

# Singita



**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE**  
**For the month of September, Two Thousand and Twenty Two**

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 16.8°C (62.2°F)  
Minimum recorded: 11.3°C (52.3°F)  
Average maximum: 32.5°C (90.5°F)  
Maximum recorded: 39.1°C (102.3°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 7 mm  
\*For the year to date: 7 mm  
\*Season = Sep to Aug

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:36  
Sunset: 17:51

The heat has arrived sending the mercury past the 100°F mark on the hottest day of the month. September is also the month our rain arrives, and we start measuring the annual rainfall from now until August 2023. It was a relief to record 7 mm, and we hope for much more where that came from!

The sightings are at their best – the grass is low and everything is drawn to the permanent water sources. We've had occasions where lions and rhinos have been seen drinking simultaneously from the same source! There have also been quite a few Big-5-1-Drive occasions. In between all these 'big' sightings we were delighted to show off all the flora to one of our guests who is a botanist. It comes as such a refreshing surprise when a guest is as thrilled with a leopard orchid in a tree as she is with a leopard mammal!

## Here's a sightings snapshot for September:

### Lions

- **Southern Pride:** This pride has still been spending their time in the Hwata area, and there is still mating activity taking place.
- **River Pride:** 2 females, 1 male and 6 cubs were seen walking along the road coming from 02 Pan.
- **Nduna Pride:** This pride was seen, in good condition, at Nduna Dam.
- **Territorial males:** The two males killed a buffalo in the Nyari area, and feasted on the carcass. They also surprised guests by displaying themselves at the base of the Pamushana Hill, only moments into an afternoon game drive.

### Leopards

- There is wonderful leopard news, confirming our suspicions from July, that a female leopard has cubs in a den in the Ultimate Drive area. She has been seen with two cubs, and she has been seen out hunting dassies for them, and spending her time in that greater area.
- Leopards have also been seen with their kills in trees a couple of times.
- One set of guests had all the leopard luck, seeing these secretive cats three days in a row.

### Hyenas

- The hyenas have had a very varied diet this month! Meals, whether hunted themselves, pilfered from other predators or as a result of death from old age, have included a baby giraffe, an eland, a kudu and an impala that had been stashed inside a hole in a baobab!

### Elephants

- It's interesting to see the change in diet during these lean times. We've watched elephants feed on thorn tree seed pods and mountain acacia tree foliage. A couple of bulls are also in musth which keeps us on our toes when viewing them.

### Rhinos

Not that we ever take it for granted, but it is almost ridiculous how regularly our daily sighting reports state sightings of 5+, 10+, even 15+ white rhinos observed at a waterpoint.

Some of the month's highlights include:

- **White:** Two sets of female rhinos, both with very small babies.  
18 seen grazing along Mahande Loop.  
9 rhinos and 8 lions drinking together, after a little bit of confrontation.
- **Black:** Some black rhinos seen at a waterpoint together with white rhinos.  
A beautiful sighting of 4 drinking together at Lojaan Dam.  
A black rhino on Hippo Valley side, which ran from the game viewer, then turned and came charging, then slammed on brakes - it was all covered in red dust created by the sudden stopping and it looked absolutely spectacular!

### Buffalos

- A sure indicator of large herds, 500 strong, is the large dust cloud you see just above the treeline as they march towards water.
- One morning herds converged with a gathering of about 1 000 animals at Bhanyini Pan, leaving it almost dry!

### **Wild dogs**

- Sightings have been few and far between now that the denning season is over. A pack of 14 has been seen hunting and resting in the eastern reaches of the reserve.

### **Plains game**

- Excellent sightings of plains game, especially gathered at the waterpoints.

### **Unusual sightings**

- We witnessed a black-backed jackal defending his territory as he was chasing off another male that had fluffed up all his hair and looked like he'd been electrocuted!
- A cheeky elephant bull sprayed water from his trunk at a sable antelope to chase it away from the pan.
- A slender mongoose was viewed from the photographic hide.
- Two male waterbuck were fighting and one got into the water of Malilangwe Dam to swim away, with the other then splashing in and swimming after it!
- Several years ago a mighty baobab stood in our central area. It was an icon. Then it fell, rotted away and left a dish-shaped hollow depression in the ground. This month we came across two white rhinos curled up and sleeping in the depression – a nest of rhinos!
- A highlight of one sunset cruise was seeing an African fish eagle swooping down to catch a bream in everyone's full view, then propelling itself with its wings to take off with the heavy load.

