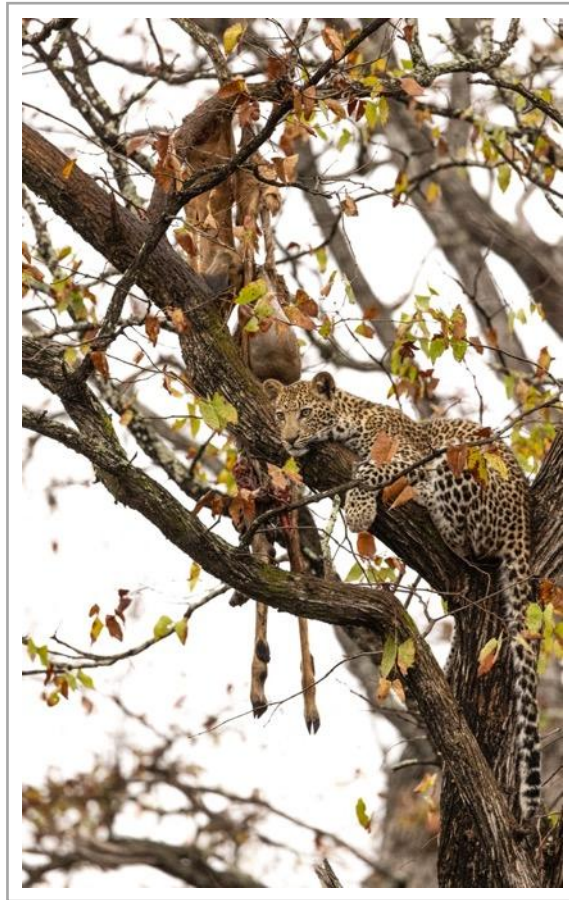


Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE August 2026

Temperature

Average minimum: 13° C (55.4° F)
Minimum recorded: 08° C (46.4° F)
Average maximum: 27° C (80.6° F)
Maximum recorded: 33° C (91.4° F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 9 mm
Season to date: 639 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:05
Sunset: 17:43

We were all taken by surprise when a cold snap from the south made its way to us, bringing a few days of light rain to the reserve. The morning that clocked up the most exciting sightings of the month was a rainy one — Not that the weather affected sightings.

Singita Pamushana Lodge and Malilangwe House have been busy and full. It's always a joy to see repeat guests as well as new ones, such as two young girls who experienced their first safari with us.

Game viewing has been truly exceptional. On one memorable afternoon, guests saw the Big Five within just two hours. Highlights included a leopard and cub feeding on an impala carcass with a spotted hyena waiting below; more than 300 Cape buffalo drinking at Banyini; four white rhinos, two pairs of lions mating; and seven elephant bulls drinking at Hwata Pan.

Here's a summary of sightings and activities for August:

Lions

Nduna Pride:

- Three lionesses were seen sleeping at Nduna Dam.
- The Nduna Pride males were seen patrolling, resting, and mating with two lionesses.

River Pride:

- An excellent sighting of the River Pride saw three young males, two adult lionesses, and a sub-adult lioness emerge from the reeds just as guests settled down for sundowners. The lions then walked directly past the vehicles and continued towards Ray's Drift.
- Eight lions were seen on the Chiredzi River while a breeding herd of elephants passed through.
- Near the Chidumo grid, guests listened to lions calling to one another near the river. A young male and large male approached and called near the vehicle, while a black rhino unexpectedly ran across the road.
- The River Pride killed a male nyala. A lioness monopolised the remaining carcass while three young males rested nearby.

Southern Pride:

- Two Southern Pride lionesses were seen mating with the Nduna males.

Leopards

- A female leopard and a cub were seen in a mopane tree with an impala kill. The story continues in this journal.
- A leopard sighting from the boat demonstrated the value of listening for alarm calls: bushbuck and guinea fowl alarm calls alerted the guide to the leopard's presence.
- An adult female leopard was seen walking along the Nyamasikana riverbank before climbing into a tree overhanging the water. Guests enjoyed a spectacular sighting in golden light.
- Two leopards were found feeding together on a kudu carcass not far from the jetty.
- A pack of wild dogs treed a young leopard, not far from the lodge. Later, an older female leopard was encountered nearby, making for an exceptional sequence of sightings involving wild dogs and two leopards.

