

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA GRUMETI & LAMAI, TANZANIA For the month of July, Two Thousand and Twenty-Six

Temperature

Average minimum: 17°C (62.6°F)
Average maximum: 32°C (89.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 16°C (60.8°F)
Maximum recorded: 34°C (93.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

Grumeti: 31.2 mm
Lamai: 49.0 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:48
Sunset: 18:48

July signalled the height of the dry season in the Grumeti. The once green plains gradually transformed into a tapestry of brown and silver-grey as the grasses dried beneath clear skies and cool mornings. It is also the time of the year when carefully planned controlled burns are carried out across selected areas of the ecosystem. These low-intensity fires play an important role in maintaining healthy grasslands, clearing away old vegetation and encouraging fresh growth that will sustain wildlife when the rain returns.

By the middle of July, the last of the great migration herds had gradually departed Grumeti region. But while the sound of the wildebeest was fading in Grumeti, it was only just the beginning in the north. As the wildebeest arrived in the Lamai Triangle, anticipation shifted to one of Africa's greatest wildlife spectacles, the dramatic Mara River crossings.

Although the migration had moved to Lamai, Grumeti was far from empty. Vast open plains continued to support impressive numbers of resident wildlife, with thousands of zebras and topi, hundreds of Thomson's gazelles, large herds of buffalos and elephants scattered across the landscape.

July sightings snapshot for Grumeti:

Lions:

July was an exceptional month for lion sightings, with a total of nine different prides recorded across the concession. The lions were active throughout the month, often using riverbanks, drainage lines, and waterholes as strategic hunting grounds where prey naturally congregated. Wildlife viewing remained consistently rewarding, with excellent lion encounters on many game drives. Even prides that are rarely seen made several appearances as guides explored different parts of the concession, providing guests with memorable and diverse sightings.

- The Butamtam Pride roamed around WD Waterhole, Pundamilia hill, and the Manangai drainage throughout the month.
- Albizia Pride members were seen upstream of the Kombre drainage, within the woodland.
- Earlier in the month, Colobus Pride members were observed hunting wildebeest as they crossed the Grumeti River at one of the main crossing points.
- Sabora Pride members were frequently seen around the Morum Pit.
- Sabora West Pride members were observed east and south of Marula Explore camp.
- Ridge Pride members were seen at the beginning of the Butamtam drainage, along Ridge Road, and south of OP 7.
- Kawanga Pride members were observed moving along the Busanga drainage and across the open plains south of Kawanga Ranger post.
- Mkuyu Pride individuals were seen around Sand Beach along the Grumeti River.
- Kombre Pride individuals were seen around the Arab Camp thicket and Sasakwa Hill, particularly during nighttime game drives.

Leopards:

July got off to a remarkable start, with outstanding leopard sightings throughout the month.

- The highlight was the Raho female, who, together with her two young cubs, provided some of the most exciting and memorable encounters. She spent most of the month along the Raho drainage just south of Sabora camp, where she was regularly observed from the beginning of July, delighting guests with relaxed and intimate sightings.
- The Mbogo drainage female was found with a wildebeest calf kill at the beginning of the Grumeti north drainage, where she remained for three days.
- A male leopard was seen with a wildebeest calf kill near the Rhino Rocks Morum Pit.
- A female leopard was observed near the junction of Helmetshrike and Farsi Road junction.
- Another female leopard was seen at the junction of Rhino Rock and Chui Link Road.
- A female leopard was seen walking near Boom One, just east of Sasakwa Lodge.
- The skittish German Bridge male leopard was observed west of the bridge.
- The female known as Maridadi was observed along the Sabora drainage with a wildebeest calf kill.
- Another female leopard was seen along Uwanja wa ndege.
- A male leopard was found with a buffalo calf kill along the Raho drainage.

Cheetahs:

As the migratory herds grazed and trampled the long grass, the plains gradually opened up, creating ideal conditions for cheetah viewing. The shorter grass greatly improved visibility, resulting in more frequent and rewarding encounters with these elegant predators. After several months of regularly seeing only the dominant male, July brought renewed excitement with additional cheetah sightings, making it a truly memorable month for guides and guests alike.