### **Fishing**

- Quite a few bream have been caught this month, with the tigerfish still proving much harder to land.

### **Photographic hide**

- Highlights were lions and rhinos together; also seeing lions, rhinos, elephants and buffalo all drinking from the pan during the course of an afternoon and evening. On one occasion lions tried to kill one of the buffalo bulls while the guests had front row seats in the hide. However, the lions weren't successful.

### **Rock art**

- It's the perfect season for walks to view the property's rock art, and guests have found this activity to be an unexpected highlight of their African safari.

**Some Bush Stories follow, as well as a September Gallery of images.**

## A camping trip never to forget

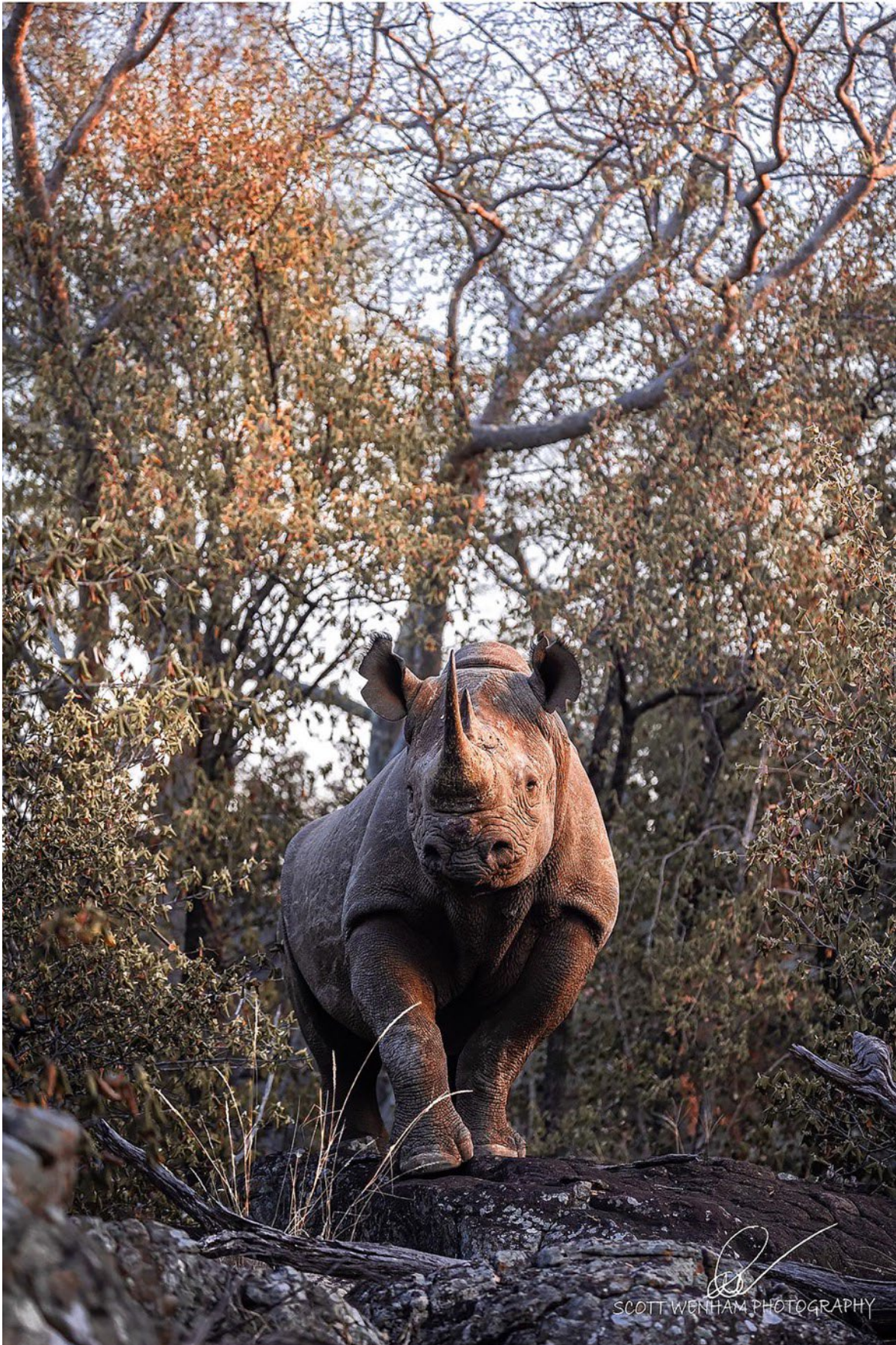


Scott Wenham, who has grown up on the Malilangwe Reserve, recounts this awesome experience, “We were camping in the reserve, and when my brother and I woke up to start the fire we heard something just over some nearby rocks, so we decided to investigate what it was. When we peered over we saw this black rhino bull! We called the others to come and look, and when the rhino saw us he charged, then turned and ran up the hill. My dad, brother and I followed. When we found him right at the top of the mountain he saw us again and came to investigate. We hid behind a small rock as he looked over at us from less than 12 yards away. He stood there for over 15 minutes, then walked off. I will never forget the experience of being so close to such a huge animal with just a small rock between us.”

