

Singita



Photo by Josh Saunders

WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE

For the month of July, Two Thousand and Twenty One

Temperature

Average minimum:	11.3°C (52.3°F)
Minimum recorded:	07.9°C (46.2°F)
Average maximum:	25.7°C (78.2°F)
Maximum recorded:	33.1°C (91.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month:	0.4 mm
Season to date:	808.3 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise:	06:25
Sunset:	17:35

Although we are in the grip of winter, our Zimbabwean lowveld winters are comparatively mild and we still experience glorious, sunny warm days. The vegetation is relatively thick given the time of year, thanks to all the rain we received, but the colours have turned to the muted metallics.

It's been a busy month with guests and sightings, so here's an overview:

Lions

- The River Pride males were found cuddled up together in the morning sunshine, trying to warm up.
- The Southern Pride have been seen near the boundary in the Benzi area.
- The dedicated lion scouts track the lion prides daily, so all guests should see lions at Singita Pamushana.

Leopards

- There've been some lucky sightings of leopards this month. Two of the highlights were of a young adult leopardess sitting on a large mound near to the road, bathed in late afternoon golden sunlight, and another stalking and hunting impalas and nyalas.

Hyenas

- The clan of hyena in the central areas is so formidable. Eight of them were seen near the airstrip trying to locate some wild dogs that had been in the area, and they've been making kills and feeding around Simbiri Dam.

Rhinos

- Excellent sightings of rhinos, as always. Many of the sightings are at rhino middens where a dominant bull marks his territory, and other rhinos show their submissive acceptance of the territorial bull.
- One of the most enjoyable white rhino sightings was on the Banyini open areas of a bull patrolling and marking his territory while a mother and calf happily grazed while basking in the warm sunshine. Another was of a white rhino bull with a long needle-sharp horn, posing beautifully while backdropped by the typical African scene of an umbrella tree.

Elephants

- The elephant sightings are also excellent, thanks to the drying vegetation and the need to drink from the pans that have a year-round supply of water.
- A lovely breeding herd sighting was when they were located moving across the Mubangweni Road. The elephants with their babies happily walked in front and behind the vehicle, appearing and then disappearing like great grey ghosts from the mopane woodlands.
- A memorable bull encounter was had on the eastern side of the Banyini where there was a large elephant feeding in the mopane. The guide stopped on the road at about 50 metres from him and the giant then stopped feeding and walked straight to the guide and guests, stopping only about eight metres from the vehicle. He looked everyone over, then crossed the road and started feeding nearby. The guests spent about 10 minutes watching him in silence, loving the experience and seeing him feed at such close proximity.

Buffalo

- The vast herds drink daily and watching this is quite a spectacle. Here's one account, "A cloud of dust started to emerge from the eastern tree line, and we knew it was something big. We positioned ourselves at the water. What a sight it was... an estimated 800 or more buffalo came pouring in for water. Like a swarm they quickly engulfed the waterhole and waded in, providing us with front row seats to some spectacular viewing of the unforgettable event."

Plains game

- Wonderful scenes of the abundant plains game, as well as the more reclusive eland, sable and Lichtenstein's hartebeest.

Unusual sightings

- There was a great sighting in the evening of an African wild cat.

Underground photo hide

- The Hwata photo hide is very popular with elephants, rhinos, buffalo, plains game and guests!

Bush walks

- Now is the very best time for bush walks. Some guests have spent time on foot watching two white rhinos graze nearby. Other guests watched a bull elephant drink from a spring that flows from a hole in a rock, while four buffalo bulls grazed nearby. Their guide helped them to climb onto a rock right above the scene and watch from the safe vantage while being in complete awe of this experience. Then they continued to another spring and spent time watching a herd of over 100 buffalo pour in for water. Apart from the wildlife that can be seen on foot it is wonderful to experience great vistas and views, and to stand next to some of the biggest baobabs that stand sentinel over this landscape.

Rock art

- Here's an account from the daily reports of one guide's excursion with guests to see some of the rock art, "We enjoyed a beautiful walk through the Malilangwe hills, navigating highrise rocky passages, never knowing what lay around the next bend. On the one corridor we turned up, we came through the vegetation to be blown away by the sheer scale and multitude of ancient rock art on the rock face. We spent nearly 40 mins just admiring the huge variety of paintings. Eventually we had to press on and continued to Chimbiya spring, passing more rock art and taking some time to just absorb the tranquil environment we found ourselves in."

