

# Singita



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

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 13.9°C (57.0°F)  
Minimum recorded: 09.1°C (48.3°F)  
Average maximum: 26.8°C (80.2°F)  
Maximum recorded: 35.5°C (95.9°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 5.0 mm  
Season to date: 350.6 mm  
\*Season = Sep to Aug

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 06:31  
Sunset: 17:23

June announced her arrival with the crackle and crunch of drying herbaceous undergrowth as we walked the landscape by day, and spritzes of mist on your face as we drove in the early mornings armed with a hot water bottle on our laps. The warm winter days always confirm there's no better place to be, and the clear nights have been ideal for sunsets and mind-blowing stargazing!

Guests that have chosen Singita Pamushana for their first ever safari have been ecstatic with the sightings seen. Sightings-wise it is the most prolific time of the year, and some guests were lucky enough to spot the Big 5 on an afternoon drive.

**A sightings snapshot for June follows:**

## Lions

- Five lions were around Hwata Pan – three males and two females. Both the females were in oestrus.
- The Nduna Pride killed an adult buffalo bull just south of Bandama Pan. Six members of the pride were present feasting – three adult males and three adult females.
- An eye-opening sighting was seeing two adult lionesses feasting on a baboon carcass.
- An awesome scenario was, after spending the afternoon exploring the Chiredzi riverbank and stopping at Chikwete Cliffs for sundowners, seeing two adult male lions relaxed in the sandbank below the cliffs. The audio as they roared and the echoing sounds were epic.
- Later in the month these two brother lions from the Hippo Valley side joined up with two females along the Chiredzi River. The males showed great interest in the lionesses and followed them every time they moved.

## Leopards

- June has been a great month for leopard viewing – some of the sightings included: a beautiful leopard north of the runway, a swift leopard crossing the road near Sosigi, an adult male leopard on the western side of the river that then proceeded up some sandstone rocks and remained relaxed, two different female leopards as we returned to the lodge after sunset, and a big male leopard patrolling at night.
- A particularly good sighting that many guests got to see was of an adult female leopard with her two cubs feasting on an impala – the sound-effects were as impressive. The mother must have killed the impala in the morning, but as the sun was setting it was obvious that she was going to safeguard the food against other marauding predators. It was so impressive to witness her lifting the carcass up and hoisting it high in a nearby umbrella tree.
- Another incredible encounter was of a mother leopard and her cub. The mother gave away their position by leaving a drag mark from her kill across a road. The guide and his guests parked a respectful distance away and got to see the bold and relaxed cub walking all over the site. The funniest was when a big male giraffe came their way and the cub immediately got down flat on the ground, showing hunting instincts. Then it leapt out giving the huge giraffe a fright and it fled away!

## Wild dogs

- The great news is that the pack of six adults denned successfully on the south-eastern boundary. They were initially seen with eight puppies but the latest sightings are of five pups. The pack seem well and were also seen feeding on an impala which they had killed on the fenceline.
- We have yet to confirm if the larger pack in the north have denned and successfully raised pups.

## Hyenas

- Two hyena clans were seen fighting near Croc Creek – the howls, growls, yips and laughs rocked the airwaves!
- Under spotlight, on the way back to the lodge, two hyenas were spotted feeding on an impala carcass. Further investigation revealed a young leopard which had been displaced from its kill by the hyenas. The leopard later approached the hyenas, fought them, and reclaimed the kill but was not able to stash it in a nearby tree. It's most likely the leopard lost the kill to the hyenas again.

## Rhinos

- Brilliant sightings of both black and white rhinos, as always. One of the guides in his sighting report has described a black rhino mock charging his vehicle as the rhino doing its "investigation dance" – a rather wonderful way of describing this formidable behaviour.
- In amongst a breeding herd of well over 300 buffaloes was a black rhino mother and sub-adult calf. Upon noticing the game-viewer the rhinos shot out in full speed, mock charging the game viewer. The guests got some wonderful footage on their phones and cameras.
- The standout sighting of white rhinos was seeing a calf right after it had been born.

