

Singita



Male lion from the coalition of six seen on the Sasakwa Plains. Photographed by Calson Luka.

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19°C (65°F)
Average maximum: 32°C (89°F)
Minimum recorded: 17°C (62°F)
Maximum recorded: 33°C (91°F)

Rainfall Recorded

Faru Faru 62 mm
Sabora 156 mm
Sasakwa 168.5 mm
Lamai 140.03mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise 06:08
Sunset 18:17

In true September spring style we watched the burnt, brown and dusty plains of Grumeti transform into a lush, green and emerald landscape with the onset of some early rains. July and August had been very dry but by the end of September the area looked dramatically different. The Grumeti River is up again and flowing a thick, chocolate brown colour. The grass, trees and bushes all have green shoots and the wildlife flocks to the previously burnt areas to capitalise on the fresh, nutritious grasses. Waterholes and pan systems have filled up and we have seen the terrapins re-emerge.

Prior to the rain and at the start of the month there was very little water around. Animals had to move far and had a choice between either the Grumeti River or Sasakwa Dam. Big, long and dusty animal paths led to all the safest watering spots, while lions and leopards lay in ambush at the more dangerous ones that were surrounded by thick bush with limited escape routes.

September Sightings Overview for Grumeti:

Lions:

The lion viewing has been exceptionally good and there are more cubs stashed in den-sites than we can count! Some lionesses have grouped together accompanied by 11 cubs or more at a time. Other lionesses are still secretively denning, and we have yet to see their cubs. The oldest cubs seem to be about three months old. Other highlights include:

- Lion activity on Sasakwa Hill has been exciting and we often hear lion and hyena disturbing each other during the night. We had two big male lions spend some time on Sasakwa Hill and they were determined to find the lionesses. The lionesses did their best to avoid the males but inevitably they did meet up and we could hear lots of roaring and fighting. Last year we lost cubs to infanticide on the hill and we hope the same does not happen again. It does however make for interesting lion behaviour and dynamics. The males are believed to be the same males that were seen with the Ridge Pride around Sabora Access and Fungo Road earlier in the month.
- A number of coalitions of older, mature male lions have been present and we even had lions mating on Sasakwa Hill, as well as two mating pairs right in front of Sabora Tented Camp. The presence of the bigger males seems to have pushed the coalitions of younger males out of the area for now which is normal lion behaviour.
- 20 members of Butamtam Pride (3 lionesses, 6 big males and 11 cubs) sighted along Chui drainage – this now seems to be the pride's preferred den-site area.
- 13 members of Ridge Pride (5 lionesses and 8 cubs sighted at junction Sabora Access and Mak Link.
- 5 members of Nyasirori Pride (3 sub-adult lions and 2 sub-adult lionesses sighted at junction Fungo and Serengeti Roads. The six members of were seen north of Sabora Tented Camp.
- A pride of 6 (4 subadult lions 2 subadult lionesses) sighted in the Albizia woodland.
- A pride of 16 were sighted west of Balanites Explore Camp.

Leopards:

We are still fortunate to see good sightings but we do think leopards and cheetahs become more secretive as they attempt to stay out of the way of all the lions that are about. Sightings include:

- 1 adult female sighted at Mbogo drainage.
- A relaxed female seen along Raho drainage upstream from Kigelia crossing ,with Bohor reedbeek kill.
- A big male was seen on Sasakwa Hill.
- A skittish unsexed leopard was sighted north of Sasakwa airstrip.
- A male was sighted west of the balloon launch site, and he was relaxed.
- A skittish leopard was seen between Grumeti River and Nyabeu drainage line.
- A female and her cub were sighted along River Road, believed to be the Grumeti North female.

Cheetahs:

- 1 adult male sighted east of marsh area. Most likely the new young male that now dominates the Sasakwa Plains and surrounding areas. Seen around WD waterhole and Old School areas too.
- 1 adult male sighted east of balloon launch site.
- A young female sighted west of Sabora Tented Camp.
- Male with Thomson's gazelle carcass sighted west of Nyasirori Ranger Post.
- A single female was sighted east of Nyuki bush breakfast site.
- 2 young males seen near Boundary Pan and Nyasirori high grounds, hunting young warthogs.