Gonarezhou day trips

- One of the day trips into Gonarezhou National Park included visiting Chivilila Falls and having tea on the platform, then continuing on to Chilojo Cliffs where elephants, kudu, zebra, nyala and other plains game were seen en route. At the cliffs a couple of elephant bulls were cooling their feet in the river directly below the colourful cliffs, creating a most memorable iconic scene.

Water safaris and fishing

- The sundowner water safaris are simply sublime at this time of year.
- The fishing is less prolific in these colder winter months, but some monster tigers have been landed by devout enthusiasts!

Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as the July Gallery of images.

Covid-19, what a disruptive chapter this has been for the world, for us as humans, for business and especially the Travel and Leisure industry. Having recently spent too much time without any guests to guide, as a direct result of this pandemic, I was so excited to finally get a private guide and his guest who were determined to not let anything stop them coming on safari. Upon picking them up from their late flight and chatting with them on the way back to the lodge, I listened as they told me the horrors and frustrations of being locked down in the UK, and how special it was just to be out in the fresh air with nothing but pure pristine wild areas around them. So, without wasting too much time settling the guest into the lodge, we made a plan to get out into the bush as soon as possible.

We left the lodge in the late afternoon, and being winter here right now the sun starts to set rather early, but despite this the birds were out in force singing and chirping away while impala and nyala hung around a small waterhole near the lodge, lapping up the last rays of the afternoon sun. Finally, we were out and away from all the restrictions and worries of before!

It's amazing how Mother Nature just knows what is needed to heal our souls. This afternoon was no exception, and as we drove round the corner from the lodge, filled with excitement and still chatting, I glanced to my left and I could not believe my eyes... There was a young adult female leopard just sitting upright on an earth mound, right next to the vehicle! I was so excited, simultaneously bringing the vehicle to a stop, pointing out the cat, and getting my words out in time, fearing that this magnificent cat would flee if we made any undue sound or movement. To my absolute relief, this elusive, solitary, secretive leopard remained sitting there looking at us, then looking around her territory for any hunting opportunities. I turned to my guests to express my excitement and saw them also blown away by this sighting. It was the last thing we had expected to see, let alone to see her so relaxed, and almost as if she was excited to see guests again and had come out to welcome us! A ray of golden light came out from the shade, catching the leopard's eyes and causing them to glisten. Despite my guest and her private guide both being into photography, neither had their cameras up, both were so entranced at this sighting. I quietly suggested grabbing a quick picture even if it was just for a memory of their welcome to Zimbabwe.



Photo by Nicholas Vounnou

We spent several minutes watching the young leopardess before she zeroed in on some distant sounds. She slowly got up, looked back at us momentarily, as if to say, "Please excuse me, my dinner is calling..." and off she went. As we started to move off, we could see far away in the distance what she had been hearing, a herd of impala moving through the thick vegetation, making them a great hunting opportunity for the leopard.