### **Elephants**

- Large breeding herds have been seen calmly feeding – there was one of about 90 animals near the old bush dinner baobab and on West Valley Road, and another of more than 150 at the swamps on Hippo Valley, with buffalos feeding nearby.
- The bulls have been seen drinking at Hwata and Banyini Pans.

### **Buffalos**

- Large herds of buffalo have been seen drinking at Banyini Pan and at the Chiredzi River, and feeding at the swamps.
- A lucky escape was when two adult lionesses were observed stalking and then chasing buffalos. They missed one by a whisker and the buffalo lived to see another sunrise.

### **Plains game**

- In addition to the abundant plains game of zebras, giraffes, wildebeest and impala it has been especially rewarding to see a herd of about 20 sable antelope with their young ones.

### **Unusual**

- An after-dark surprise was seeing an African wild cat on the prowl.
- A troop of dwarf mongooses were unconcerned by the human audience as they were earnestly digging for something. It was amazing to watch how they ignored us and carried on as the hole got deeper and deeper.

### **Birds**

- Stealing the show again was a bat hawk doing beautiful aerial displays chasing after bats.

### **Boat cruise**

- These are always a highlight with zen vibes, hippos, crocodiles and birds aplenty, but not feeling the zen vibe was a hyena that was seen swimming across the river with crocodiles in hot pursuit!

### **Fishing**

- Despite the 'cold' weather some earnest fishermen have been out, and have caught. One young guest wished to catch a tigerfish, catfish and a tilapia. He landed a tigerfish on his first cast, and followed that up with a catfish and tilapia. Wish granted.

### **Photographic hide**

- Rhinos and elephant bulls are the regulars at the pan where our sunken photographic hide is. However, many other species are drawn there too, and this month a mating pair of lions came to quench their thirst while guests were inside the hide. What an exhilarating experience!

### **Walks & rock art**

- It's the best time of year to conduct bush walks, which we love, especially when they include a visit to a rock art site or the most mammoth baobab on the property.

### **Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft**

- Outings to the bushcraft museum have been enjoyed, especially when guests get involved with learning some of the crafts such as making fire, finding water, pounding grain and cracking a whip.

### **Daytrips to Gonarezhou National Park**

- Adventurous guests did a camp out in Gonarezhou, and spent an unforgettable night listening to the sounds of lions, leopards and elephants, safely alone with their guides in the wilderness.

**Some bush stories follow, as well as the June Gallery.**



## Simbiri waterpoint

Simbiri Dam is small, set at the base of a sandstone cliff, has a sandy shore and big boulders strewn about. Our talented lion scouting team followed the tracks of some of the Nduna lions there, and found them drinking. It was a beautiful scene as the gold, copper and emerald tones of the scene reflected and rippled in the water, setting off the colour and profile of the lions to dramatic effect.



Getting caught between a rock and a hard place were two little birds that had been parading along the shoreline – not ideal when the “hard place” in this case was a significant cat.





Like a knight in shining armour





This white rhino bull arrived at the waterhole, but spent a significant amount of time sharpening his horn, before drinking.

Rhinos sharpen their horns through a process of constant abrasion against various surfaces such as trees, rocks, and the ground. This behaviour is both instinctive and necessary, as the rhino's horn, composed primarily of keratin, can become blunt and less effective if not regularly maintained. By honing their horns, rhinos ensure that they remain sharp and pointed, which is crucial for combat with rivals, defence against predators, and even foraging for food. The act of sharpening serves to keep the horn in optimal condition, and the rocks and baked gritty earth around the waterhole provide the perfect whetstone.

He first used a stone, rubbing his horn over it, and then the drying mud, vigorously dragging and pummeling his horn across it. After that he went and drank calmly, for quite some time. He was the only rhino at the waterhole. But after drinking he decided that his horn still needed refinement. He had wet the bottom edge in the water, got a bit of mud on it, made his way over to the dry gravel, and, with determined intent, filed his horn some more. Notice how he created plumes of dust as he did so.

