers which prey heavily on scorpions. However, some mammals in the evolutionary race are immune to scorpion stings.

Lectures done during the course also included first aid response that involved scene scenarios and possible species identification according to the environment one is in, as different species have different habitats.

During the evenings we would go out in the field to capture, identify and set traps for different species which we would then identify during the day before releasing them back to their environments.

The course was of paramount importance, taking our guiding skill to another level and learning how one can introduce the fascinating topic to guests and children on safari. After the course we all participated in an online exam which we all did very well in! The guiding department gives a great vote of appreciation to those that organised the course and a big thank you to our instructor Jonathan Leeming - his courses are always impactful and fun.



Scorpion training. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko



Mozambique thicktail scorpion.



Wolf spider.  
Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko

## The spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)

Story by Stephen Chinhoi

The most misunderstood predator in Africa is one of the two hyena species that are found at Singita Pamushana. The other is the brown hyena (*Hyaena brunnea*), which is less commonly seen but is also found in the area. Despite the fact that spotted hyenas are skilled hunters, they were misinterpreted as such. In the beautiful landscape of Singita Pamushana, hyenas have been observed hunting baby giraffes and often dominating them. On some occasions, hyenas do follow wild dogs to steal their kills.

On one morning game drive, I was watching a leopard lying on a rock, and moments later, an impala ram came springing past. Before I could be certain of what was happening, five wild dogs appeared chasing the impala but then the leopard took over the chase and killed the impala. Within a short space of time, four spotted hyenas showed up and stole the carcass from the leopard!

The body structure of hyenas give them a very energy-efficient gait and they have incredible stamina. They can easily cover a distance of over 40 km in one night. They have powerful jaws which helps them to crush bones. Hyenas are social animals under the leadership of a female (larger than the males) known as the matriarch. They are also intelligent animals. On several occasions I have watched hyenas feeding near waterholes and they cache excess meat in the water to hide it away from other possible scavengers which may include jackals and vultures.

Cubs are dependent on fat and protein-rich milk for up to six months of their lives, and they can still be suckling for about a year. Some myths surrounding hyenas suggest that the females are hermaphrodites, which is not true since females have a pseudo-penis and pseudo-scrotum that only look like male anatomy. In fact, that anatomy is a clitoris which mimics the male anatomy.

In African folklore, hyenas are associated with witchcraft - their gait and the distances they cover are said to be designed for a witch to ride and cover an incredible distance at night. Being nocturnal animals reinforces the story with witches operating in the cover of night!

Spotted hyenas are territorial animals and mark the edges of their territories with middens. The faeces in the middens appear white due to the calcium in the bones that would have been crushed and ingested. They live in clans.



Hyena at Nyari. Photo by Nicholas Gaunje

Spotted hyenas are vocal, and they have about ten different calls.

Hyenas provide crucial ecosystem services that are vital for environmental health as they act as nature's clean-up crew by controlling disease and regulating populations of other animals. However, hyenas that live near communities are quite unpopular with the locals as they tend to prey on their livestock, widening the gap in human-wildlife conflict.

Hwata is one of the best photographic opportunities one can ever experience on safari. The blind/hide is at Hwata waterhole. There is a constant flow of wildlife coming and going, but usually more wildlife on hot days. Morning time to about midday is the best time to see plains game, ranging from impala, wildebeest zebra, eland, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, and even sable antelope.

The advantage of being in the hide is the way it was constructed, in such a way that it is underground and eye-level with the waterhole. If you are not making noise, you will enjoy all the wildlife without the animals realizing your presence. On one good morning, I watched seven elephant bulls coming to drink and mud bath - they also splashed muddy water onto the guests in the blind, creating a memorable experience!

We have also watched white and black rhinos coming to drink. White rhinos will quite often do territorial marking by defecating on dung middens and urinating on the dung, then breaking the droppings using their hind feet to carry the scent for marking purposes. During a good session in the blind, it is very easy to record multiple rhinos. I have had the privilege of watching black rhinos coming to drink at the blind just before sunset.

Photography from the blind is more dependent on either morning soft light or evening soft light, which we call the golden hour, for the best pictures.



Zebras arriving at Hwata Pan. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi

I have been lucky enough to see a peregrine falcon hit a dove that then fell into the water, and the falcon tried to retrieve it, though it was not easy. It ended up giving the guests a good photographic opportunity as the falcon kept coming back, trying to pick up the dove. Bird life is busy in the mornings and late afternoons. Every evening we get to watch guinea fowls, doves, and sandgrouse coming to drink.

Giraffes are one of the most interesting animals to watch drink, due to their long legs and necks - they have to splay their legs so as to reach the water and drink.

From the blind, you also get to watch animal behaviour as there is dominance and hierarchy from the larger animals to the smaller ones. Some animals like impalas and warthogs have to constantly check the surroundings, making sure that the coast is clear before coming for a drink due to the possible presence of predators.