African wild dogs

- A pack of 16 wild dogs, including four pups, were encountered trotting along the road towards the lodge.
- An extraordinary concentration of wildlife occurred when two wild dogs, three buffalo bulls and a black rhino were found together in a small area.
- Wild dogs were observed chasing and successfully killing an impala on the Hippo Valley side.
- Guests witnessed an entire hunt and kill, followed by the adults feeding and regurgitating food for the begging pups.
- The dogs were also chased by hyenas attempting to steal their kills.

Spotted hyenas

- Hyenas were seen regularly patrolling the pathways at dusk and dawn.
- They were also in evidence when the wild dogs and leopards had kills.

Elephants

- A breeding herd of elephants, a breeding herd of buffalo and a white rhino were all encountered together.
- Along the river road, a bull elephant was feeding in the riverbed while a breeding herd on the opposite bank descended to drink before returning to the riverbank.
- A breeding herd at the swamps came exceptionally close to the vehicle, providing an intimate viewing experience.
- Huge tusker bulls were seen drinking at Hwata.

- A small herd of about 15 elephants was observed feeding on a fallen thorn tree.

Buffalo

- Large herds of buffalo were seen in several areas, including south of Chikwete and north of Bandama Pan.
- An exceptional herd of more than 700 buffalo was recorded south of Banyini.

Rhinos

- An excellent drive produced sightings of two black rhinos and four white rhinos.
- At Banyini, guests enjoyed an extraordinary scene containing four white rhinos, an adult bull black rhino and two wild dogs — all endangered species together.
- A black rhino bull challenged a white rhino bull. The white rhino eventually backed off.

White rhinos:

- Three white rhinos were seen near the Nyari shortcut to Banyini, followed by additional white rhinos at the waterhole.
- White rhinos were observed mating at the old Chimize Pan.
- Multiple white rhinos and some very young calves were seen gathering at the various pans.

Black rhinos:

- A black rhino bull was seen challenging a young elephant bull.
- An exceptionally inquisitive black rhino approached within four metres of a game-viewer, remaining nearby for around 20 minutes. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the guests.
- One of the month's most dramatic encounters occurred at the Chiredzi River. While approximately 200 buffalo streamed out of the river, a black rhino approached the vehicle, making several mock charges, snorting and kicking up dust.

Brown hyena

- A brown hyena was seen on West Valley Road, shortly before the turn-off to Ultimate Drive, making its way towards a rocky outcrop.

Plains game

- Regular plains game included impala, kudu, zebra, nyala, giraffe, wildebeest, and warthog. The best place to see them was mid-morning at Hwata Pan.
- A huge eland bull and a Lichtenstein's hartebeest were notable sightings.
- A highlight was a herd of 12 sable antelope drinking at O2 Pan.

Photographic hide

- Hwata remained particularly productive, especially during mid-morning. Guests watched quietly as animals approached from different directions until one impala finally drank, triggering a chain reaction as the other animals followed.
- Animals seen included: elephant bulls, hartebeest, white and black rhinos, kudu, hyenas, eland, zebra, wildebeest, and giraffe.
- One exceptional sighting involved 30 eland and more than 70 zebra.
- White rhinos interacted close to the hide, providing exceptional close-range viewing.

Unusual sightings

- A spring hare was seen hopping down the Chimize Highway.

Birds

- A Pel's fishing owl was flushed from a tree, providing an excellent sighting of this sought-after species.
- A pair of racket-tailed rollers was seen in the Miombo woodland.
- A flock of 8 whiskered terns was recorded at the Runde causeway.
- 2 Grey-headed gulls were seen during a boat cruise.

