

Singita



Photo by Sarah Ball

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE

For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty Two

Temperature

Average minimum: 22.3°C (72.1°F)
Minimum recorded: 19.8°C (67.4°F)
Average maximum: 32.6°C (90.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.1°C (100.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 135.5 mm
*Season to date: 376.8 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:35
Sunset: 18:36

There has been beautiful bountiful rain and the wildlife and landscape are looking robust. Our guests in January were mainly Zimbabwean, and we were all relieved and delighted when it was announced on 29 January that the quarantine period for all inbound tourists was lifted with immediate effect. We simply cannot wait a moment longer to welcome our international tourists to Singita Pamushana, and share the wonders of this animal kingdom with you.

A sightings snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- The Nduna Pride provided the bulk of the sightings this month. The plains game are all well fed and healthy thanks to rains and good grazing, and this makes it harder for lions to hunt them successfully. As such the pride are looking quite skinny and hungry at this time. Various members have been seen at different times, but the largest count of them was of 14 in total: Two males, four females, and eight cubs of different ages.
- An adult male and lionesses were seen following one another, west of Chikwete Pan. They were probably from the Hippo Pride.
- A male lion killed a buffalo calf on the open areas of Banyini, and guests were able to watch him feed.

Leopards

Both of these leopard sightings have been from the safari boat cruises:

- A relaxed female leopard was seen walking along the shoreline, opposite Malilangwe House.
- A great sighting of a male leopard sleeping on a log. Guests watched him for more than ten minutes and also were treated to a black rhino browsing along the shore.

African wild dogs

Sightings of the pack range between 12 and 14 members.

- The wild dogs were seen hunting and they caught two baby impalas.
- They were also seen sleeping in the shade at 02 Camp.

Hyenas

- Spotted hyenas are dotted all over. One was seen trailing the wild dogs, hoping for a free lunch.

Rhinos

White rhinos:

- Fantastic crashes, up to ten in number, have been seen grazing, drinking and wallowing.

Black rhinos:

- On one occasion a black rhino and crash of white rhino were spotted in the same area.
- A black rhino tested everyone's heart function with a little mock charge. All were found to be in good health.

Elephants

- There have been excellent sightings of calm elephant bulls, content with feeding on the nutritious offerings. A huge tusker was seen feeding on the mopane bushes north-east of 02 Camp.
- A breeding herd of about fifty elephants and two white rhinos was feeding south of 02 Camp.

Buffalo

- Large herds have been seen – sometimes over 150 Cape buffalo and at other times a herd in excess of 300. They are really enjoying the good grazing and the plentiful water and mud wallows.

Plains game

- The plains are teeming with game, thanks to this year's good grazing.

Unusual

- See the ostrich story that follows!

A selection of bush stories follow, as well as a January Gallery.



Photo by Brad Fouché

The bush telegraph exploded when the news of an ostrich on the property was announced! It was almost unbelievable and everyone on the property rushed to respectfully have a peak at this extraordinary bird.

In the early days of transforming the area into the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve captive-bred ostriches were introduced because they historically occurred here. The Sparrow family that were the pioneers of this area in the late 1900s could recall collecting ostrich eggs on the property. Unfortunately the introduction of 40 captive-bred ostrich was not a success because they either killed themselves running into the boundary fence or they were eaten by lions.

Historically the fence around the property was all one height, but that has been dropped on our southern border with Gonarezhou to only 1.2 metres to allow the movement of large animals between Gonarezhou and Malilangwe. Ostriches can easily clear jumping this low section of fence and it is possible that our visitor came from the south. Ostriches do occur in Gonarezhou National Park, but their population was severely affected by the 1992 drought.

This brave and adventurous bird is such a welcome visitor, and we hope she is predator-savvy and stays on the property. Head Guide, Brad Fouché, told me that apparently, from time to time in the past, a single ostrich has come on and off the property, but since 1999 this is only the second one he has seen.

