

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT
SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE
For the month of April, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 18.6°C (65.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 13.3°C (55.9°F)
Average maximum: 31.0°C (87.8°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.7°C (99.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 1 mm
Season to date: 345.6 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:10
Sunset: 17:30

Reading through each guide's April sighting report gives an accurate indication of just how good the wildlife sightings have been this month. The lodge has been busy, especially with some large groups, and the more guides out covering different areas of the reserve results in more sightings being called in. It's a win-win for everyone and all our guests have marvelled at the diversity of wildlife to be seen here.

We are well into autumn now, and have had very little rain. Chiloveka Dam in the south is dry, which has resulted in a concentration of animals drinking at a natural spring in that area. Elsewhere the animals are drawn to the few pans that receive piped water, or else they drink from the other dams and rivers.

A sightings snapshot for April follows:

Lions

Lion sightings have been excellent! One group of guests managed to see two different prides in one morning.

- Nduna Pride: A female buffalo was killed and we presume fed on by five members of the pride before the coalition of three males claimed the rest of the carcass. The two lionesses, one sub-

adult male and two sub-adult females left the carcass to drink at Simbiri Dam which was such a picturesque setting amid the sandstone rocks and cliffs. Later in the month, at Nduna Dam, nine lions were seen. The pride managed to kill another buffalo which provided a feast for all. An epic sighting that took place at month's end was at Hlamba Mlonga where three hungry lions, walked up the rocky incline alongside Simbiri Dam in an effort to survey for prey. Eventually a herd of buffalos walked between the lions and the water. It was a huge herd and the lions waited for the last one before launching an attack. One male lion jumped on the back of a buffalo which fought the lion and escaped. The buffalos then circled back and chased the lions out of sight.

- River Pride: Four members were seen hunting north of Ray's Drift, and feeding on a kill in that area. From there they moved over to the Hippo side of the river and successfully hunted a female waterbuck – an incredible sighting for guests that are seasoned safari travellers. Expecting to find the pride still feeding on the waterbuck the next morning, they were instead tracked to a different location, far away, where they were found feeding on another kill.
- Nyamasikana Pan is way in the north, and not visited as regularly as those in the central areas, so it was wonderful to be rewarded with a sighting of five lions sleeping in the shade there.
- Another great sighting, barely out of the starting blocks from the lodge, was of one male and three lionesses on West Valley Road, actively roaming and roaring, responding to another male that was calling from the dam. We think the lionesses could be coming into season hence all the calling.

Leopards

Highlights for the month include:

- Seeing two leopards while on a boat cruise – one was marking territory below Malilangwe House and one was drinking on the northern shore.
- An action-packed morning ensued when a female leopard was seen killing an impala ram on Southern Straight Road, east of the Buffalo Fence junction. Having killed the impala the distress calls from other impalas caught the attention of four spotted hyenas who then overpowered the leopard and stole the kill leaving her running for her life.
- A mating pair of leopards was seen (with an bull black rhino in close proximity) at the hippo trails before Nyamasikana Crossing on West Valley Road.

Wild dogs

- African wild dogs have been seen on both sides of the Chiredzi River. The pack of 12 with a pregnant alpha female was last seen in the north of the property which is a good sign, as that's where they denned last year, and it's denning season now.

Hyenas

- There have been some interesting sightings of hyenas around the Malilangwe Dam, while guests have been enjoying the boat cruises. One was when a hyena caught a terrapin and the sounds of its powerful jaws crushing the shell were amplified over the water. Another was when a hyena was seen feeding on a buffalo carcass, followed by a fiery sundowner and icy moonrise.

Rhinos

Of course, rhino sightings top the list – it's what we're best known for!

- Crashes of several white rhinos are often seen grazing or drinking together. Highlights include a white rhino bull using a termite mound as a pillow, and a mother with a newborn infant.
- Every guide has their own lucky spot for finding black rhinos, but a hotspot that we've all been working of late is a block of good browsing habitat between the river and Binya Road. Lone bulls are seen, or young bulls together, and most often a cow with a calf close behind.

Elephants

- A breeding herd of more than 60 elephants was viewed for much of the month around the Croc Creek area as they headed towards the Malilangwe Dam at the base of the lodge, to drink and feed

on the green vegetation there. A delight is the abundance of baby elephants tottering about between the pillars of legs.

- An enormous breeding herd of 115 elephants was seen on the Hippos side, feeding at the swamps.
- An overwhelming sighting was finding the afterbirth where an elephant had just given birth, and nearby the newborn elephant baby finding its footing to keep up with the rest of the family.

Buffalo

- Vast herds of up to 500 buffalo are seen on a daily basis, at the water points. However, a puzzling sighting was finding three buffalo carcasses floating in the Malilnagwe Dam. It's possible there was a stampede, caused by lions, and the animals drowned in the ensuing chaos.