An afternoon well spent

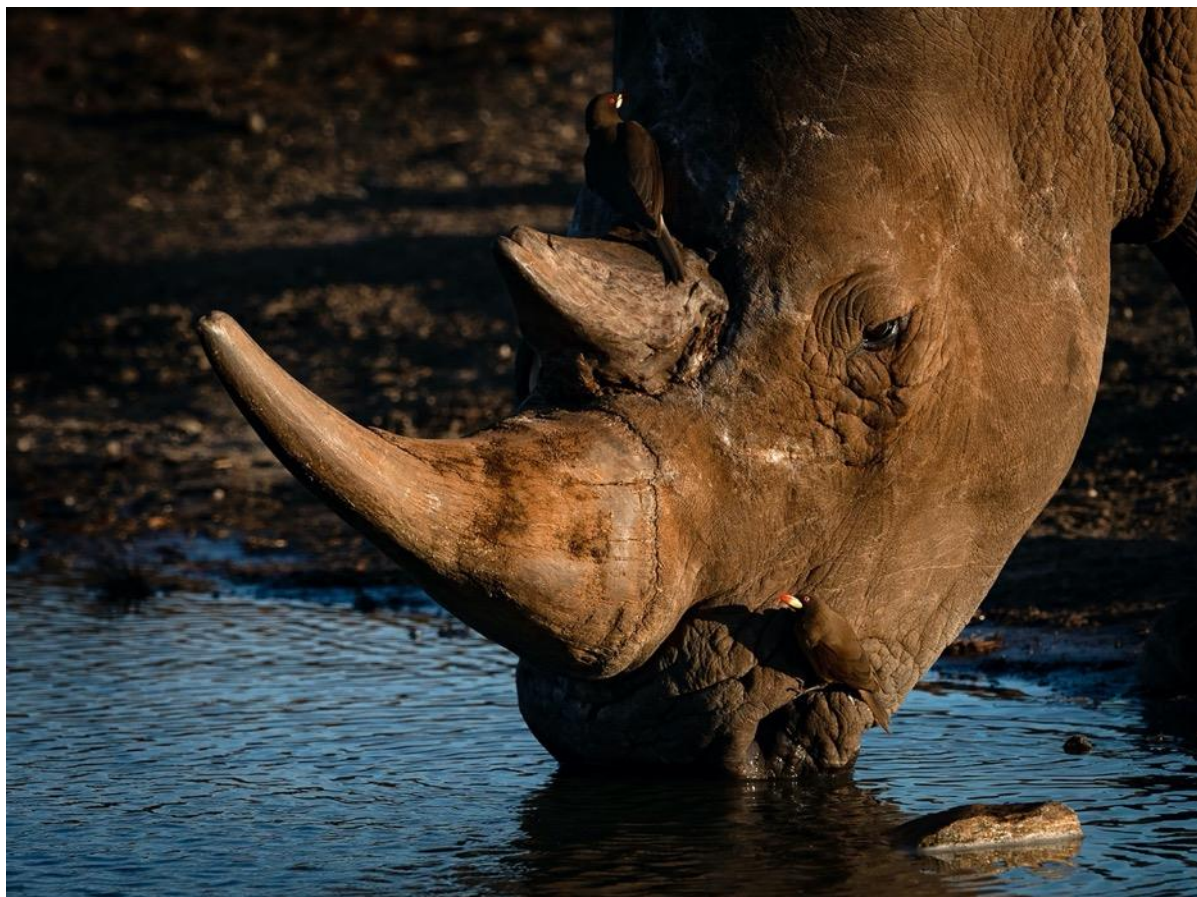
Story and photos by Alex Naert

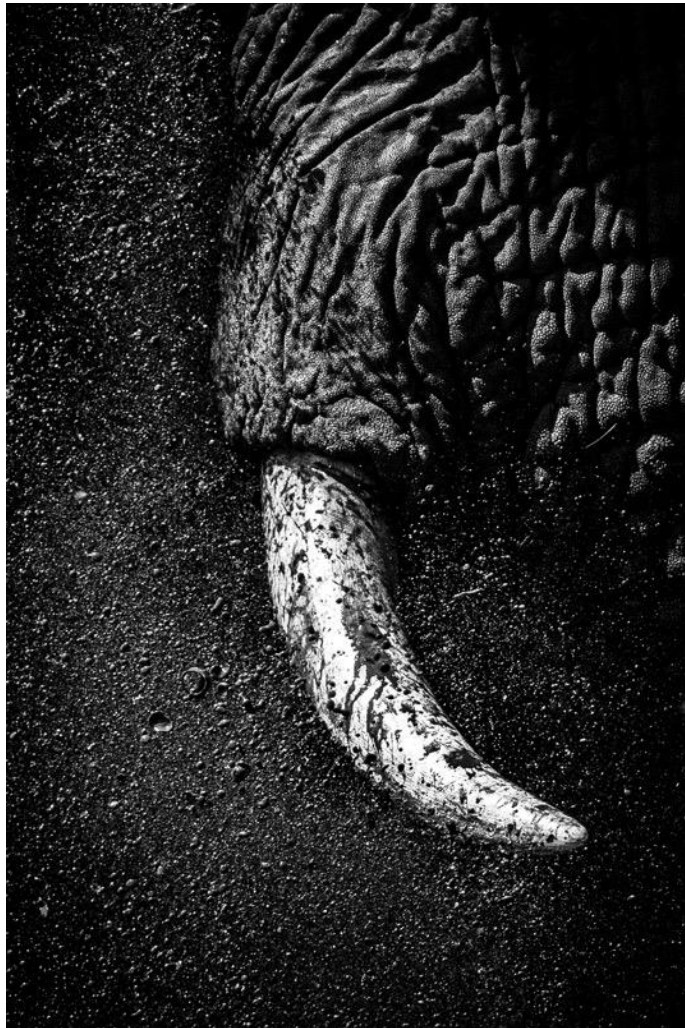
It was my guests' first afternoon at Singita Pamushana and I decided to take them to the underground photo hide at Hwata Pan, here on the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve. When we arrived there were no animals at the pan, so we went into the hide, set ourselves up and waited patiently.