Elephants:

- We continue to remain fortunate with numerous elephant sightings. The rains mean they have dispersed from the Grumeti River and back into all the woodlands – capitalising on the fresh growth on the trees and the abundance of water everywhere.
- Breeding herds ranging between 7 and 40 individuals have been seen far and wide. There are also a lot of young calves in the herds at the moment.

Migration

- At the start of the month, when it was still hot and dry, we had very good numbers of zebra (herds 1 000 strong) congregating around Sasakwa Dam and safe drinking points on the Grumeti River. The rains which resulted in water becoming available everywhere meant that the zebra herds pushed into the previously burnt areas.
- Wildebeest numbers remained quite low during the month but on 24 September there were reports of the first decent herds entering the Ikorongo, around Nyabehu area, heading towards Grumeti. The area continued to fill up over the following days to an estimated 5 000 animals by the end of the month.

Buffalos:

- The buffalo herds are strong at the moment, with herds ranging from 80 to 400 individuals. Healthy adults with many calves are protected within the herd, and big bulls guard the flanks making the youngsters a tough challenge for lions and hyenas that are trying to target them.
- Even the herds of bachelor bulls number 30 – 50 strong.

Rhinos:

- The rhinos in the sanctuary are all well and the male has been seen frequently this month.
- We've had reports of at least three calves under six months old from the rhino population that we released into the Ikorongo – Serengeti areas. It is really pleasing to hear the population is growing.

Plains game:

- From mid-September we saw lots of new babies being born – noticeably zebra, impala and topi. There seems to be a lot of young giraffe and elephant calves too. Grouped into nursery herds the young giraffe stay out in the open watched carefully by their mothers who feed on the fringe of the woodlands.
- Far out west in the short grass plains there are reports of large herds of topi congregating together and starting to calf, and the Ikorongo has also started to become busy with plains game as well as elephant herds.
- The first wildebeest started to arrive in the Ikorongo towards the end of September.

Unusual sightings

- A female giraffe was seen who had had a miscarriage. On closer investigation the guides realised there were twins which is quite unusual. The mother was healthy, not too young, and there was plenty of resources in the area for her (food and water). So we concluded that although it has been recorded for giraffe to have twins it is very unusual. Most of the time the two foetuses become too big for the mother to carry and she miscarries in order to ensure that she at least can survive and go onto to reproduce again in the future. We shared the information with the RISE research team.

September Sightings Overview for Lamai (Mara River Tented Camp):

The month of September has been a very good month to be visiting Mara River Tented Camp and the game viewing has been exceptional.

Migration:

- Lamai has continued with its impressive game viewing over this period. Huge migratory herds have remained on the northern side of the Mara River congregating in the Lamai Triangle before pushing north into the Masai Mara. River crossings have been pretty consistent and there was a shift of animals pouring north at the start of the month along the stretch of river close to Mara River Tented Camp. Towards the middle and end of the month we noticed herds starting to push south again and were crossing the river south further east of us (Crossing point 7 and eastwards). From the 20th September the push south by the big herds was very noticeable as they began to drain out of the Masai Mara, south across the Mara River and into the Serengeti where big rains had fallen.
- The Lamai area continued to hold huge herds of wildebeest because of the frequent afternoon thunderstorms. If the rains persist in the central and western Serengeti it is possible many of the herds will leave the Mara River areas and head south and arrive back on Grumeti earlier than expected.

Lions:

We are fortunate to have the Lamai Triangle as an area to do our game drives in when we are not exploring the Mara River looking for migration crossings, crocodiles and hippos. In the Lamai Triangle there is very good lion viewing. There are numerous impressive males in coalitions of two or three. Strong lionesses use the thick riverine bush along the gullies and deep river courses to hide their cubs. They capitalise on the thousands of wildebeest around during this time of abundance.

- A pride of 11 (5 lionesses 4 cubs and 2 big males) sighted west of Daraja Mbili several times throughout the month. The pride would be seen together at times but the males would often split off and patrol their territory.
- A pride of 7 (3 lionesses and 4 cubs) was seen along Kenyangaga Road out towards the top north-eastern corner of the Serengeti.
- A pride of 8 (3 lionesses and 5 sub-adults) was seen around Korongo La Minazi.

Cheetahs

- We have been fortunate to continue to see the mother with her two cubs often in the Korongo la Saa Kumi open plains.
- The two dominant males have also been seen frequently across the Lamai Triangle and across the border into Kenya.
- The cheetahs have targeted wildebeest calves and occasionally their kills have been stolen by hyenas which are in good numbers in the area.