Plains game

- Excellent plains game as always, and seen on every drive. Now that water is more scarce we've also had sightings of sable antelope, eland and hartebeest. A wonderful afternoon was spent at Nduna Dam, where more than 20 giraffes quenched their thirst.

Boat cruise

- Idyllic, peaceful, mesmerising and addictive as always, with some great wildlife sightings further elevating the experience. On one cloudy and overcast afternoon we didn't expect to see much wildlife, but were happily proved wrong when we found about 150 elephants and 200 buffaloes scattered along the shoreline.

Fishing

- There have been some good catches of tilapia, and one group of dedicated fishermen caught a good number of tigerfish, with the biggest weighing in at 8.2 pounds (3.7 kilograms).

Photographic hide

- This is the best place to spend several hours, underground in a dark space, eye-level to the water, if you are an avid and dedicated photographer. This month the following species have been seen from within the hide: white rhinos, black rhinos, zebras, kudus, warthogs, elephants, impalas, giraffes, eland, sable, wildebeest, lions. On one occasion a lioness arrived at the waterhole but was not allowed to get to the water by a crash of white rhinos. They grouped together and charged her. Eventually the lioness went to the side and drank from there, which gave the humans in the hide an opportunity to see the predator at very close range!

Rock art

- Our guests are always in awe of the rock art we show them – an everlasting history of the resourceful and highly skilled Bushmen/San that lived here hundreds of years ago.

Walks

- The drier and more sparse the vegetation, the better for conducting bush walks and tracking animals on foot, so now is a good time for these immersive activities.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- Our guests were introduced to the bygone ways of Shangaan people in order to find water, gather food, make tools, ignite fire and extract salt from the soil. They also tasted the local sadza and okra.

Daytrips to Gonarezhou National Park

- These trips are a full day out to our neighbouring National Park, where scenic views, Chilojo Cliffs and herds of elephants are guaranteed.

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

Gold dust



At first light a vast herd of African buffalo emerged from the surrounding bush, heading towards the central waterhole. With each step, they stirred up clouds of dust that cloaked their dark forms, like chocolate in a gold wrapper. As they neared the water they stopped, their ebony eyes fixing upon us with a mixture of curiosity and caution, as if loftily questioning our presence in their ancient domain. Their collective gaze was somewhat intimidating and a testament to their resilience and spirit.

The inclusion of buffalo in the Big Five reflects the historical significance of their role in big-game hunting. They're included due to their formidable size, strength, and unpredictable behaviour, making them one of the most challenging and dangerous animals to hunt on foot. Their sheer mass, big bulls reach about 800 kilograms (1 763 pounds), combined with sharp horns and a notoriously aggressive temperament, presents a significant threat to hunters. Moreover, buffalo often roam in large herds, adding an element of strategic coordination and heightened danger during hunts.

But what I admire most about them is each one's individuality and personality. At sightings like these you can take the time to look carefully at them, one by one, and notice each one's unique characteristics – different horn shapes, scars, body shapes and weights, torn ears, carriage, deportment and so on.

Upstaging

A colossal white rhino drank at the waterhole, and you'd be forgiven for thinking nothing could upstage that, but it was this vibrant lilac-breasted roller that stole the show. Perched upon the rhino rubbing post, polished smooth on top by years of use, the avian hunter scanned the immediate area for prey.

Lots of parasites are rubbed off the rhinos and onto the post or the surrounding earth that's scattered with dung and attracts other insects. The area promises a plentiful bounty for the savvy predator.

The roller's keen eyes detected the subtlest of movements, and with wings ablaze in vibrant hues of azure, mint, and violet, it would swoop down and nab a tiny insect from its hiding place. Back and forth it darted with a shuffle of flamboyant feathers, each successful strike adding to its feast.

The rhino, having finished his drink, lumbered past the rubbing post, but the lilac-breasted roller stood its ground, undeterred. The scene revealed so many intricate tapestry threads – the water, earth, wood, bright green foliage, enormous monotone beast, flashy colourful bird, hidden insects – it was a mesmerising masterpiece to see.





