Singita

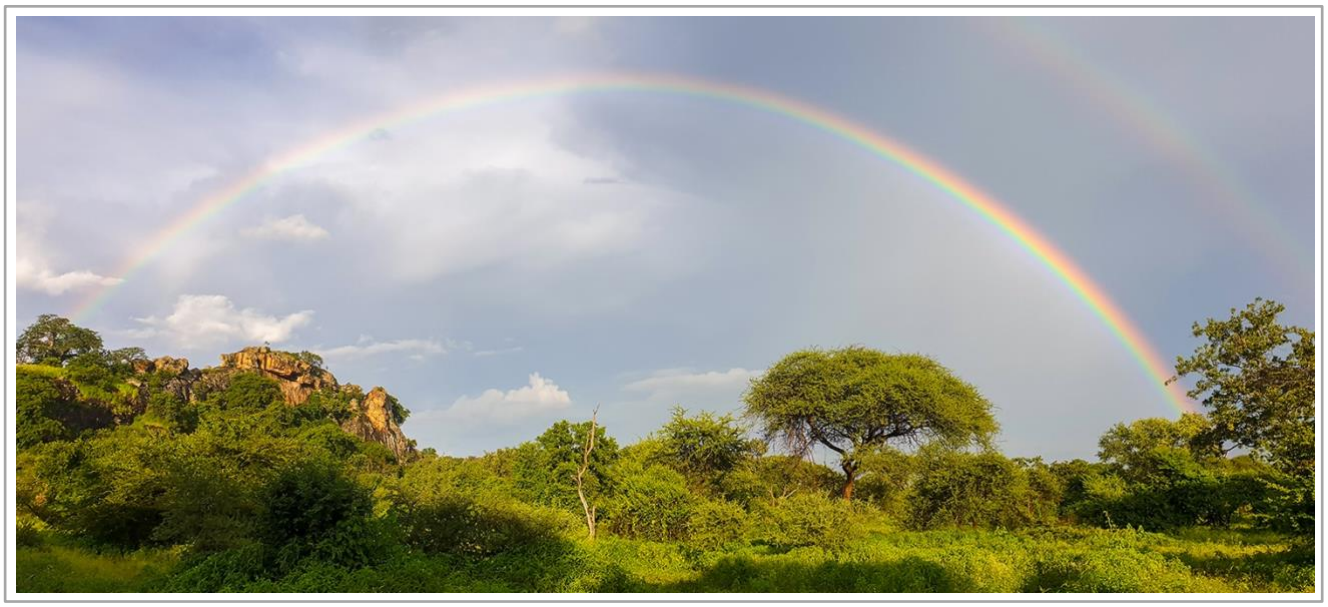


Photo by Mark Saunders

**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**
**SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE**
**For the month of February, Two Thousand and Twenty One**

| **Temperature** | | **Rainfall Recorded** | **Sunrise & Sunset** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average minimum: | 22.1˚C (71.7˚F) | For the month: 79.1 mm | Sunrise: | 05:51 |
| Minimum recorded: | 18.9˚C (66.0˚F) | For the year to date: 333.1 mm | Sunset: | 18:20 |
| Average maximum: | 31.1˚C (87.9˚F) | | | |
| Maximum recorded: | 37.1˚C (98.7˚F) | | | |

The rains continue and the dams spill every time it rains. Driving through the bush is like wandering through a maze the vegetation is so high! But we have started to notice the change in season coming on. The temperatures are slowly dropping, and the days are contracting slightly. It's butterfly season here which is simply a delight!

We are so looking forward to guest check-ins in the near future. We are as impatient to guide you as you are to join us!

**Here is a snapshot of February's sightings:**

**Lions:**

- The Chiloveka Pride has been frequenting the southern side of Mahande Loop which is the northern end of their territory. The male from this pride has been seen a few times on his own patrolling his territory. He was last seen on the Binya Road near the Mahande Bridge.

- The River Pride has been spending time between the swamps and Hippo camp area.

**Rhinos:**

- White rhino sightings this month have been more extensive around the Hwata and Mahande Loop areas as well as around Southern Straights Road. The regulars still make appearances in the evenings at Banyini Pan.
- Staff had a wonderful sighting of a crash of seven white rhinos at a pan in the north east.
- Black rhino sightings have been very scarce this month, most sightings have been seen on foot between Chimize Highway and Buffalo Fence Road.

**Elephants:**

- There have been a few sightings of big elephant bulls frequenting different parts of the Chiredzi River.
- There was a large breeding herds of elephants enjoying the cooling waters of Sosigi Dam during the heat of the day.

**Buffalo:**

- The large buffalo herds have been seen frequenting the area between Ganyaan Loop and Orphan Road. You have never seen buffalo so healthy and fat!
- Many different groups of old battle-axe buffalo bulls are seen regularly.

**Wild dogs:**

- There was one Africa wild dog seen this month at the end of Access Road.

**Cheetah & Leopards**

- Without game drives going out, and with the grass being so long and the roads so muddy, we haven't spotted any spotted cats this month. As soon as we begin dedicated game drives and tracking again we'll start recording sightings of these somewhat elusive felines.

**Plains game:**

- The plains game is absolutely fantastic! Nice big journeys of giraffe and herds of eland are the order of the day on Banyini at the moment.