Elephants:

- The elephant herds continue to frequent the tree and bush-line along the Mara River as well as the numerous smaller rivers and gullies in the area. Mostly browsing the herds can vary in number from 10 to 40 animals, and occasionally we are see some with impressive ivory.

Leopards:

Leopard viewing continues to surprise us in the Lamai. There are now a few relaxed individuals that are seen far more frequently than ever before. This bodes well for the future and when the wildebeest are in the area the leopards tend to stay put and we see them more often.

- The big male is still seen frequently along the Daraja Jeusi drainage line not too far from camp.
- A skittish female was sighted at Korongo la Minazi.
- A big male was seen in Daraja Mbili tributary with a wildebeest calf kill hoisted in a tree.
- A male and female were seen together along the drainage line of Korongo la Fisi.



Photographed by Calson Luka.

This photo is of one of the two dominant lions who hold a territory that includes Sabora Tented Camp. Just before the rains this male and his brother spent a week in front of the camp mating with the lionesses that form part of the Sabora Pride. Both guests and staff were fortunate to see them frequently right out in the open from the main camp area. It was a very memorable experience for all.



Photographed by Calson Luka.

The zebra numbers grew to a few thousand every day drinking at Sasakwa Dam, prior to the rains arriving. Sitting quietly on the opposite side of the dam and listening to all their noises and commotion was a great experience.



For most of the month we saw an interesting zebra foal, initially around Sasakwa Plains and the dam and then she moved towards Nyasirori high grounds with her family. Higher concentrations of melanism most likely resulted in her unusual pattern. You will see her mother also has large, broad stripes on her back. It would be wonderful to see her again in the years to come.



Photographs by Grant Telfer.



Photographed by Grant Telfer



Photographed by Abutwalbu Ngua

Another interesting thing we have noticed while spending time with the zebra is that some of the stallions have very short manes. As you can see in these pictures the mane is uniformly short and it isn't as a result of stallions fighting or poor health. We have only noticed stallions with these short manes – not many but more than one realises if you start looking for them. We have shown the photos to the Grumeti Fund, RISE researchers and they have shown a lot of interest in this.

Maneless zebra, *Equus quagga borensis*, are found in north-western Kenya (from Uasin Gishu and Lake Baringo) to the Karamoja district of Uganda. They are not recorded in the Serengeti. The zebra recorded in the Serengeti are Grant's zebra, *Equus quagga boehmi*. Is it possible that there is a hybrid sub-sub species within the Serengeti herds? Hopefully some DNA testing can help us answer that question.

The manes look as if they have been shaved with clippers. You can compare the patterns on the necks of these two zebras to see that they are different individuals.



Zebras with the typical manes that we expect to see in the Serengeti population.

Photographed by Andrew Kavenga.

September Gallery



The rains finally broke the dry spell around the 8th September. The initial water that fell literally soaked into the ground like a sponge and the following morning there were no puddles to be found. From that day on it rained almost every afternoon and transformed the Grumeti into an emerald green landscape.



A big male lion from one of the western prides displaying a dominant stance and scent marking while the lionesses exhibit submissive behaviour. You can see the flush of green following the rains which was such a contrast to the dry conditions at the start of the month. Photographed by Toti Olekuwai.



The leopard viewing has been really good especially in the areas around Faru Faru Lodge. The leopards have been using the thick cover along the drainage lines to stalk potential prey as well as hide their kills. They have had to be far more cautious with the number of lions around. Photographed by Paulo Kivuyo.





A new lion cub and an addition to the Butamtam Pride. Developing the strength and skills it will need later in life to survive. You can still see the eyes are somewhat underdeveloped and the spots in the coat that help them hide away in the thick bush when the lioness goes off hunting. Photographed by Calson Luka.



An already well-fed crocodile takes advantage of an exhausted wildebeest calf in the Mara River. Photographed by Jeremiah Morris.



Wildebeest struggling up the banks of the Mara River – a very real danger when the river rises, and the current washes the animals away from the easy exit routes. Photographed by Grant Telfer.



The Lamai Plains and the thousands of animals dotted across it at this time of the year, makes for a special sight. Photographed by Grant Telfer.



Report compiled by Grant Telfer.