It was fascinating to watch – he was like a medieval knight meticulously sharpening his sword. A successful dominant rhino always needs to be prepared for battle and to defend his realm. Even his smaller horn was sharpened and in shape – you could see he had rubbed it against the trunk of a tree as it had tannin stains from bark on it.

Some wildlife reserves have opted to remove the horns from their rhinos as a conservation strategy to protect them from poaching. The horns do regrow over time. Dehorning provides a temporary deterrent and is useful in areas where the rhino population cannot be monitored and protected on a round-the-clock basis – but as you can imagine it de-arms rhinos of their formidable weaponry which alters their natural behaviour.



## Caught napping

This photo was taken at 06:10 when it was still quite dark – I had to crank the ISO up to 1250.

I'd been travelling down the main Binya Road, wanting to get to a specific area to look for black rhinos at dawn. As I travelled along, bundled up against the chill, I went past a boulder that shouldn't have been at the side of the road. Braking as gently as possible I realised it was a black rhino, fast asleep, and curled up in a sandy indentation.

Black rhinos have a way of surprising one, but finding one fast asleep on the side of our main road was a new gig for me, and to add to our delight, there was a mother and calf also tucked up and asleep a few metres into the thickets as well. Shortly thereafter they all woke up, rolled over and stood up, the bull only then catching our scent and spotting us. The little family calmly ambled off into the bushes to start their dawn browsing.



While their eyesight is relatively poor, black rhinos have excellent hearing and a strong sense of smell, which they rely on heavily to detect danger and locate other rhinos.

In this photo you can see the triangular prehensile upper lip that is pointed and adapted for grasping leaves and twigs from bushes and trees. This is one feature that distinguishes them from white rhinos, which have a broad, flat mouth suited for grazing.

Black rhinos are generally solitary, but they are known to establish territories. The territories of males often overlap those of several females, and they use scent marking and dung piles to communicate and mark their presence.

Black rhinos can run at speeds of up to 55 km/h (34 mph). This is a good time to remind everyone that the speed limit on the main Binya Road is 50 km/h so, if a black rhino overtakes you, just stay in your lane!



## Marching into battle

Again the Binya Road delivered this surprise. We'd been searching for wild dogs for over a week and coming up empty-handed. I headed far south-west and found their fresh tracks on the bank of the river and despaired that they may have crossed over. Heading back towards the main road we came across an enormous fallen tree that blocked the path, and there was virtually no way around it. The detour back the way we came would have been so long, that I decided to off-road around the tree and pick a path through, which was easier said than done, but we were elated when we popped out on the southern section of Binya Road to find the whole pack of dogs resting and playing in the middle of the road!



I radioed the other guides who were quite far away to let them know, and then we spent the better part of an hour watching the wild dogs / painted wolves / hunting dogs interact. In due course they started rallying for their evening hunt. It was fascinating to watch as they marched up the road, sometimes in single file, looking nonchalant but listening intently for any audio of potential prey. Their satellite dish ears moved constantly. If something caught their attention a few of them would bound off in that direction, with high leaps to try and get a visual on the animal. If nothing came of it they would return back to the road and continue their at-ease march.

The latest news update with the wild dog packs is that the smaller pack of adults have denned on the southern boundary, west of the Chiredzi River, and have been seen with five pups.

We have a very strict and entirely appropriate rule to not to disturb any wild dog den-sites to ensure that the pups have the maximum protection and chance of survival, so we only view dogs with their pups when the pups are old enough to leave the den. (By viewing pups at a den-site other predators like lions and hyenas learn the whereabouts of the dens from the regular vehicle presence and the track left behind by vehicles regularly accessing the site. These predators can and will kill pups in a bid to eliminate all competition. Also, adult members of the pack that have been out hunting are more reluctant to return to the den to regurgitate the meat they have swallowed for the pups, if humans are there, and therefore the pups become starved or malnourished and do not grow into the healthy strong specimens. Another problem is that more hunting dogs may stay behind to babysit pups if they are being viewed by humans at a den-site, and this lowers the success rate of hunts resulting in less food for the pack and pups.)