- A mother and one subadult cub were seen west of Nyasirori high ground.
- A subadult male was seen at the beginning of the month, east of Nyasirori ranger post.
- The dominant male was seen with a wildebeest calf kill southeast of the ranger post.

Elephants:

July was a remarkable month for elephant sightings across the reserve, with these magnificent animals appearing in exceptional numbers. Both large family herds and smaller groups were observed moving gracefully through a variety of habitats, from open plains to woodlands and riverine areas. Although the great migratory herds had already departed, the landscape remained vibrant and full of life. The abundance of elephants ensured that the plains never felt empty, offering breathtaking wildlife encounters and highlighting the reserve's rich biodiversity even after the migration had passed.

- The Kombre and Raho drainage systems were the main hotspots for elephants during the month. These areas provided an ideal habitat, offering lush riverine vegetation for grazing, reliable sources of drinking water, and seasonal pools where the elephants could wallow to cool themselves during the heat of the day

Buffalos:

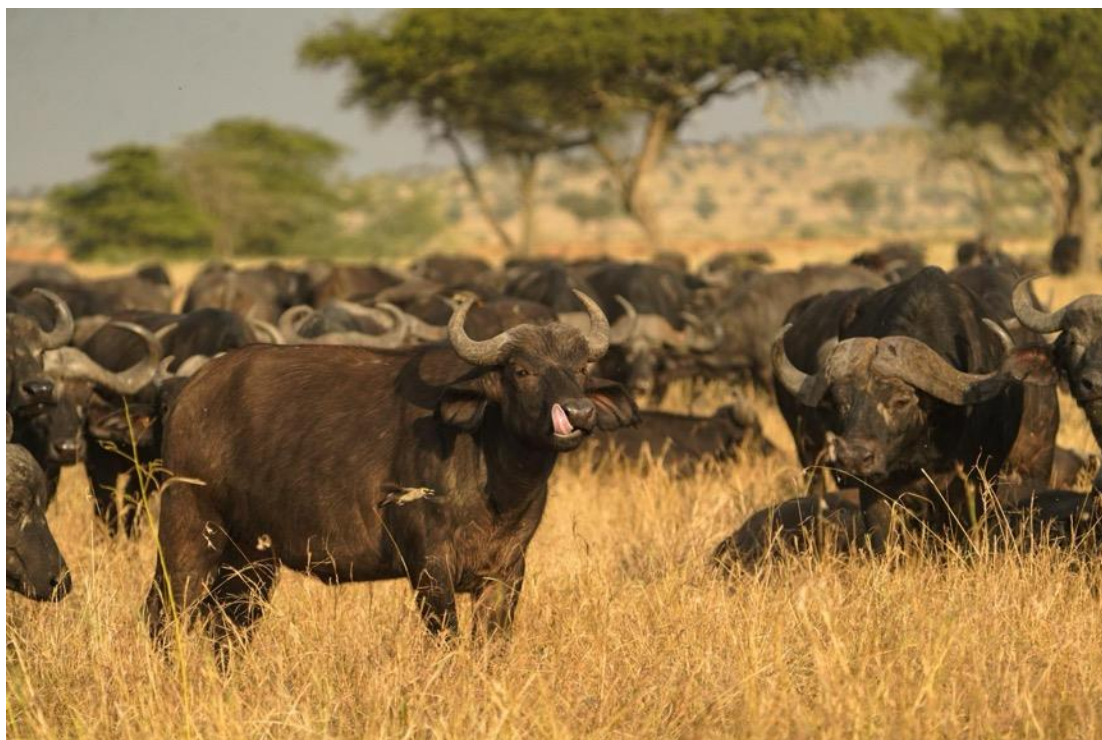
The controlled burning carried out during the month influenced buffalo movements, with herds quickly shifting to areas where fresh grazing became available. In the Sasakwa region, they were commonly found around Ovambo and Ridge hill, while regularly visiting Sasakwa Dam to drink. Elsewhere, the highest concentrations of buffalo were recorded in the Sabora, albizia woodland, and Gambaranyera areas, where favourable grazing conditions supported large numbers throughout the month.