A very similar occurrence took place at Singita Sabi Sand about a decade ago. A single female ostrich showed up and wandered the open grasslands of the southern area. She soon became a highlight on game drives mainly due to her trying to flirt with the vehicles, not realising that there were no male ostriches in the back seats! But then a tall dark stranger arrived and it did not take long before a clutch of eggs was found in an open clearing. The chicks hatched and within a few months they were known as the 'Ostrich Family' when sighted. They have raised successful clutches of chicks in subsequent years. Let's hope this history repeats

itself for Singita Pamushana guests to see the world's largest flightless bird on the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve.



Photo by Brad Fouché

Almost as surprised as we were by this visitor were the resident wildlife. The impalas stared in disbelief, as did the zebras and wildebeest. It has been rather funny watching their reactions and see them wondering who on earth this is!



Photo by Sarah Ball

I was allocated to be the safari guide to a couple who were the only guests in camp during the 22nd to the 25th of January 2022. They were a Zimbabwean couple from the Marondera farming area of Mashonaland East. Upon arrival they made it absolutely clear that they eat and drink birds. Big game was a bonus but birding was their main priority, and even though they appreciated seeing any birds they had a bucket list of five species in particular they looked forward to see - these being the pennant-winged nightjar, broad-billed roller, racket-tailed roller, eastern nicator and Narina trogon.

On the very first afternoon drive I headed east towards Nduna, an area I sometimes see three of the species namely the racket-tailed roller within the miombo woodland, the Narina trogon mostly seen in the indigenous forests as you enter Nduna from the western side, and the pennant-winged nightjar also seen within the miombo woodlands of the *julbernardia* species.

On our drive there we were fortunate to have our first tick in the box to view a broad-billed roller, in a baobab before the Nyamasikana crossing east of Nhanga Pan, to the delight of the guests. Other species of birds were recorded but then none from the bucket list were seen by the time we reached Nduna Dam and decided to stop for an epic sundowner. We heard calls from the freckled, fiery-necked and square-tailed nightjars, but none from the most wanted pennant-winged nightjar.

I was optimistic and kept my fingers crossed, and on the way back on Orphan Road, just before the Mulovelo Crossing, we were rewarded by what we were eagerly looking for - the rare and very good sighting of a pennant-winged nightjar caught in the headlights of the game viewer. As is the norm when you are birding you have to prove why it's whatsoever you are looking for which resulted in me switching off the headlights and rolling the game viewer forward, and with the help of the spotlight we saw the bird take off in full view, displaying the pennants on either side, much to the joy and amazement of the guests.

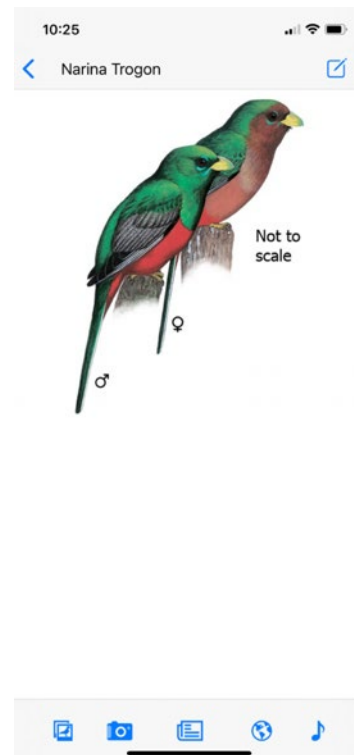
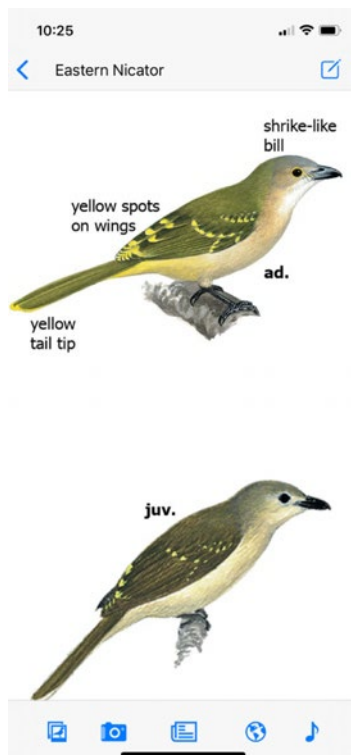
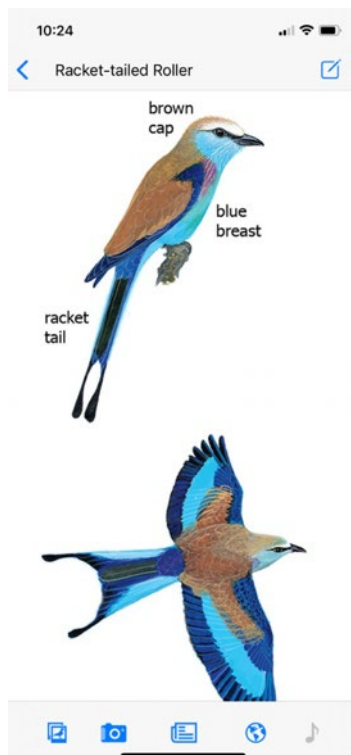
The next morning we set off early for a full day adventure into the Gonarezhou National Park, another untamed wilderness area, also rich in terms of bird species. We took a slow drive through Ultimate Drive in anticipation to see whether we could get our racket-tailed roller as it can also be seen in the *Brachystegia* woodland of mountain acacia. We didn't see the roller but we did see the eastern nicator which was another tick in the box! Then heading from Ultimate Drive to the open plains of Banyini we saw the ostrich! The Gonarezhou National Park was as wild as ever with mock charges from the cow herds of elephants and the ever gorgeous Chilojo sandstone cliffs.