**Fishing**

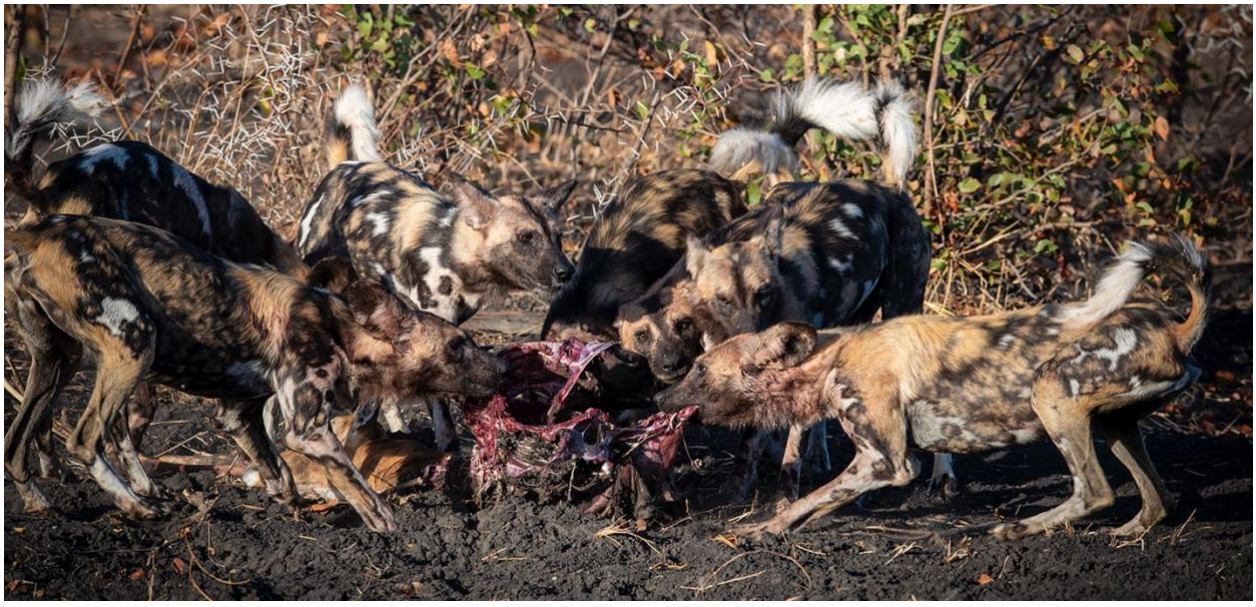
- You cannot believe the size of tiger and bream that the young fishing fanatics on the property are catching! The have been perfecting their skills with different types of baits, jigs, lures and flies – and then releasing their trophies to fight another day.

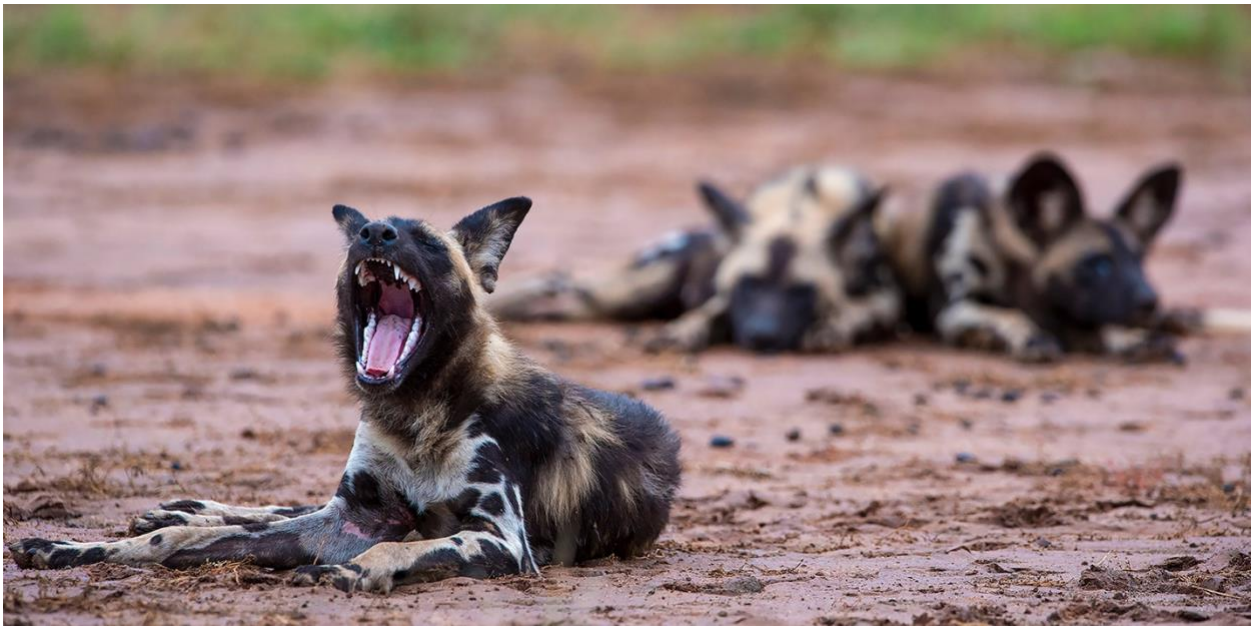
**Some interesting bush snippets follow, as well as the February Gallery of images.**

**Making it extra snappy** **Article and photos by Jenny Hishin**

I came across an interesting term recently, that of Bite Force Quotient (BFQ). BFQ is the regression of the quotient of an animal's bite force in newtons divided by its body mass in kilograms. Simply put it is an animal's bite force adjusted for its body mass allometry. It does not take into account sharpness of teeth or other differences in tooth form.

What amazed me was that African wild dogs *(Lycaon pictus)* have the highest BFQ of all living Carnivora. Their BFQ is 142 which is greater than that of a tiger (127) or a hyena (117). African wild dogs only weigh about 25 kgs – they are very lithe spry creatures. They seem especially small compared to the prey they hunt, and so their extremely powerful bite force quotient is to their advantage. A wild dog will sometimes even take its chances hunting a kudu, which weighs about 200 kg, on its own.