It only took 10 minutes for a white rhino cow and her calf to show up. She cautiously walked up to the water's edge and started drinking, whilst her calf stood beside her looking at the laughing doves. Before she had finished drinking two young white rhino bulls walked straight to the water and started drinking. Before long the cow and calf were standing away from the water with another cow and calf, and a couple more rhino at the waterhole. In total we had 11 white rhinos surrounding us!

As the sun started to set and the rhinos slowly disappeared into the mopane, a lone old buffalo bull came down to the water, looked around and walked away without drinking. We were enjoying the sound of the double-banded sandgrouse, when a young elephant bull came along to drink. He drank his fill and as he was walking off he flushed a male lion out of a grass patch! The elephant ran off in one direction and the lion in the other.

It was now the end of our first afternoon and it reminded me of another amazing afternoon spent there taking photographs of lions and rhinos, in the hide, at such close proximity to these large wild animals.





Soft light

We are well into winter and on some chilly mornings a blanket of mist has been thrown over the low lying landscape. By driving through the mist you receive a complimentary, hydrating, facial spritzer. It's the perfect way to wake up and get ready for the photographic opportunities that lie ahead, because the blanket of mist acts like a filter for soft photographic studio light.



Photo taken above the low-lying mist by Josh Saunders, and the photo on the airstrip of beautiful soft diffused light, with the sunshine trying to break through, by Mark Saunders.



Twitter



Blue waxbills at the water's edge.
Photos by Josh Saunders



Red-billed oxpeckers jumping off a buffalo to take a bath, then flying back onto the buffalo's rump to dry themselves off and preen.
Photo by Josh Saunders