Hwata blind is always a spectacle comparable to being in a movie house where you are waiting for the movie to start, but you are guaranteed of no disappointments! One moment it is quiet and the next moment is like a rush hour at a busy pub in a busy street. Big buffalo herds  $\pm 400$  do regularly visit, and from inside the blind it is an amazing spectacle. It takes a long time for them to quench their thirst and some buffalo have to wait for others to finish drinking before they can have their turn. Usually, you can hear the noise and see the dust before seeing a single buffalo when they are coming from a long way.

I have observed a lioness trying to kill a white rhino calf - the calf ran in front of the mother, and she made an alarm call. The rhinos that were drinking all came to her rescue, and the lioness was chased off.

In my opinion Singita Pamushana is the best place for photographic safaris from the boat, walking safaris, game drives, and from the blind.



White rhino bull at Hwata. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko



Gathering of a crash. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi



Reflections: buy two, get two free! Photo by Stephen Chinhoi



Lioness drinking at Hwata. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko

Twitter



Left: Lilac-breasted roller - the most photographed bird on safari. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi  
Right: Fish eagle at Malilangwe Dam. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko



Double-banded sandgrouse - the best camouflage of any chicks. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi  
Crowned lapwing - the eggs blending with the surroundings. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi

November Gallery



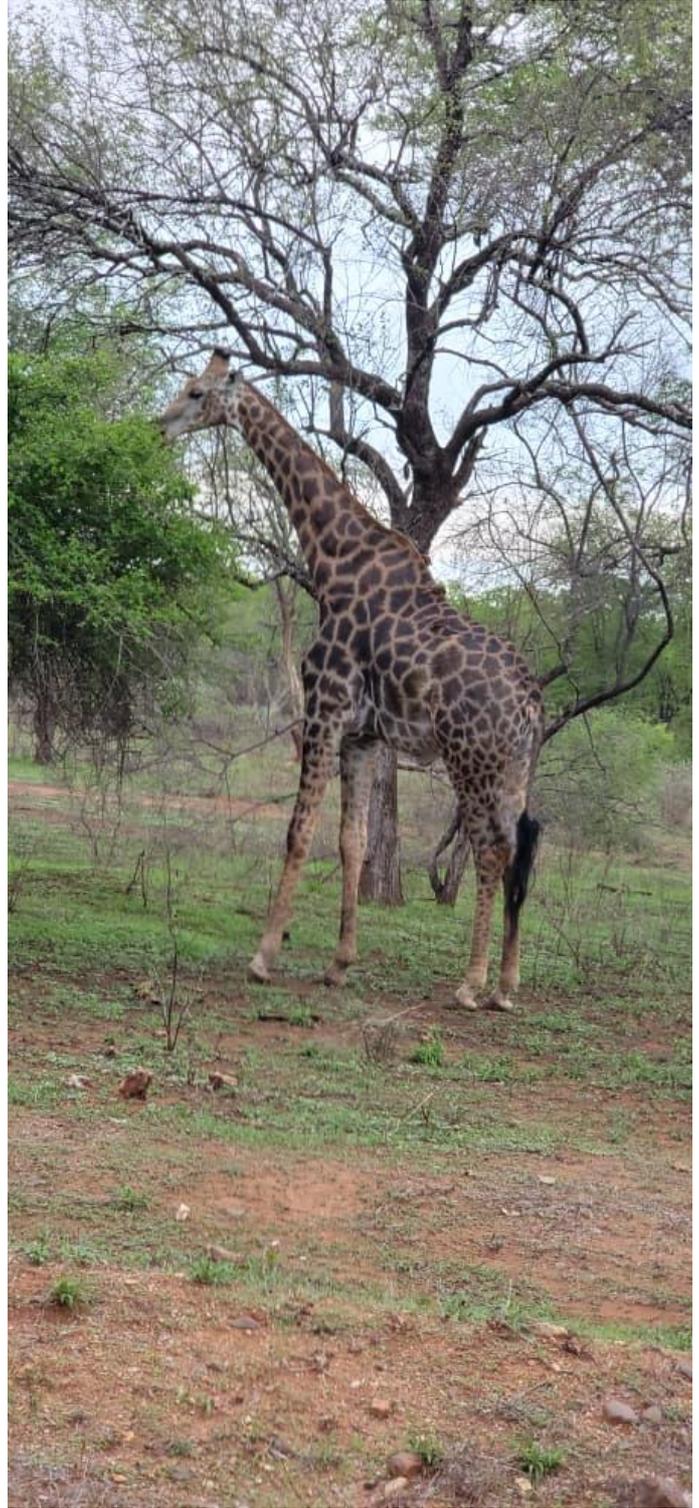
Common flat-lizard – they are always entertaining guests at the Jackalberry Bar. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi  
Always lovely to see a mother giraffe and her baby. Photo by Stephen Chinhoi





White rhino bull at sunset. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko  
Black rhino bulls fighting at Chibi. Photo by Nicholas Gaunje





Giraffe at Banyini. Photos by Nicholas Gaunje