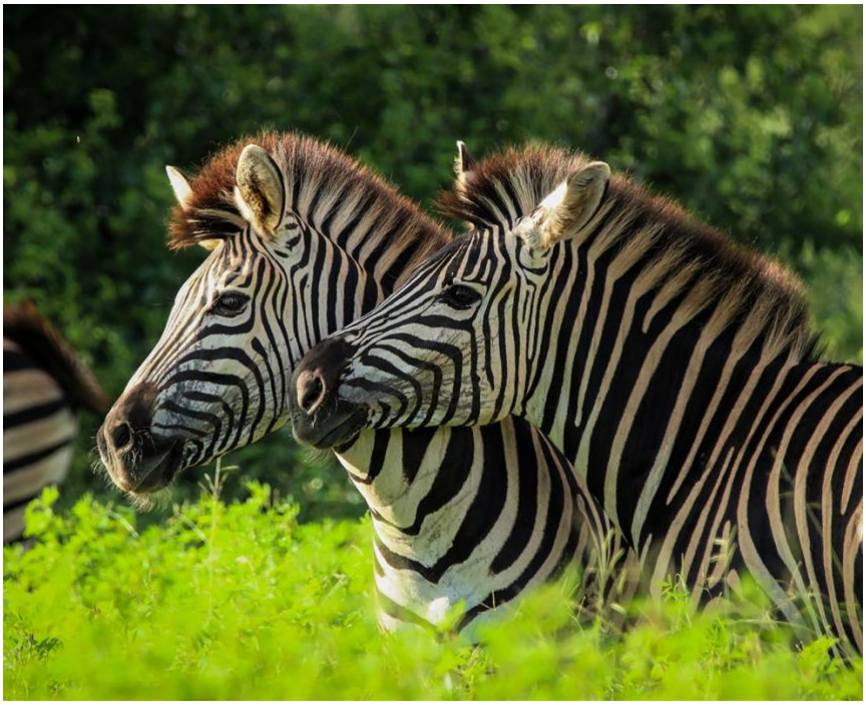




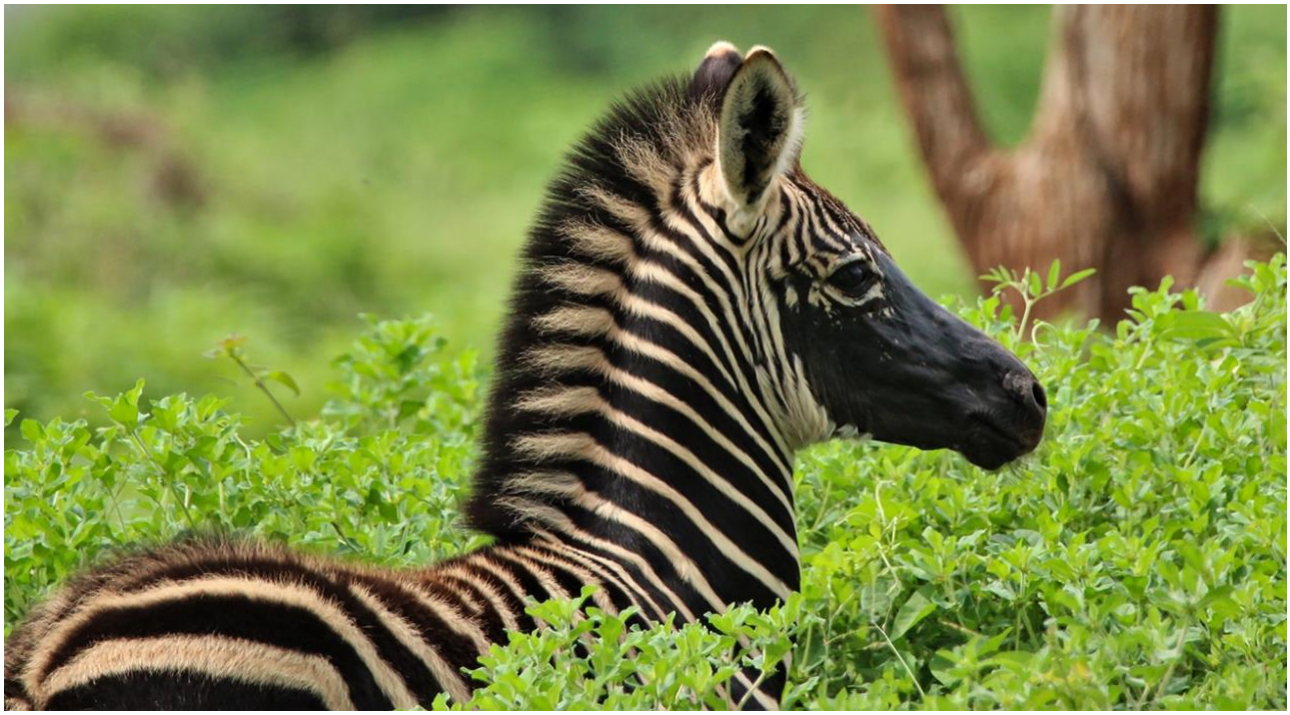
**Black with white stripes** **Article by Jenny Hishin, photos by Sarah Ball**

We are seeing some even stranger patterns on the zebras – it looks like fine black lines on the adults' muzzles and in some cases the foals have black faces! They are losing some of their white hairs and this is because of a contagious skin disease that's prevalent at this time, caused by mites. *Sarcoptes scabiei* mites are the cause of sarcoptic mange.

The tiny mites burrow into the outer layer of a zebra's skin and form tunnels. The female mites lay their eggs within the tunnels and in a few days the larvae hatch and move in the tunnels or move onto the surface of the zebras' skin. The foals are affected the most because the condition spreads when the zebras come into direct contact with one another, and the foals have a lot of contact with their mothers when suckling, staying close for protection and when being groomed.



It's not a condition to be concerned about at this stage, and is part of a natural cycle. But it does prove beyond doubt that zebras are black with white stripes! Since the mite is eating away the white fur, all that we can see is the underlying black skin of the zebra.