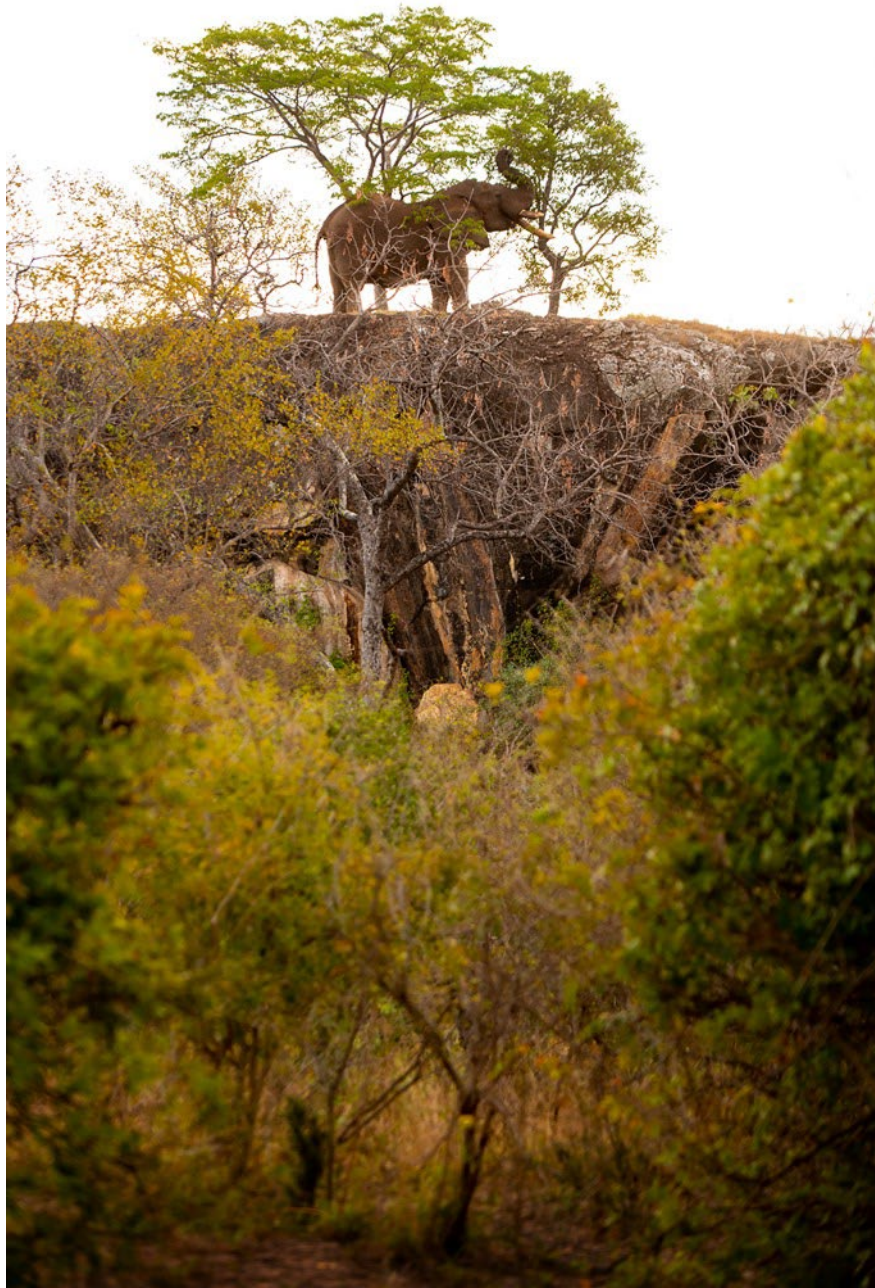
With a well taught bush-wise demeanour and camera in hand Scott was able to capture these incredible one-of-a-kind images – a critically endangered species, photographed from a low angle, standing statuesque on a rock, in sublime morning light, in its natural environment.