Bush walks

- It's a beautiful time of year for bush walks — something our guides always look forward to. Observations of animals seen during bush walks included a crash of 6 white rhinos, an elephant bull, and a large herd of buffalo.
- During a walk to a spring, a black rhino appeared ahead of the group. Guests were moved behind rocks while maintaining a clear view of the animal, which remained undisturbed before the group diverted its route.
- One group of guests enjoyed hikes before sunset. One took them to the top of Hunyunyugwi Hill, the highest point on the property, providing a memorable wilderness experience. Another was up Simbiri Hill, followed by sundowners in the open plains of Banyini.

Rock art

- The Chinzwini paintings were particularly well received, especially when one of the trackers gave an interesting interpretation of spirit mediums and entering a state of trance.

Boat cruises

- Excellent sightings of crocodiles, hippos, and birds were enjoyed during relaxing sundowner cruises.
- Lucky finds included: a leopard, hyenas feeding on a dead kudu, and buffalo.

Fishing

- Fishing excursions were relaxing even when catches in the cool water were modest.
- A session with a seasoned fly-fisherman produced 7 good-sized tigerfish and a tilapia, much to the guests' delight.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- A visit to Kambako was warmly appreciated by guests. Julius provided insight into the vanishing cultures of the custodians of the land, with guests actively participating in some of the traditional activities.

Gonarezhou National Park

- A full-day excursion into Gonarezhou produced sightings of elephant herds and numerous lone bulls. Chilojo Cliffs were the highlight of the day.

Some bush stories follow, as well as the August Gallery.

Extraordinary leopard sighting

What an absolute boon to find a freshly killed impala hanging from a tree —you know you have a guaranteed three-day leopard sighting lined up. Better still, this impala had been hoisted into a mopane tree alongside one of our most accessible roads.

When I arrived on my own, I spent about an hour sitting quietly in the vehicle hoping the leopard would appear. Instead, the only customer was a hyena fast asleep on the ground beneath the tree. Some of the carcass had already been eaten, but at least 85% of it remained, so it seemed only a matter of time before its owner returned.



Sure enough, later that morning the news crackled over the radio: the leopard was back in the tree. We made our way to the area, desperately hoping she would still be there when we arrived. And there she was — a magnificent, light-eyed female we have come to recognise over the years.

I must emphasise just how rare it is to see a leopard in a tree, with a kill, on this reserve. Some staff members have been here for decades and can count their sightings of this behaviour on one hand. Watching this gold-and-black cat, her jade eyes gleaming, framed against the precious-metal hues of the mopane leaves, was a truly unforgettable sight. It was drizzling steadily, not that anyone was complaining, and the raindrops clung to her fur like a diamond tiara.

For the next three days, guests and those who live on the property were treated to extraordinary views of her. Yet, if you did not know precisely where to look, you could have driven straight past. Her camouflage was extraordinary and at times she seemed to dissolve completely into the dappled leaves and branches.

At our first sighting, she had fed but seemed increasingly unhappy with the position of the impala — the hyena now circling directly below it. She fussed around it and decided to reposition the carcass higher in the tree. It slipped from her grasp and crashed to the ground with a sickening thud.

The leopard launched herself after it, and the hyena dived in. For one heart-stopping moment, it looked as though she might lose her hard-won meal. Instead, she clamped her jaws around the carcass and, with astonishing speed, sprinted for a second mopane tree nearby. She was up it almost before we had time to register what had happened. Those of us watching had held our breath in horror, only to release a collective sigh of relief when she secured her kill once again.



On day two, I drove past the area but could see no sign of the leopard. Rather than continue down the road, I did a U-turn and drove past again, and there was a leopard. But this time something was different. This leopard looked smaller, and its ears were smooth rather than ragged.

It was a female cub.



What an exquisite little leopard she is — curious, alert and clearly fascinated by all the attention. The roadside carcass provided a great opportunity for her to become accustomed to our game-viewer vehicles and people. With no alternative food source nearby, she was forced to feed in view of us and, importantly, could take her cue from her remarkably calm mother.







Both leopards in the tree, with the hyena circling below. Photo by Mark Saunders.

The cub descending the tree, against the stained glass effect of the mopane forest.