**All about anting** **Article by Brad Fouché**

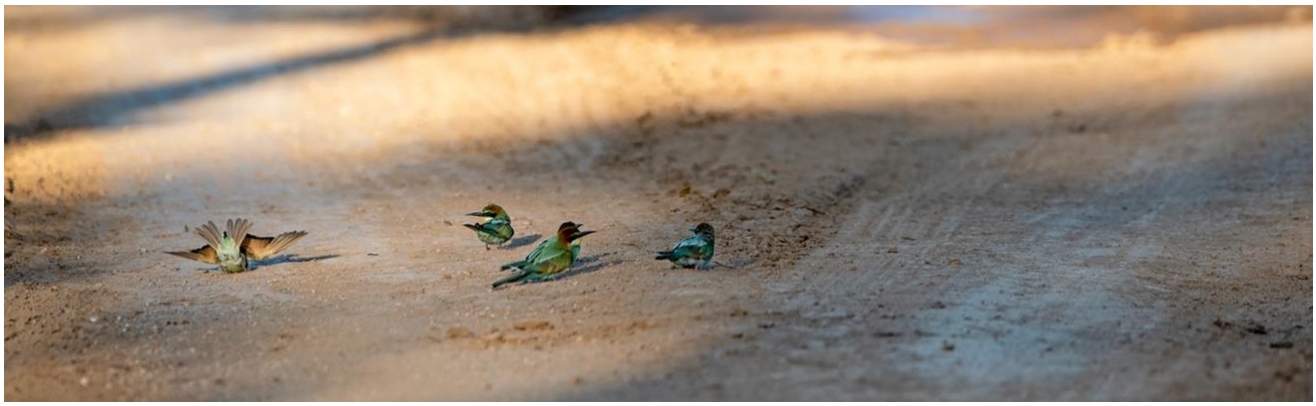
Anting is a behavioural grooming maintenance trait in birds. The first detailed records of anting behaviour are from the late 1930s. Anting has been recorded on six continents, and has been seen in several avian orders - mostly passerines, making up more than 200 bird species.

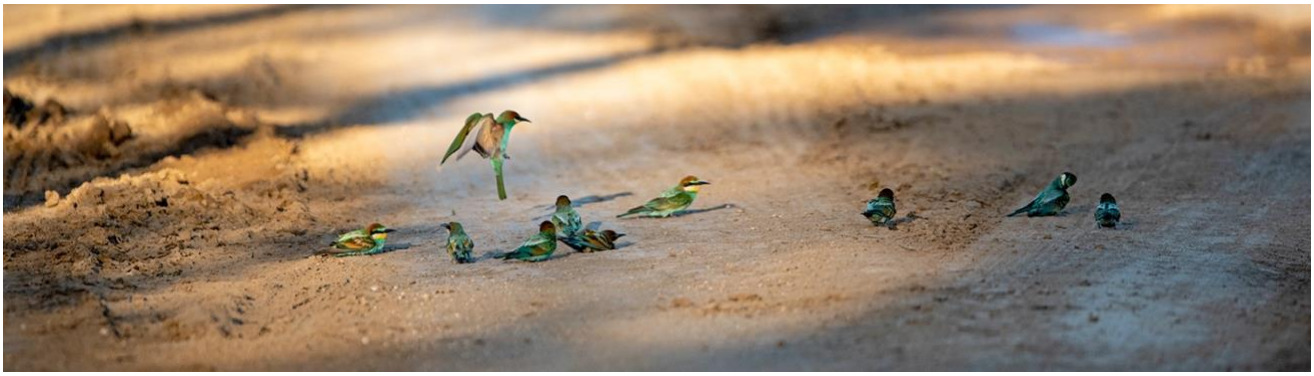
Anting behaviour happens in two forms. The first being, whereby the bird catches individual ants and in a preening fashion rubs the ant amongst their feathers. This is known as active anting. The second being when birds will locate an ant nest and fly down and lie in the nest sand provoking the ants and letting the ants crawl all over them. This is called passive anting. Ants that birds usually choose are from the genus *Formica*, which spray or exude formic acid in attack and defence.

The functions for anting, at this stage can only be hypothesized, but educated assumption leads us to believe that birds provoke the ants and this in turn causes the ants to release their defensive secretions. It is thought that the ant secretions may have an insecticidal, miticidal, fungicidal, or bactericidal properties. It has been suggested that anting could possibly be a way of ridding ectoparasites, being an extra additive to preen oil for feather grooming, decreasing skin irritation during moult, food preparation (removing formic acid from ant bodies to make them palatable), sensory self-stimulation, etc.

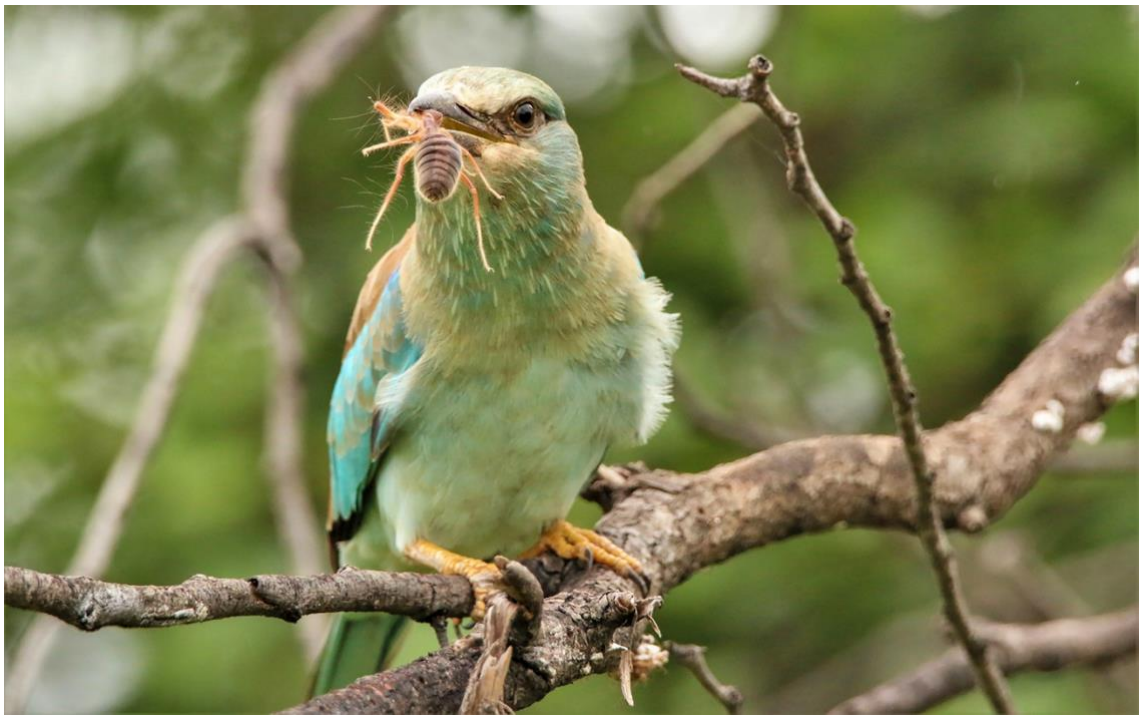
Anting at times of high humidity might explain the documented fungicidal properties in ant secretions. It has been noted that most anting seems to take place in spring and summer, and this coincides with the time that most bird species moult and most ant species are active.