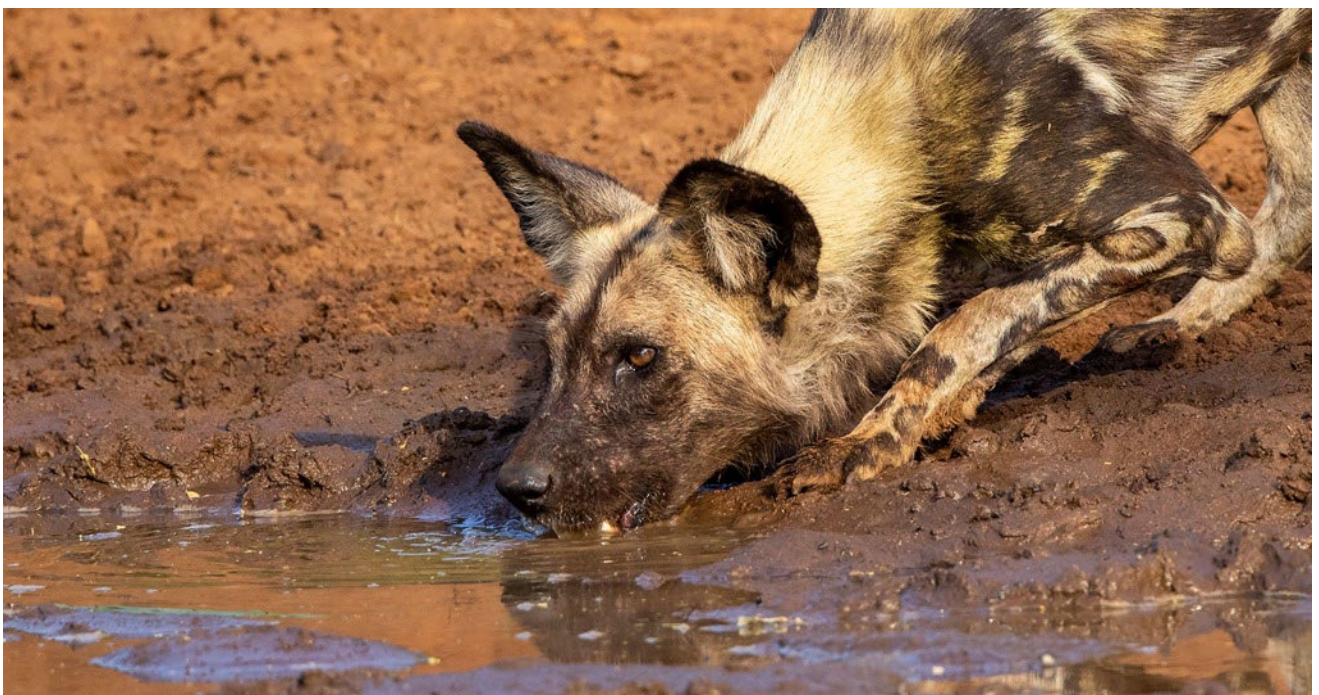
Fast food and hot dogs

Your best chance of finding a pack of wild dogs, other than at their den-site, is in the shade near a waterhole. You can be lucky enough to see them at dawn and dusk hunting, when they will usually trot along a road or trail before scattering off into the bushes to flush and pursue prey. This was a particularly warm morning, and we were delighted to find them resting in a cooler basin near Banyini Pan.



African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are well adapted for living in hot environments. As you can see in the photo above they are all panting. The rapid intake of air over a wet tongue helps to bring an animal's temperature down. Their large round ears also help with cooling - air moves over the blood vessels in their ears and carries heat away.

However, these adaptations and others are not enough to contend with climate change. Chasing prey during a hunt causes the dogs to become extremely hot. Now, because of rising temperatures, there are



not enough hours in the day that are light enough and cool enough for the dogs to hunt successfully. Recent research has found that both the time African wild dogs are able to be active and the survival rate of pups has reduced dramatically.

The scientists couldn't definitively prove that the decrease in successful hunting is causing a decline in the successful reproduction of wild dogs. However, it seems logical that a reduction in successful kills could potentially result in the starvation of offspring. Additionally, if adults are struggling to locate prey in the cooler daytime hours, they might resort to more aggressive hunting, putting their pups at risk from other predators. Moreover, hungry dogs might take greater risks to obtain food, thereby increasing their own mortality rates. Alternatively, it's possible that rising temperatures are directly impacting the dogs, as has been observed in other species where higher temperatures have been linked to reduced milk quality and production in nursing mothers.

It's far easier to picture how climate change is having a devastating effect on animals like polar bears as their icy homeland melts and available prey disappears, but the effects of climate change are as insidious here in southern Africa where animals like wild dogs, despite their adaptations, are facing shorter daylight periods at optimal temperatures in which to hunt.



On a more proactive note this month The Malilangwe Trust, in partnership with The African Wildlife Conservation Fund, the Department of Veterinary Services, and local community leaders, organized a 10-day initiative to address rabies in the nearby communities surrounding the reserve. Residents were encouraged to bring their pets – dogs and cats – to receive complimentary vaccinations against rabies, as well as other diseases including canine distemper and parvovirus.

Many diseases can be transmitted between domestic and wild animals, making disease control crucial, especially for the conservation of endangered carnivores, such as African wild dogs, that are susceptible to population declines due to disease outbreaks.