Over the following days, we found the mother in various positions around the tree: sleeping on a nearby mossy branch, sitting sentinel over her kill, or resting on the ground beneath it, where her beautifully rosetted coat blended perfectly with the leaf litter.

Watching these two leopards negotiate the tree was fascinating. The mother could race up it so quickly that your eyes could barely follow her. Coming down was another matter entirely. She descended head-first, carefully placing each clawed paw against the rough bark. Her cub was the same - gripping the trunk with oversized paws and awkwardly slip-sliding her way down.

On one particularly memorable occasion, both leopards were in the tree together, while the ever-patient hyena lurked hopefully below.



I couldn't help feeling a little sorry for that hyena. For three rainy days it curled up beneath the tree, looking like a Copenhagen raisin bun, patiently waiting for its reward. Other hyenas came and went, but this one remained steadfast. It ended up with pennies on the dollar - only a tiny scrap of sinew and skin that dropped from the tree once the leopards had finished their feast.



Rhino babies reveal

You never know what you'll capture when sitting at a pan, in total darkness, with your focus pre-set on the edge of the water, and relying on your flash to light the scene for a split second. What a delight when reviewing the images to see these two baby white rhinos going to meet each other and then settling down afterwards — one to inspect the water's edge with its mother, the other to nurse peacefully.



The Pamushana pups

There are few things more exclusive than the deck loungers next to your private plunge pool at Singita Pamushana Lodge — unless you happen to be a baby dassie.

I peered through the window of Villa 1, hoping to make use of the lounger for a luxurious rest, only to discover that they had already been claimed. Not by someone sipping something chilled, but by baby dassies who had clearly decided that this was the perfect place to spend the afternoon. I didn't have the heart to shoo them away. Two were snuggling contentedly while another appeared to be stretching out after a particularly strenuous nap. Good thing they haven't worked out how to dial Room Service yet.



I think baby dassies are adorable. Unlike many mammals, they arrive in the world already remarkably well equipped: fully furred, eyes open and ready for action. Within just a few days they can scamper about and nibble solid food. At a few weeks old these little youngsters had wasted no time in putting their padded feet to good use and learn the ins and outs of lodge life.



The three pups now hop confidently between rocks, pathways and deck roofs. Their mother and father are always nearby, keeping a watchful eye on their indulgent, spoilt-brat antics.

Dassies are highly sociable animals, living in colonies and spending much of their time feeding, basking and keeping a vigilant eye out for danger that comes in the form of raptors, snakes and leopards. Their padded feet contain specialised glands that keep them slightly moist, giving them remarkable grip on steep rocks and other surfaces. If danger approaches, a sentry from the colony gives an alarm call and the others disappear rapidly into rock crevices. Their alarm calls are surprisingly sophisticated — they have a range of vocalisations, including whistles, grunts and screams. Their alarm calls can vary depending on the type of predator detected. Their habit of living among rocky cliffs (and exclusive lodges), and their lightning-fast ability to vanish into narrow crevices are very useful survival strategies.

And then there is their most surprising claim to fame: despite their somewhat guinea-pig-meets-rabbit appearance, dassies are among the closest living relatives of the African elephant. DNA has revealed that these small, furry rock-dwellers are remarkably close kin to Africa's largest land mammal.

I often daydream about what animal I would like to be in a different life, and I think, predators aside, these Pamushana pups rank high on the list.



One of the pups with a parent in the background.



The African finfoot (*Podica senegalensis*)

Some wildlife sightings are memorable because of what you see, others because of just how unlikely it is that you saw them at all. Seeing an African finfoot falls firmly into the latter category. This secretive waterbird is a master of disappearing into the dense vegetation fringing waterways, and even experienced birders can go years without a decent view. So, finding a female standing in the open on Sosigi Bridge was a stroke of extraordinary luck.

We'd caught a glimpse of her in the water, through binoculars, a few days before. We were about to drive across the bridge when she appeared, and instead of immediately retreating she began walking towards the vehicle seemingly unconcerned by our presence. We watched in amazement as she came closer, giving us an almost impossibly good view of a bird that is usually glimpsed only fleetingly as it slips through riverside vegetation.