Anting is a special behaviour to witness, so next time you see birds on the ground and you think they are just dust bathing, try and have a closer look!

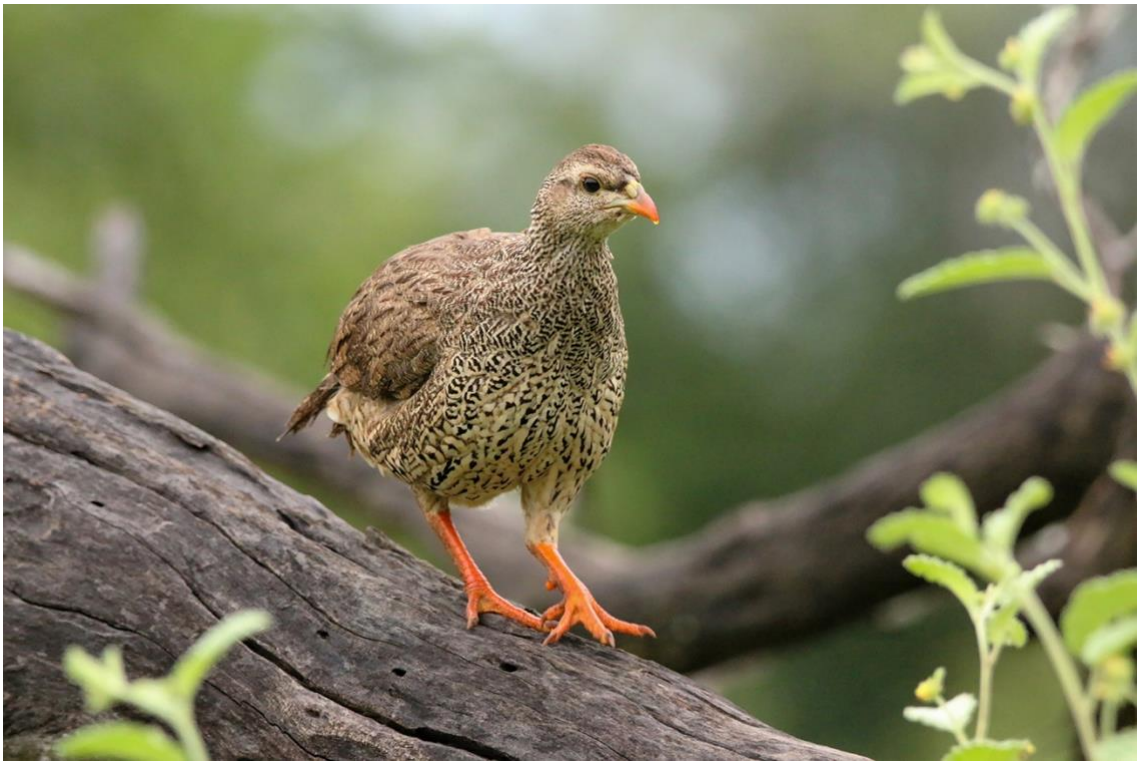


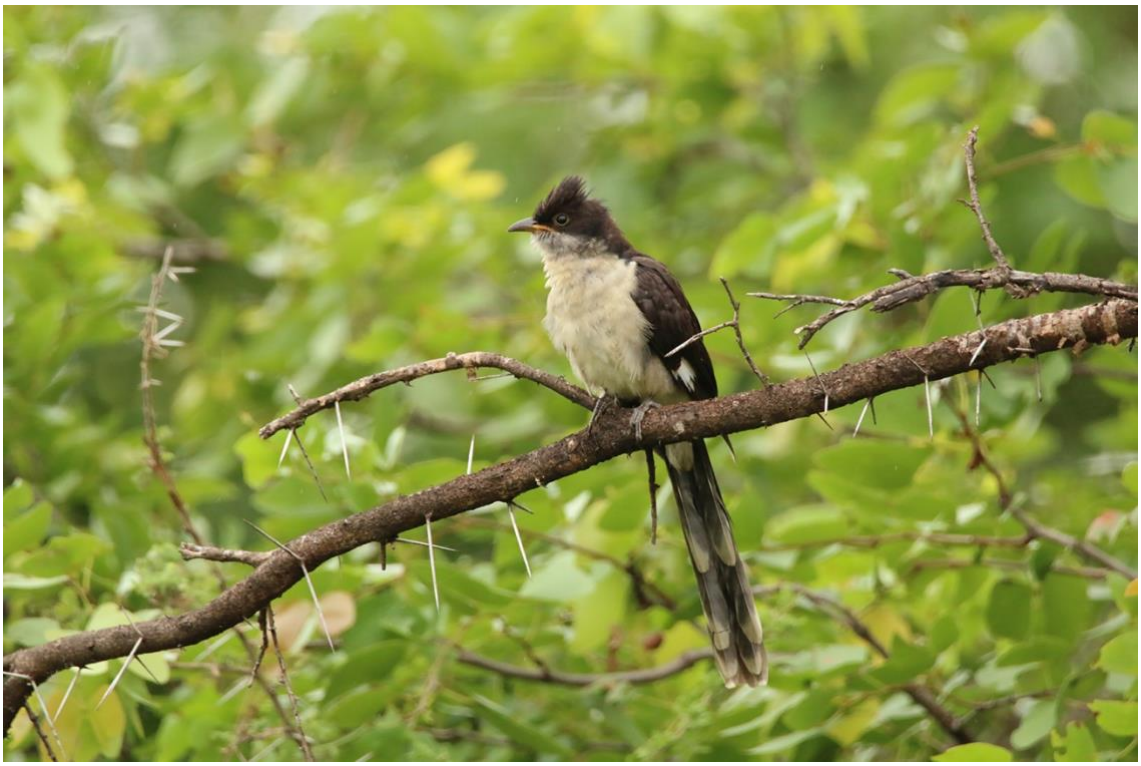


Photos by Jenny Hishin

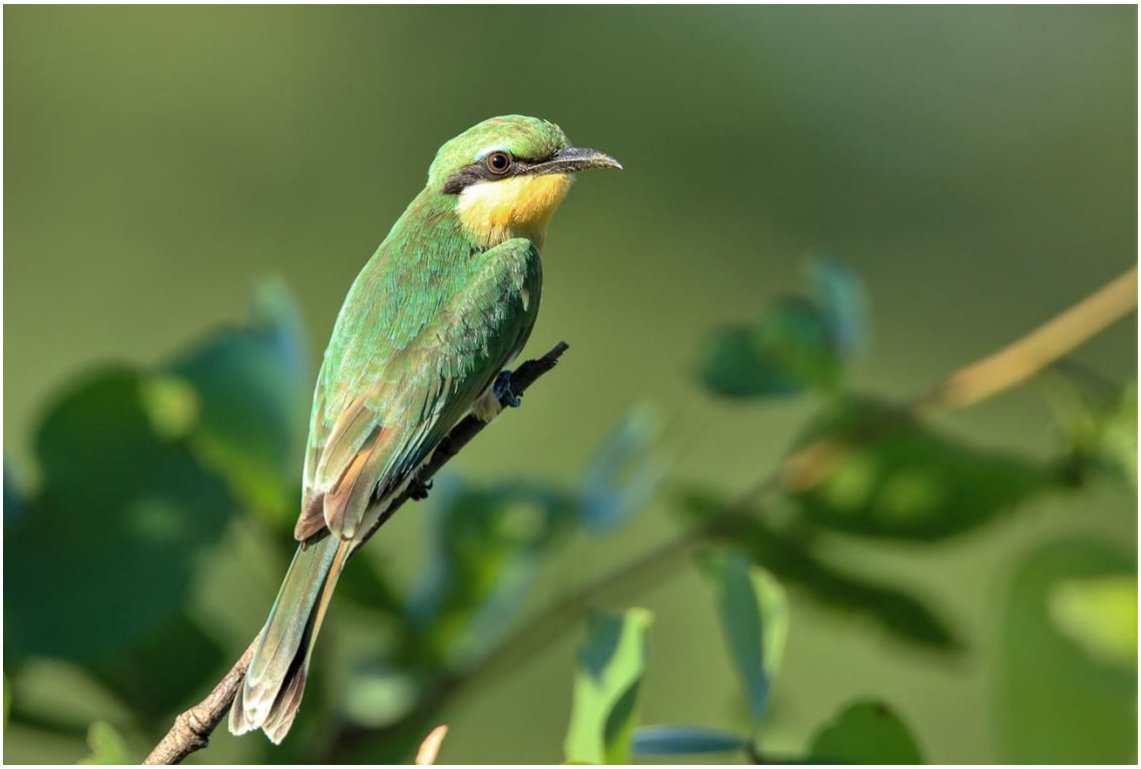


A young European roller grabs a juicy meal.
A Natal spurfowl on a wet morning.