Plains game:

Although fresh grass had not yet fully emerged in the recently burnt areas, these sites attracted large numbers of zebras, topis, resident wildebeest and gazelles. The open plains north of Sabora in particular, were very productive, with a high concentration of herbivores taking advantage of the recently burnt landscape. The improved visibility and the first signs of new growth created excellent conditions for observing general game.

Rhinos:

There were several sightings of both black rhinos, Zaituni and Laikipia, which were often seen walking together inside the boma. They were most frequently observed on the western side of the boma during the evenings, where they appeared relaxed and browsing together.



Buffalo on the Sasakwa plain. Pictured by Calson Luka

July sightings snapshot for Lamai:

Migration:

The arrival of thousands of wildebeest and zebra transformed the open grasslands and valleys of the Lamai Triangle into a breathtaking wildlife spectacle, making it one of the month's true highlights. Here, thousands of wildebeest gathered along the riverbanks, hesitating before plunging into the Mara River, where enormous Nile crocodiles lay in wait for the opportunity to feast. Every crossing is unique. Some end in triumph, while others become powerful reminders of nature's unforgiving balance, making each crossing an unforgettable spectacle.

Lions:

Lion sightings were exceptional throughout July as the arrival of the migration in the Lamai Triangle transformed the landscape. The large herds grazed down the long grass and opened up dense bushes, greatly improving visibility across the plains. This made it much easier to locate and observe lions in their natural habitat, resulting in spectacular and prolonged sightings. Guests were treated to unforgettable encounters with these magnificent cats, making July one of the finest months for lion viewing.

- Kenyangaga Pride members were mostly spotted upstream of Daraja Mbili, along the Kenyangaga drainage.
- Boundary Pride members were seen along the Kenya–Tanzania border, near Mawe meusi.
- Korongo la Minazi Pride spent most of their time around Korongo la Minazi and Korongo la Saa Kumi.
- Another pride was observed along the Mara River, where they were commonly seen around crossing points 3 and 4.

Leopards:

Lamai Triangle once again lived up to its reputation as one of the finest places to observe leopards. Throughout July, guests enjoyed exceptional sightings, with an increasing number of relaxed individuals recorded across the region. While a few leopards remained shy and elusive, many were remarkably calm and tolerant of vehicles, allowing for prolonged and intimate viewing experiences. From the Kenyangaga drainage to the boundary areas and the Mara River, leopard encounters were consistently outstanding, reinforcing Lamai Triangle's reputation as one of the best destinations for leopard viewing, year after year.

- A female leopard was seen along Kenyangaga drainage.
- A young male leopard was regularly seen along the Kenyangaga drainage, towards Maasai Mara and Serengeti border.
- A male leopard was spotted a few times between crossing points 4 and 5.
- A female leopard was observed often between crossing points 6 and 7.
- The well-known male Kunta was frequently seen along the drainage upstream of Mara River Tented Camp.
- The female leopard called Bhoke and her single cub were regularly seen along the boundary area and around chaka la Kigelia.

Cheetahs:

Cheetah sightings remained outstanding throughout July, with the two male coalitions continuing to provide consistent and memorable encounters across the Lamai Triangle. In addition to these familiar coalitions, a female cheetah was also recorded during the month, adding to the diversity of sightings. The continued presence of the resident coalitions, together with the female, made July another remarkable month for observing these elegant predators.

- The two brother cheetahs were seen near Alex Walker Camp and the plains of Sanctuary Camp.
- Three brothers were seen on the high ground of boundary plains, and they roamed between Maasai Mara and Serengeti National Park.
- There was a female which was located west of the camps along the main road.

Elephants:

Large breeding herds of elephants were frequently encountered throughout the month, particularly along the Kenyangaga drainage and in the Kogatende area. Other family groups were observed moving across the open plains of the high ground, while some ventured close to the camps, providing guests with memorable and often close-up encounters. Their widespread presence and constant movement across the landscape added to the richness of the wildlife experience and highlighted the importance of the area as a key habitat for elephants.

Buffalos:

Buffalo sightings were highlighted by a large resident herd that roamed the open plains along the boundary throughout July. Their regular presence added to the diversity of wildlife encounters and created impressive scenes against the vast plains of the Lamai Triangle.