The greenish feathers on her back were iridescent, head snaking, shape elongated, and feet a bright red-orange. They are distinctly lobed, perfectly adapted for life in the water, and are the feature responsible for the bird's unusual name. Unlike the webbed feet of ducks, the finfoot's finned toes provide excellent propulsion and manoeuvrability — allowing it to swim and forage efficiently along the edges of rivers and streams.

For a few precious moments, we had this notoriously elusive bird to ourselves. Then, as if suddenly remembering a business appointment, she hopped from the bridge and disappeared into the water below. Just like that, she was gone.

African finfoots are medium-sized aquatic birds, about the size of a reed cormorant. They have feet like a grebe, swim like a darter, sunbathe like a cormorant, waddle like a duck, skulk like a flufftail, and climb trees like some rails. Although a strong flier, the species seldom takes to the air. Instead, African finfoots patter across the water, seemingly battling to get airborne, when making a hasty retreat. In many indigenous languages, the species' common name refers to this comical characteristic. In South Africa, the Afrikaans name, "watertrapper," translates as "water walker". In Zambia, the Bemba people call it "Mapalampata," and in Tanzania, the species is known as "Batta," both of which are onomatopoeic references to the sound it makes pattering across the water when flushed.

Spring in August



The very first hints of spring are in the air, if you look closely, but none of us were expecting such a cold snap and rain in August. The first long-tail cassia (*Cassia abbreviata*) blossoms are already developing into green pods, and the decadent deep red blooms of the sausage trees (*Kigelia africana*) are attracting a buzz of pollinators.

This wire-tail swallow (*Hirundo smithii*) looked as perplexed as I was about the rain, as it perched above the river feathers fluffed and droplets of rain rolling from them.





Despite the rain this pair of white-bellied sunbirds (*Cinnyris talatala*) made the most of feeding on the nectar of these early blossoms. The male was a conspicuous flash of colour in his emerald and sapphire plumage, while the female was extremely difficult to spot as she flitted about, blending in with the grey background.

August Gallery



Watching a breeding herd of elephants has to be one of life's greatest joys, and of course it's the little ones that always steal the show.

The first baby (photo 1) to cross the road tottered across quickly, tail in the air, but the next one (photos 2, 3 & 4) seemed to like an audience. First, it stopped to kick up some sand, then suctioned it up with its trunk, all while holding a stick in its mouth. It then started sucking the end of its trunk like a baby sucking its thumb, but got alarmed when it clamped down too hard. You could see its momentary wide-eyed fright before it realised to let go of its own trunk.



Initially the mothers and aunts were very protective of the little ones, wanting to usher them across the road, but the babies were curious and peeped at us between their legs. Settling down quickly, we were even treated to the sight of a baby suckling from its mother.





Kudus invariably move away the moment you lift your camera, but this beautiful cow stayed still on the rocky outcrop with a long-tail cassia tree in the background.

Only on processing this photo did I notice the odd marks on her leg, and on closer inspection (see photo alongside) it looks like cuts from a cat's claws. The deepest cut has a twig stuck in it. Possibly she survived an attack by lions, or even a leopard. There were other minor wounds on her back and belly too, and it was likely she was spending some time recuperating from her ordeal on this rocky outcrop that had good visibility all around.





This mating pair of lions was seen for days in the Hwata Pan area, the male never letting the female out of his sight or more than a metre away from him.





This big tusker and his companion arrived dry and dusty. It wasn't long before they were covered in mud, the drips dribbling down their ivory.





A young male impala in the grasslands on an early morning.

Impala drinking in the heat of the day, being watched by a terrapin. We thought we had front-row seats in the underground hide to watch what came to drink at Hwata Pan, but this terrapin pipped us at the post.





Wildebeest seem to be far more gung-ho about wading into the water for a drink than the highly strung zebra and impala that are ever cautious.





What a start to the day — a lioness sitting in the middle of the main road, watching a male lion, concealed in the grass, consume the remains of a buffalo calf.