A Jacobin cuckoo perches in the rain while a little bee-eater waits for its next meal to buzz by.



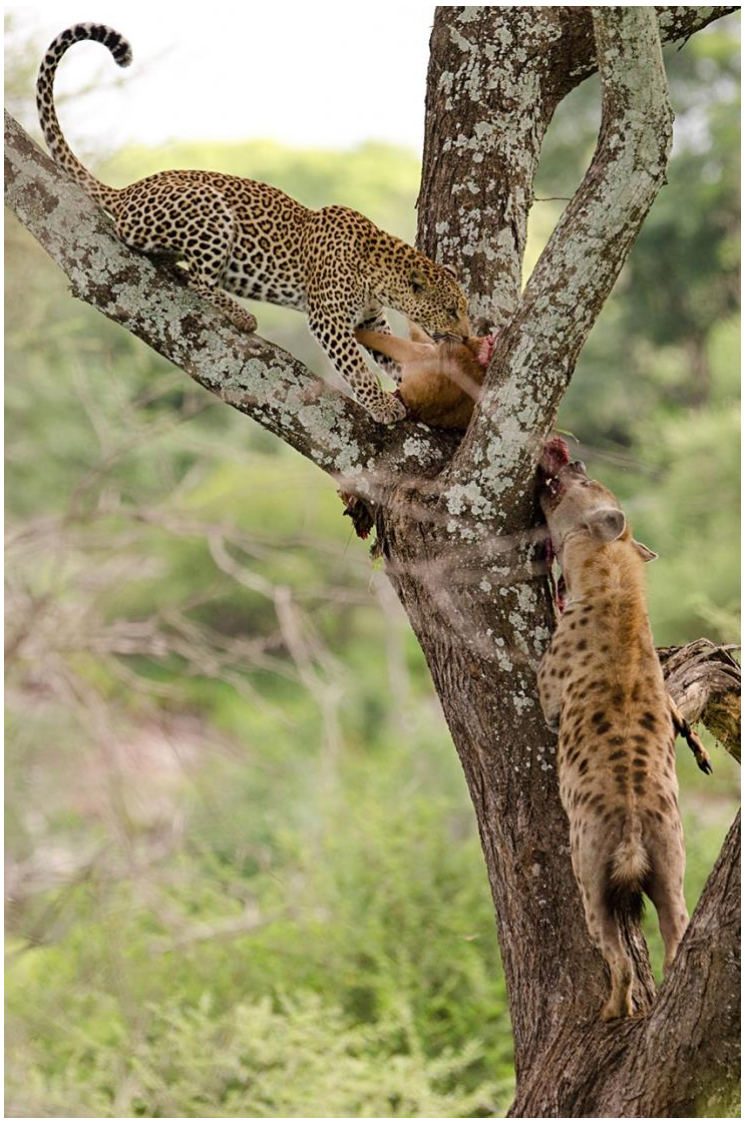
**Hyena Seeks Revenge**

**An African fable as told by Wilson Macheke , Singita Paumushana Maintenance Supervisor**

A long time ago, when Goat was a Sangoma, Hyena and Leopard were brothers. Leopard was older and wiser than Hyena. They would fight but Hyena was always beaten. Hyena was fed-up and wanted equal rights.