Black rhinos are complex creatures - they are tough and reactive personas but also sensitive, playful and curious by nature. Every rhino on this property has a unique personality, known lineage and personal history, and each individual is absolutely critical to the overall survival of Africa's remaining black rhino populations.









### **Mammoth on a mountain**

I did a double take and could hardly believe this scene. An enormous bull elephant, silhouetted against the sunrise, on the very top of a high rocky ledge. How on earth did it get up there? Well, it is well known that elephants can climb relatively steep mountainous terrain if they have to. (Apparently, the North African general Hannibal, led elephants over the Alps, around 200 BC.) But it takes a massive amount of energy and the rewards would have to outweigh the effort.

The *Brachystegia tamarindoides* trees on top of the ridge had some young green leaf growth that certainly looked more tender and nutritious than the surrounding vegetation, and this old bull must have thought them worth the effort. I have to say, in defence of their often destructive way of pushing a tree over to get at the foliage, that this bull was being far more gentle, and only plucking a few small branches. More of a “light pruning” as a PR would say, and he left the ridge after only a few minutes.



### Seasonal visitors, permanent residents and occasional guests

The Southern Pride's territory is usually way down south, around Chiloveka Dam. But, during our water scarce winters this dam dries up and the pride are forced to push north and spend much of their time around the permanent water source of Hwata Pan. This makes them more vulnerable to conflict with the Nduna Pride and the River Pride, but it's essential for survival – they need to eat and drink regularly, and their prey species are forced to drink from that pan too.

It's difficult to know exactly how many lions are in the pride, but nine members have been seen together in one sighting, which included the young cub and the two adult males. The cub was born around December 2021 and January 2022, and is quite the character. At a recent sighting it elicited a lot of attention from its mother and aunts, but then grew tired of the attention from family and onlookers, and went and hid from all of us behind some grass (see photo on first page).



Southern pride male in his prime, above, and veteran lioness, left.



Two mating pairs were observed in this pride last month, so perhaps in about 110 day's time this cub could become the big sibling to some new additions.



Creatures with permanent residency status around Hwata Pan include this flock of guinea fowl. They can always be seen and heard in the vicinity as they go about their business of survival, and sometimes find themselves in the undignified state of being sniffed and snorted at by an all too curious rhino calf.



Sable antelope can go for longer periods without drinking than many other antelope, so they are occasional guests at Hwata Pan, and your luck is in if you see them. They take a long time to commit to drinking, and on this occasion a magnificent onyx bull led the way, before others joined and sentries stood guard.







## Water moments



Unique to Singita Pamushana are our water safaris and sundowner cruises. They are a wonderful way to relax and gaze at the landscape from the water, watch animals drink from the shoreline, and enjoy the prolific birdlife.

There are also some incredible close-up details to observe too – such as the water level marks on the tree trunks. Before the dam wall was built the valley supported many mature trees. Once the wall was erected some of these trees ‘drowned’ because the water level rose significantly as the dam filled after each season’s rainfall accumulated. Now we can see the water level marks on these old trunks and they tell a story of how much rain there was in a season, how much flora the water carried that year, and even the subtle changes of pH levels in the water.

These dead trees now offer an incredible life support for fish and birds. The underwater trunks and root systems become feeding grounds and places of safety for fish. The above water trunks and branches offer sanctuary to reptiles and birds. Water monitor lizards sun themselves on the branches knowing that a land predator can’t sneak up on them, and many birds make their nests in them for the same reason – that land predators can’t hunt them while they’re incubating the eggs, or steal the eggs or chicks when they’re off the nest.

On the following page is a photo of a dead tree that I cannot help taking every time I see it – to me it is an incredible natural sculpture reaching to the skies, or frozen lightning diving into the water.

The next photo shows a grove of dead trees on an island that gets submerged in water during the rainy season.







## September Gallery



Small observations are interesting too – the pattern on the shell of this giant snail; the fact that it must have slithered into the crevice of the tree to aestivate, but died there; the texture of the bark; the promise of the seed...

The relaxed confidence of a territorial king.











Elephants, warthogs, rhinos and every creature in between is cooling off at the waterholes, or having a quick drink before heading away to where they are less vulnerable.







This newborn zebra foal seeming so dainty and innocent compared to this herd of streetwise tough old buffaloes.







Certain as the sun  
Rising in the east  
Tale as old as time  
Song as old as rhyme  
Beauty and the beast

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