The larger pack (photographed in this story) are possibly denning in the north at the moment, but as per protocol we have left them undisturbed and are therefore unaware if they have pups yet.



Aren't these the most beautiful creatures ever? Their coats are the epitome of camouflage chic, and their long legs, wasp waists, coal-black muzzles and chestnut eyes are mesmerizing. That is to say nothing of their cerebral intelligence and unrivalled, tight-knit, family social structure. Every single sighting of them is extremely special and not to be taken for granted. Being one of the world's most endangered animals who knows, if ever, we or our children or grandchildren might see them again?

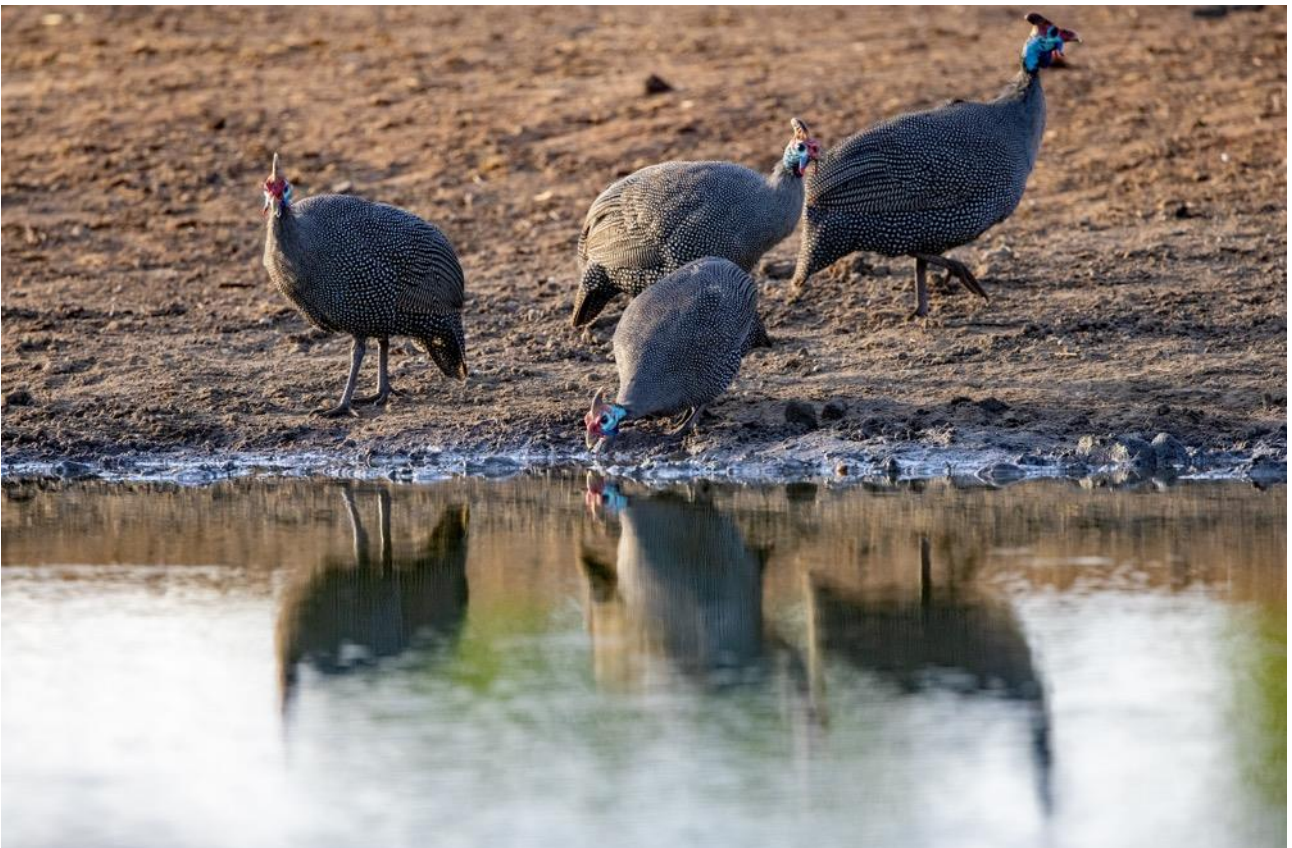




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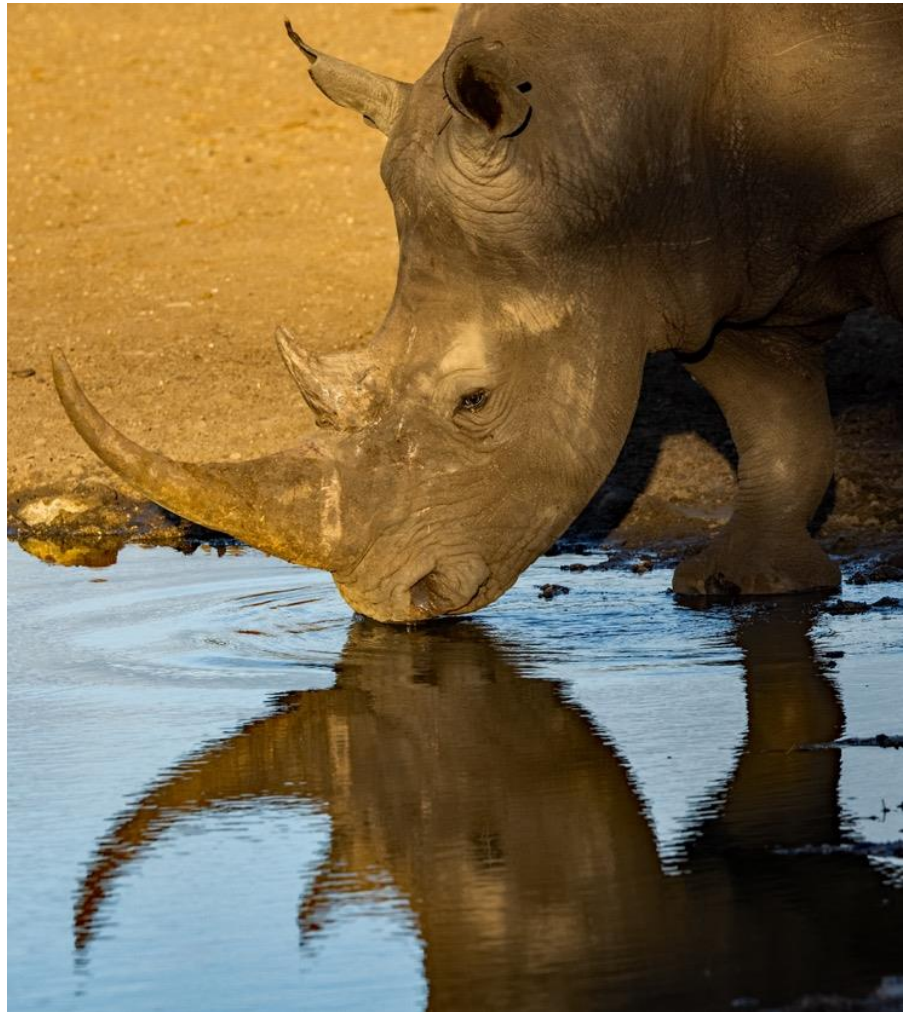
A pied kingfisher shakes off water after an unsuccessful dive, so that it's not waterlogged on the next try.  
A serene scene of helmeted guineafowl cautiously wetting their beaks.





## June Gallery

In between filing his horn this white rhino bull had a good long drink, casting a sketchy reflection of himself.



These inky dribbles of umbrella tree trunks encased between a canopy and footing of green always stop me in my tracks.