Plains game:

General game, including topi, Thomson's gazelles, resident zebras, and resident wildebeest, was concentrated along Korongo la Fisi, extending all the way to the boundary areas. These locations consistently supported high densities of herbivores, making them excellent areas for wildlife viewing throughout the month.



Kunta, a dominant male along Kenyangaga drainage at the Lamai. Pictured by Calson Luka

Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the images for the July Gallery.

Machaba: Sacred elephant tusks

Story by Adas Shemboko

Grumeti Reserve has been a photographic tourism concession since 2002. Before then, it was a hunting reserve. The reserve is surrounded by several tribes, including the Waikoma, Wanatta, Waisenye, Wakuria, Wasukuma, and Wataturu, among many others. All of these tribes speak Kiswahili, Tanzania's official language, as well as their own tribal languages.

The main economic activities are agriculture and pastoralism. The principal crops grown are maize, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, and sunflowers.

During the harvest season, each tribe holds traditional ceremonies according to its customs, which are based on the year's lunar calendar. These ceremonies are very important to many Tanzanian tribes. Goats and cattle are slaughtered, and people are invited from different places to celebrate together. This is also the time when tribal chiefs teach young boys about their traditions and culture and appoint future leaders.

I would like to tell my story of the origin of the Waikoma people and their belief in the elephant tusks, known as Machaba.

The Waikoma people originally came from Loliondo. They descended from the Sonjo tribe, who lived near Lake Natron. The Sonjo were pastoralists who migrated from north Africa with their cattle in search of better grazing land. Living close to wildlife, they also learned hunting as an important activity.

One day, the leader of the Sonjo tribe went hunting in the Serengeti but became lost and was unable to find his way home. He decided to camp beneath a tree known locally as mwikoma (*Grewia bicolor*). This marked the beginning of what later became the Waikoma tribe.

The hunter had fresh meat with him, so he decided to dry it in the sun to make it easier to carry once he found his way home. He lived beneath the mwikoma tree and stored the dried meat in its branches to protect it from hyenas.

One day, while hunting, he noticed smoke in the distance. Curious, he went to investigate and see whether he can get help. When he arrived, he found a family living there. They welcomed him and recognized from his clothing that he was a hunter. Although they could not communicate through language, they communicated with signs and gestures. He shared some of his dried meat with the family before returning to his camp.

As time passed, he developed a close relationship with the family. They offered him land to build his own home. Eventually, he married one of their daughters and began a new life there. Many years passed, and his family grew. His sons married and had children of their own. Their main activities were hunting, drying meat, and sharing it freely with their neighbours. In the evenings, the family gathered around the fire while the father told stories.

One day, he called all his sons together and told them about Machaba, the sacred elephant tusks that remained in Loliondo and the beliefs of their ancestors. He instructed two of his sons to travel to Loliondo and bring the Machaba to their new settlement, which is now known as Rubanda Village. They successfully brought the Machaba to Rubanda, where the people began to worship and honour the God of their ancestors through these sacred tusks.

Tanganyika gained independence from British colonial rule on 9 December 1961, with Kiswahili becoming the national language. On 26 April 1964, Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania.

In 1972, during the Vijiji vya Ujamaa (social villages) program, the people of Rubanda were forced to relocate to Mugumu so that the area could be reserved for wildlife conservation. However, the local people refused to leave because they believed that their God, Machaba, did not belong in the town.

The government eventually used force to relocate the community. Machaba was placed on the same truck that transported the people. When the truck reached the Grumeti River, it broke down before crossing the bridge. Mechanics came to repair it, but they were unable to fix the vehicle. The people were unloaded and walked to Mugumu while another vehicle was arranged.

When they arrived in Mugumu, Machaba was placed in a secure room under guard because private ownership of elephant tusks was prohibited in Tanzania. At that time, Mugumu had no electricity and relied on a generator. During the night, the generator suddenly failed, leaving the entire area without power. The next morning, the people discovered that Machaba was no longer inside the locked room. The authorities questioned the man who had transported it, and he replied that their God did not wish to remain in Mugumu.

The leaders refused to accept this explanation. They claimed to return Machaba to the room, but when they opened it again, it had disappeared. According to the elders, the God of the Waikoma had returned to Rubanda. The generator also remained beyond repair.