Hyena decided to pay Goat a visit, down in the valley. He sat before Goat and Goat threw the magic bones. Then Goat prepared a magic potion of herbs and crushed powders to make Hyena stronger and more powerful than Leopard. But before Goat gave the medicine to Hyena he couldn't help but play a trick on him. He frightened Hyena by telling him that Goat was the wisest of all animals because he had a beard, and the fiercest because of his big strong teeth. He said that if Hyena didn't follow his every word he would eat him!

Scared and confused Hyena followed Goat's instructions. He had to take a cold bath and then climb up onto a high platform. Goat sprinkled the platform with dry bugs and lit them, one by one, but the bugs didn't burn – they smoked – a thick black, noxious, sooty smoke…



Hyena become intoxicated by the smoke and couldn't take it for another second. He jumped from the great height and hurt his back and hind legs in the fall. His coat was mottled and singed and his eyes bloodshot.

He never did recover completely and to this very day we can still see how Goat's trick changed his appearance. Hyena now looked very different to his brother Leopard – but he had gained something too – the sharpened sense of smell that those bugs had!

Hyena went back to the hills and told Leopard of the drama. They banded together and set off to find Goat and punish him for Hyena's maltreatment. Goat was leaping around the fireside laughing when they found him, and Leopard, unable to quell his anger, lashed out and killed Goat. He ate the liver and heart and Hyena ate the remains.

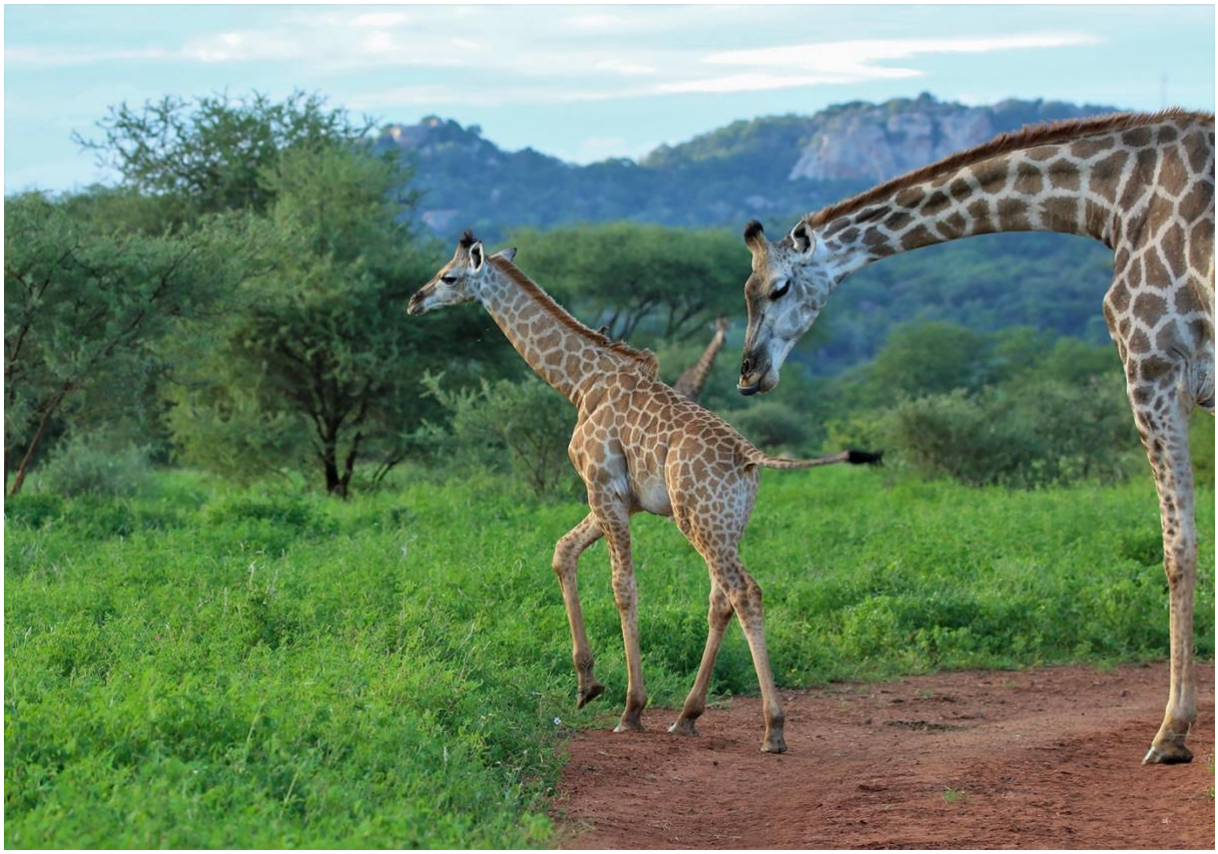
From that moment on all goats had to flee to domesticity. They had to sacrifice much of their milk in exchange for safekeeping from Leopard. Hyena however, still wants his own revenge – and that is why he sometimes visits the village late at night, to steal a goat! Hyena and Leopard still fight and are more equally matched, but Hyena is able to find Leopard's kills using his keen sense of smell!