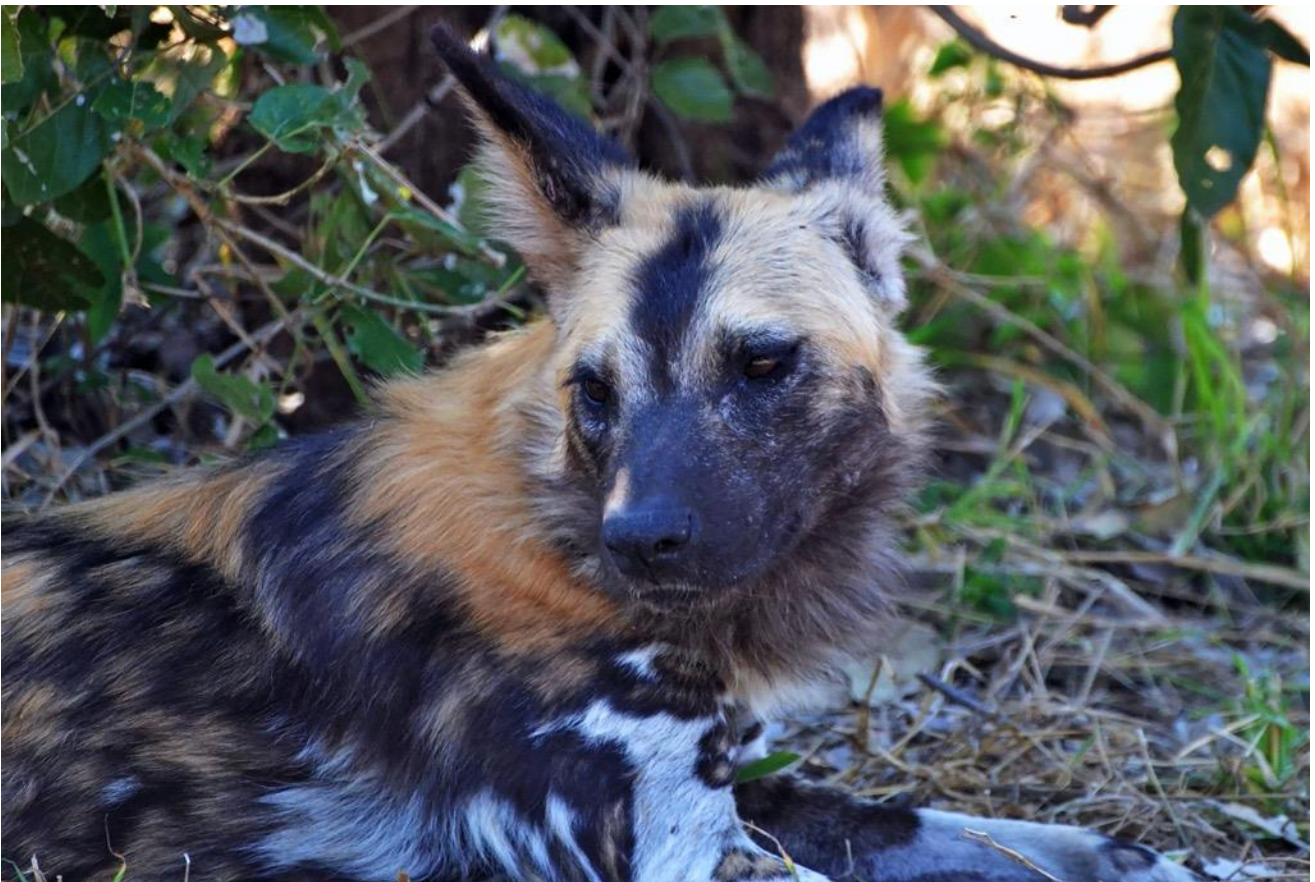
A crested barbet having a drink on the deck.
Photo by Jennifer Conaghan

July Gallery



Zebras at Hwata Pan, and an African wild dog cooling off in the shade.

Photos by Josh Saunders

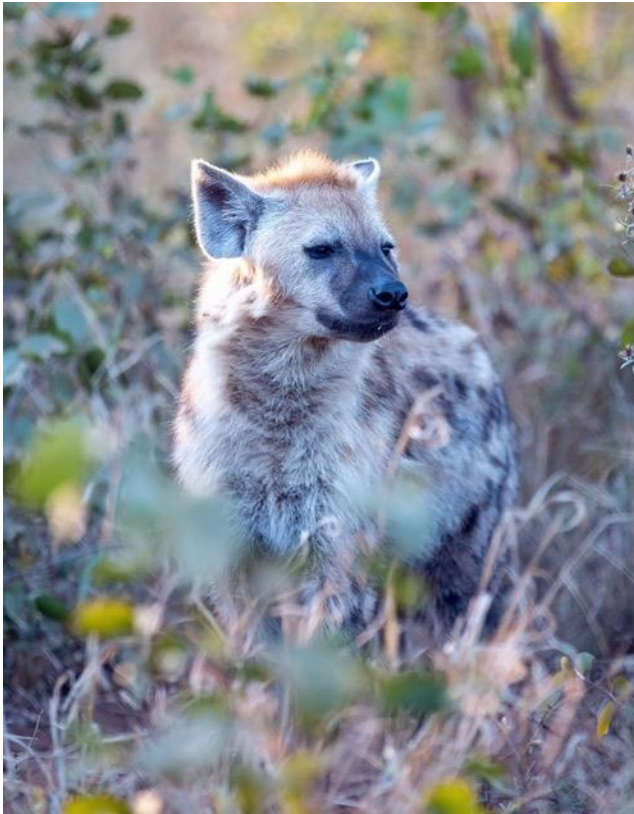




Elephant bulls at the bar.
A bull elephant enjoys a sloshy mudbath.

Photo by Mark Saunders
Photo by Josh Saunders





A young hyena in photogenic light.
Photo by Jennifer Conaghan

Hyenas at night with their eyes reflecting in the
spotlight creating a humorously ghoulish effect!
Photo by Josh Saunders