The next morning we headed east to Nduna again leaving the lodge at first light and arriving half an hour later in search of two species of birds - the Narina trogon and the racket-tailed roller. An hour went by without any success but on our third round through the rocky outcrops north of Nduna we spotted our racket-tailed roller nestled in a mtondo tree! Though jubilant we still had one more to go...

We then decided to enquire from the staff members working at Nduna camp by showing them a picture of the Narina trogon and, to our advantage, they said they normally see it flying into the thickets of the evergreen toad tree (*Tabernaemontana elegans*) just west of the entrance into Nduna camp, and we headed there in search of this beautiful bird. I started calling it using my bird calls from my iPad and within seconds there was a response from a jealous male some distance away. We froze in anticipation. I played the call again and we had a flash view of the bird as it made a sudden U-turn going back and settling in a tree about 60 meters away from us! It had its back facing us and was so well camouflaged, and it's because of this concealing behaviour that we don't get to see these birds on a regular basis.

The guests checked out the next morning having accomplished our mission, full of joy after recording 94 species of birds including all those on the bucket list. They promised to return again in the near future but this time only with three species on the bucket list: the Pel's fishing owl, blue-spotted wood dove, and the blue cheeked bee-eater. I am holding my breath!

These are screengrabs from the Sasol eBirds app, of the bucket list five:



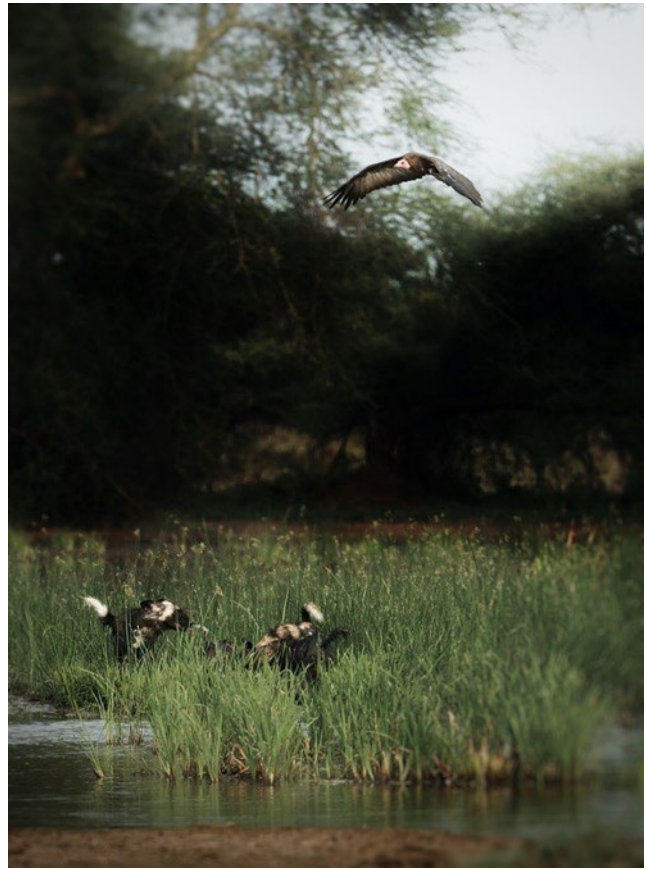
Wild dog days

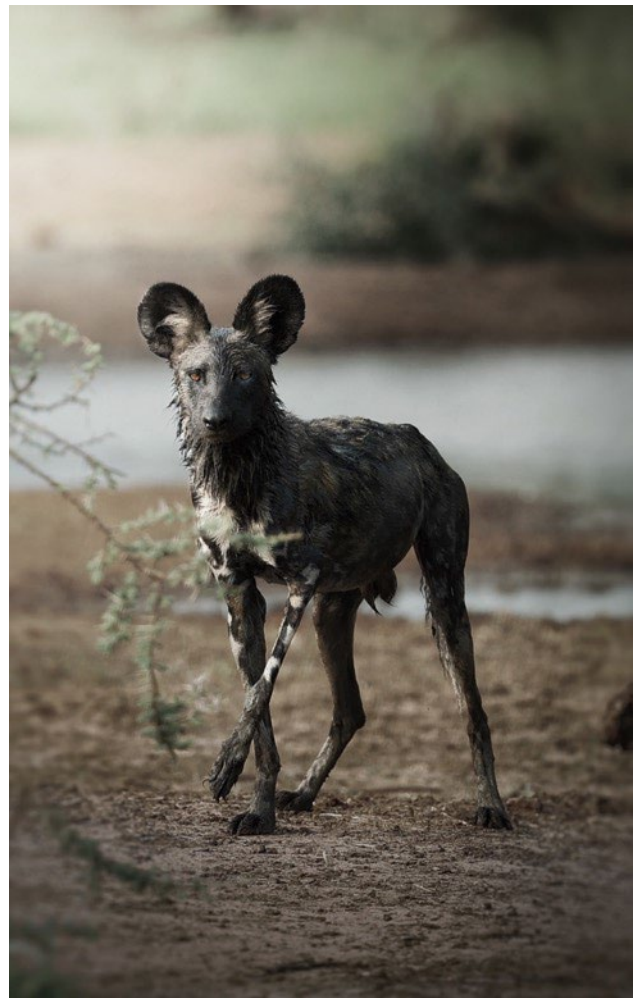
This beautiful sequence of African wild dogs was photographed by young wildlife photographer and artist, Scott Wenham. His artistic eye, camera knowledge and post-production skill combine to celebrate the wildness, characters and camouflage beauty of these Critically Endangered animals.

The pack and their pups were spending time in the muddy shallows of Banyini Pan as another Critically Endangered creature, a hooded vulture, scanned the area for feeding opportunities.

Good wildlife photography can help global conservation efforts. Evocative images of endangered species such as wild dogs helps to raise awareness by creating an emotional connection for viewers. Wildlife photography is also one of the main attractions in conservation tourism which can contribute to the protection of wilderness landscapes. Also, photographers are able to contribute to conservation management by sharing their images with research programmes and online Citizen Science atlasing databases.

Story by Jenny Hishin, photos by Scott Wenham







A buffalo bull trying to have a private mud bath behind a curtain of grass.



An elephant bull wades knee-deep in the green ocean, as a giraffe looks yonder.



A herd of buffalo barge in and bully an elephant and white rhino away from the waterhole.





A white rhino looking somewhat disenchanted with the same greens being served up, day after day.

Compiled by Jenny Hishin