The police returned to Rubanda and attempted once more to move Machaba to Mugumu. Before they crossed the Grumeti River, the truck overturned, and several people lost their lives in the accident. The tusks were then carried on foot to Mugumu while their traditional custodians were kept under arrest. According to the elders, another miracle occurred. Machaba disappeared once again. At the same time, the generator continued to fail, and a replacement generator also broke down.

The District Commissioner reported the entire incident to President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania.

President Nyerere travelled to meet the Waikoma elders and listened as they explained the history of Machaba and the beliefs that had been passed down from their ancestors.

After hearing their account, the President officially recognized the Waikoma people's custodianship of Machaba and granted them a land ownership certificate for Rubanda Village.

Even today, in Loliondo, there is land that has been preserved for the Waikoma people because they believe that one day they will return to their ancestral homeland.

This story is not simply about Machaba, the sacred elephant tusks of the Waikoma people. It is also about the wisdom of our ancestors, who understood the importance of elephants in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Through their traditions and beliefs, they found a way to protect these magnificent animals.

Today, the question is no longer what our ancestors did. The question is: What will you and I do to protect elephants for future generations?

Morning at the Mara River

Story by David Israel

The night before, the sky was completely clear. It was one of those beautiful African evenings where you can simply lie back and look up, easily picking out Orion's Belt and Gemini shining brightly above. Whenever the sky is that clear, it almost always promises a spectacular morning. The day begins with a crisp chill that reminds you it is still early, but as the sun slowly climbs higher, the warmth starts to spread across the plains. That short window when the cold gives way to the heat is my favourite time of the day. Everything feels fresh, the air is still, and the bush slowly comes to life.

With that in mind, we headed out early, planning to explore the Mara River. The idea was to drive from Crossing Point Zero up to Crossing Point Four before making our way onto the open plains. There was no rush. We drove slowly, stopping often to enjoy the morning and take in whatever the bush had to offer.

Not long after reaching the river, we came across an enormous gathering of wildebeest - around 10 000 animals packed together along the riverbank. They stood shoulder to shoulder, restless and nervous, constantly shifting positions as they searched for the courage to cross. It's always fascinating to watch them at moments like these. They seem to hesitate forever before suddenly making up their minds all at once.



Without much warning, the first few animals leapt into the river, and within seconds the entire herd followed. The sound was incredible. Thousands of hooves thundered down the bank, sending clouds of dust high into the air. They hit the water at full speed, splashing and pushing against one another as they fought the current. It was one of those classic Mara River crossings that never gets old, no matter how many times you witness it.

Then, in an instant, everything changed.

On the opposite bank, the side they had just come from, the herd suddenly exploded in every direction. Animals scattered wildly, and it was obvious that a predator had struck. The grass was tall enough to hide whatever was responsible, so we never actually saw the hunter. But sometimes you don't need to see it to know exactly what's happening.

For a brief moment, the excitement of the crossing disappeared and was replaced by complete tension. The only sounds were thousands of hooves pounding the ground, dust swirling through the air, and then the

unmistakable distress call of a wildebeest being brought down somewhere deep in the long grass. It echoed across the river before everything settled back into the rhythm of the crossing.

It was an extraordinary moment. Some wildebeest pushed desperately to complete the crossing, while others panicked, turned around, and fled back the way they had come. Dust filled the air, animals ran in every direction, and somewhere hidden in the grass, nature was taking its course. It was raw, dramatic, and a powerful reminder that every crossing tells a different story.

As we finally left the river and headed out onto the open plains, the morning chill had given way to the warmth of the sun. Looking back, the river was calm once again, giving little hint of the drama that had unfolded only moments before. Days like this are what make the Mara so special. Every drive is different, every crossing tells its own story, and no matter how many seasons you spend here, the bush always finds a new way to leave you in awe.



Elephants on the Sasakwa plain. Pictured by Calson Luka

An elephant with beautifully symmetrical tusks scents the air.