**Photo by Jenny Hishin**

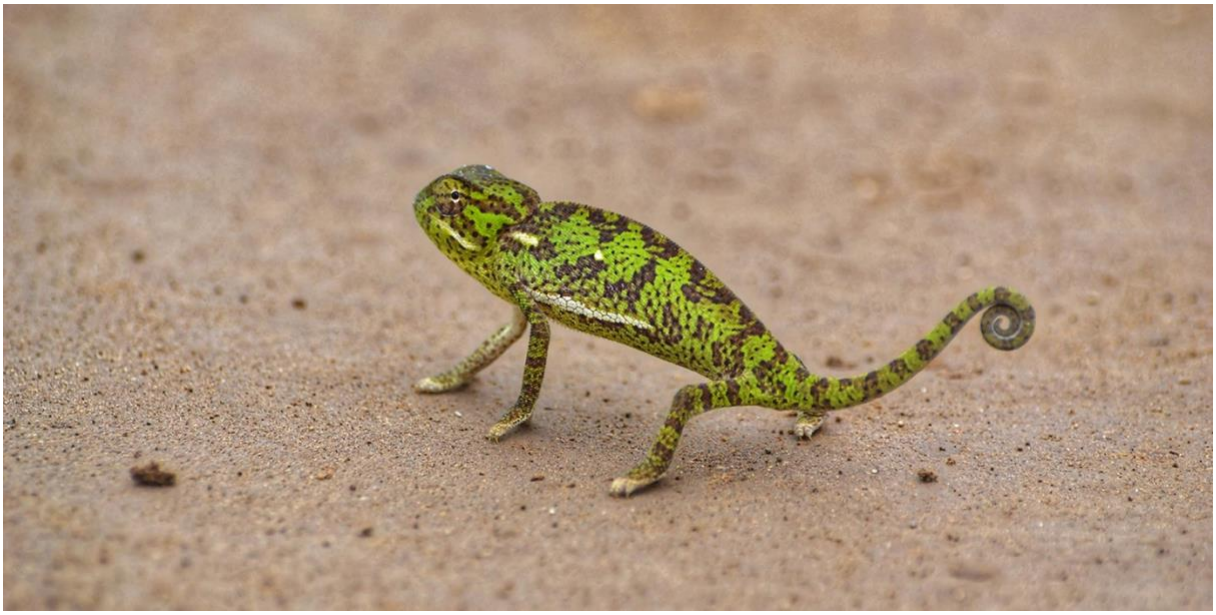
**February Gallery**

Just as well wild dogs learn how to do the “playful nip” when they are pups! Photo by Jenny Hishin

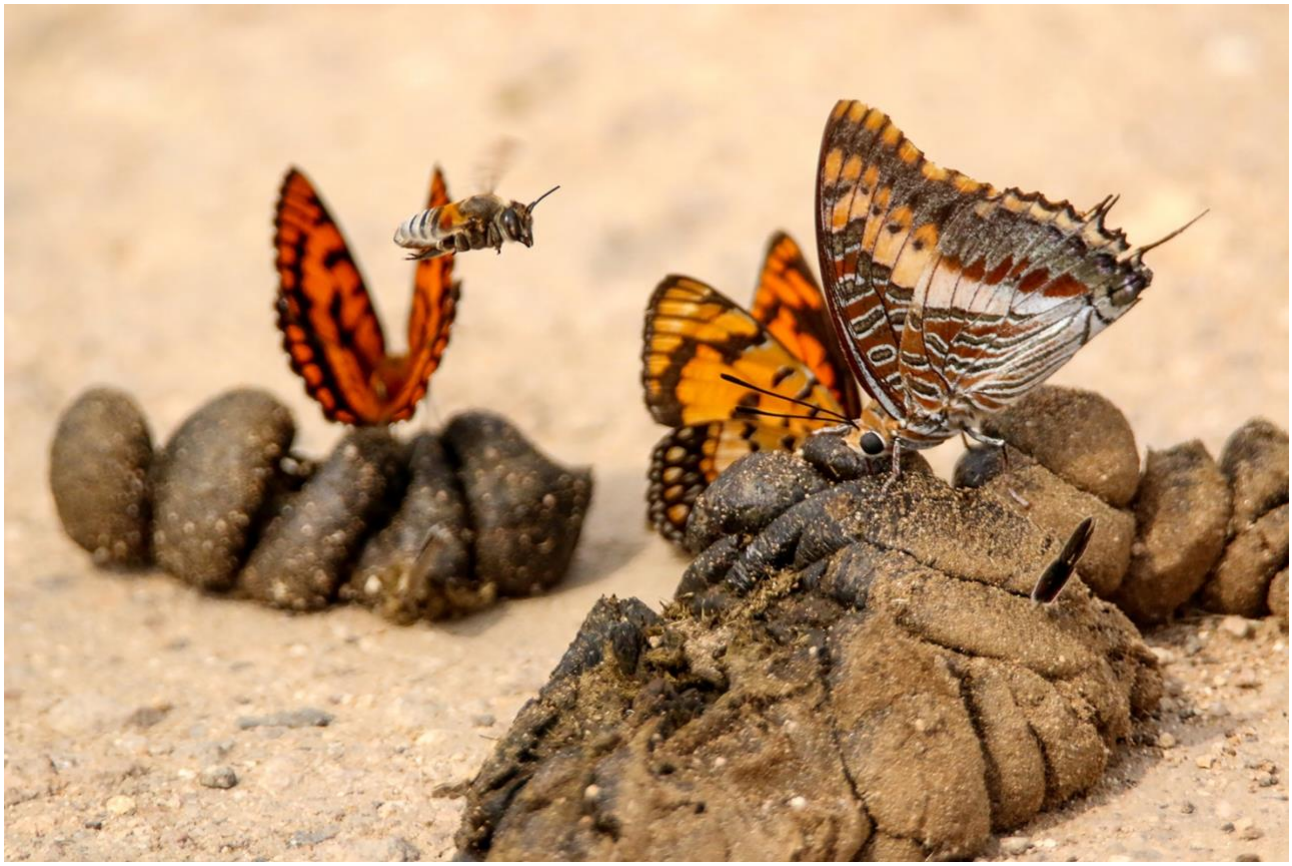
A muddy white rhino bull sands and sharpens his horn on a whetstone Photo by Sarah Ball



This baby giraffe was making a dash for freedom to avoid a bath from its mother. Photo by Sarah Ball



Making a far less hasty escape was this chameleon crossing the road. Photo by Josh Saunders



It’s butterfly season at Singita Pamushana, and the big *Charaxes jasius* in the foreground wasn’t alone in feasting on the enriching droppings on the road.

**Wildlife Journal compiled by Jenny Hishin.**