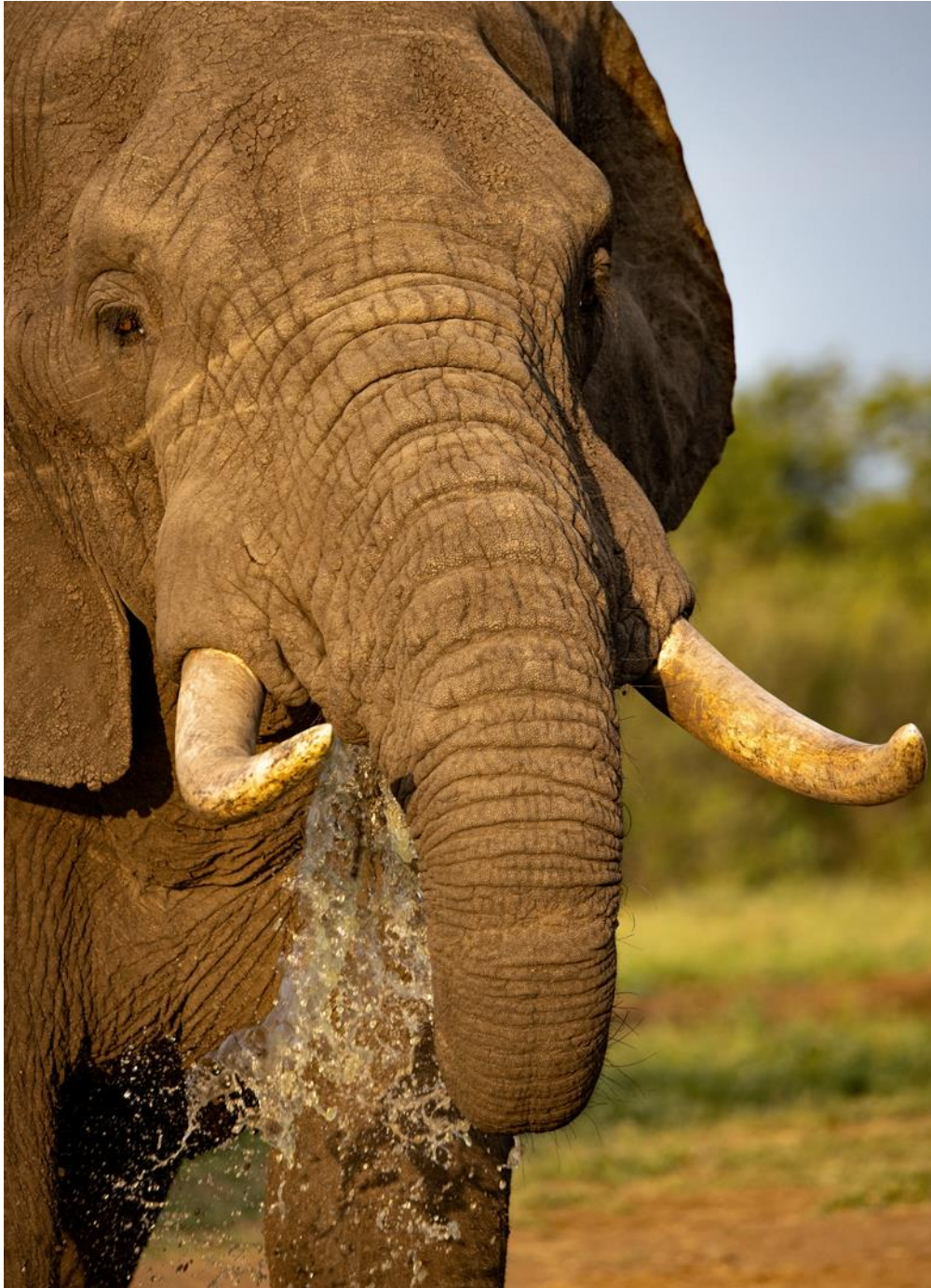




Synchronised drinking.  
This little croc thought we hadn't spotted it basking on a bank of mud.







This elephant bull not quite getting the conservation memo to use water sparingly. June has been dry, and many of the animals are drawn to the permanent water sources to drink. It really has been an excellent month for game viewing.

**All stories and photographs by Jenny Hishin, unless otherwise indicated.**