Raho female leopard, south of Sabora Camp

Elephants at Serengeti House. Pictured by Edward Kaaya



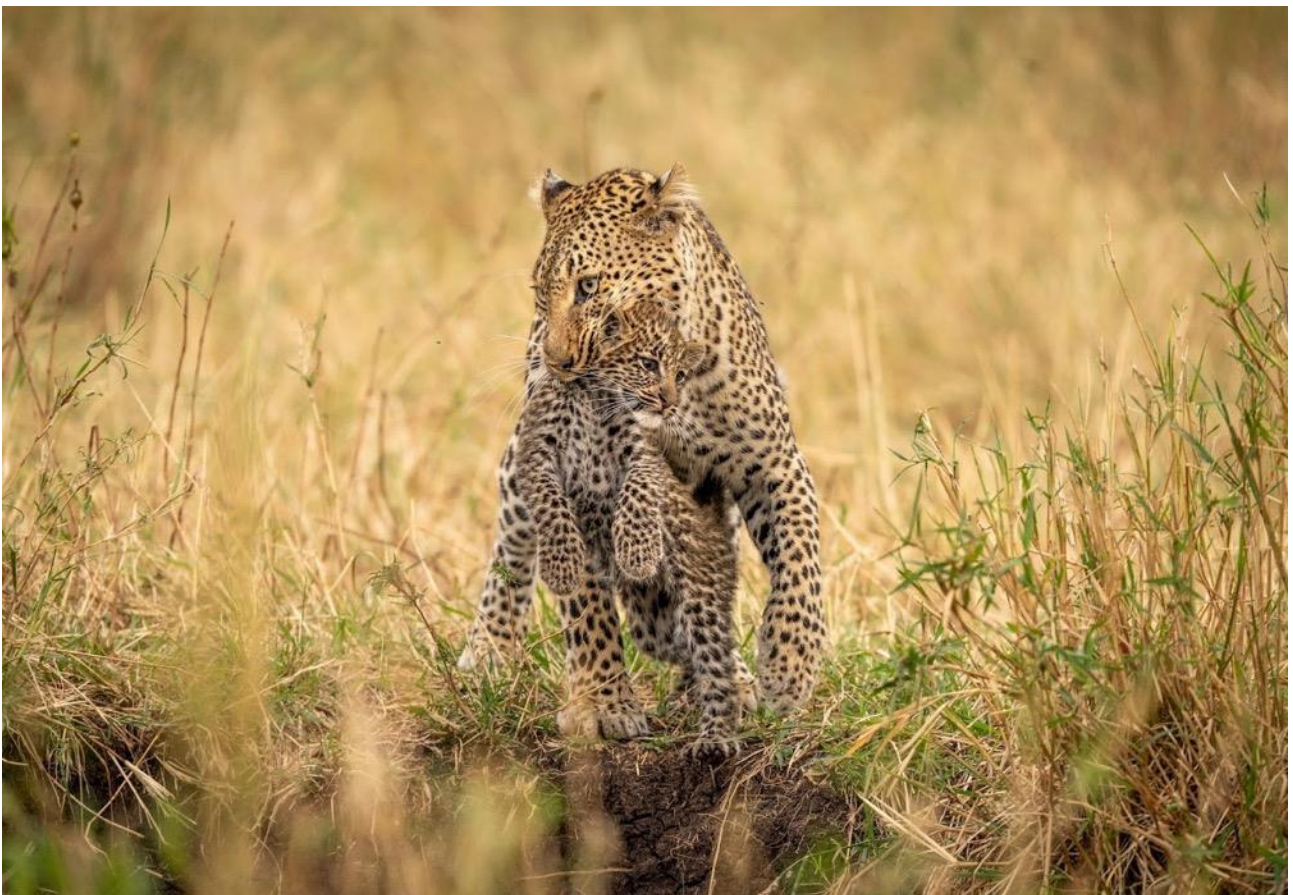


Butamtam Pride. Pictured by Edward Kaaya





Raho female leopard cubs pictured by Calson Luka





A giraffe at sunrise. Pictured by Calson Luka

A dazzle of zebras. Pictured by Calson Luka





One of two bother cheetahs at Lamai Triangle. Pictured by Clinton Kilite

The dominant male cheetah at Sasakwa plain. Pictured by Edward Kaaya





Little bee-eaters. Pictured by Edward Kaaya

Report compiled by Edward Kaaya