Oncoming traffic



It's the best feeling when you see something in the road, way in the distance. Those few seconds when you stop the vehicle, reach for your binos with your left hand – not taking your eye off the subject lest it vanish, spin the focus wheel and see what you hoped it was, in this case a male lion. Like gambling the wins are intoxicating, and the losses (the subjects that turn out to be fallen branches, rocks, termite mounds or even a lovely impala) are dismissed and go unmentioned.

It was moments before nightfall and this lion was on a mission, walking straight along the road and squeezing past the vehicle as he went. We turned and followed, and after some time he left the road in a south-westerly direction, nose to the ground, on the trail of something.

In the three days that followed we found that a buffalo had been killed and was being fed on by the coalition of three male lions, this lion being one of them. Below is a photo of one of his brothers, after all of the buffalo had been eaten, looking very full and delightfully smug.

An adult male lion can consume up to 25% of its body weight in a single extended meal. If you work out what that would equate to for oneself it's quite staggering. For me it would be the equivalent of eating a 15 kg (33 lbs) steak. Rare. Lions typically gorge themselves when they make a kill and then may not eat again for several days until the next successful hunt. The frequency of their meals depends on factors such as the size of the prey, the number of lions in the coalition or pride, and the availability of food in their territory.



We don't know the exact details of this hunt as it happened in the dead of night, however it's not impossible that it was a group effort by the Nduna lionesses and these males. Killing a buffalo takes enormous strength and its most likely that male lions do the actual killing. The Nduna lionesses and youngsters were seen drinking at nearby Simbiri Dam during the time when the last of the buffalo was being finished off, so they could have collaborated in the hunt, fed after the males and left the leftovers for them as they went to drink.

Lions are not as fast as most of their prey so they rely heavily on the element of surprise when hunting, and as such do most of their hunting at night. They will attempt to stalk within 30 metres of their prey before charging. They don't have the stamina or athleticism for a long chase and will not pursue their prey very far if the first attack fails. In a successful hunt, the prey is knocked off balance, dragged down and then killed with a bite to the back of the neck or the throat. Buffalo have been known to fend off lion attacks for hours before succumbing to loss of blood and energy. The strongest male lion will eat first, followed by other members of the pride. Lionesses will feed themselves first, with cubs getting the scraps.

Newborn arrival

Singita Pamushana's sunken photographic hide at a waterhole is always a popular attraction for guests. When inside you look out facing east, so in the afternoons you get full front-on light and golden hour light on your subjects, and it's the late afternoons and early evenings that attract the most visitors to the waterhole.



However, there is a brief 15 minute period at sunrise when you get beautiful soft light as it rises in the east, and rim lights any animal that may still be there. We'd been there for sunrise and there was little activity, only some guineafowl and doves making a brief appearance. At 07:00 we were packing away our flasks of coffee and rusks when a large grey form appeared on the horizon. It was unusual for a rhino to be arriving at this time, but the reason became instantly clear when we saw a little smudge tottering alongside her. The mother white rhino had a tiny calf with her that was only between four and six weeks old.

The mother scanned the area to make sure they were alone, and also stopped to smell the piles of dung near the water to assess what other rhinos or animals had been there recently. Then she walked straight to the water's edge and began to drink thirstily. With such a young calf she wisely didn't want other wildlife around, in case her baby got bullied, hurt, separated, chased or worse.

We were so lucky to see such a young baby rhino at such close quarters, thanks to the odd time of day and circumstances. From this close range we could see that the calf was a bouncing baby girl. The little one initially stayed close behind mum as she drank, but soon got bored and decided she needed to investigate the rocks and test her legs. She would gambol about in what seemed like sneakers that were way too big, then rush back behind mum for reassurance, before setting out again.

Newborn calves weigh approximately 40 to 60 kilograms. They will start nursing from their mother within the first few hours of being born. They cry when they are hungry with a plaintive volley of squeals. A baby rhino will start nibbling grass and grazing at around two months of age, but will continue to nurse for a year to a year-and-a-half. Older calves can drink over 20 litres of milk per day!

White rhinos stay with their mother for two-and-a-half to three years.



Here the baby is mid zoomie, ears flat back and legs stretched in all directions!



This mother has a particularly long and sharp horn. It would certainly be unwise for any clumsy rhino or potential predator (such as a hyena or lion) to get in the way of her calf.



April Gallery



A delicate blue-cheeked-bee-eater perches on a twig, waiting to swoop after an insect. A robust elephant bull splashes through a wallow, drinking, eating and mud-bathing as he goes.





A pensive black rhino mother and calf contemplate our presence.
An oblivious white rhino bull scratches his bits on a rubbing post!





In the stillness of pre-dawn a spotted hyena sniffs out the scent of transient animals on the dewy grass.
A busy breeding herd of elephants kick up dust as they shuffle down an alley in the late afternoon.





Epitomising the palette of early autumn is this nyala calf amid forbs and flowers.