

Singita



Photo by Sarah Ball

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 21.5°C (70.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 19.6°C (67.2°F)
Average maximum: 34.3°C (93.7°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.1°C (100.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 65.7 mm
*Season to date: 440.5 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:51
Sunset: 18:21

The temperatures have hardly changed from last month, but the rain has tapered off and the vegetation is noticeably drier by the day. We are moving into one of the best times to be in the bush, with cooler weather, fat happy plains game, animals having to go to permanent waterholes to drink, and a changing colour palette. Thankfully guests are returning to us too. Every sane person in the world who has had their sanity challenged during the past two years deserves and needs a safari break! We hope you are planning yours.

A sightings snapshot for February follows:

Lions

- The Nduna Pride was seen in the eastern area of Bandama, and later in the month three of the lionesses and two cubs were sleeping in the shade east of Nduna Dam.
- Two male lions have been seen patrolling long distances – first they were at Sosiji Dam, then at Mabhakweni.

Leopards

- The leopard sighting of the month was definitely seeing two courting leopards below Hunyugwi Hill. Let's hope some tiny spotted cubs are born in the next 100 days...

African wild dogs

- A pack of 11 wild dogs was seen a couple of times in the Nyari / Nhanga / airstrip area. They were either resting with full bellies or hunting. On one of their hunts they were steadfastly trailed by two spotted hyenas hoping for a freebie.

Hyenas

- A clan of 13 hyenas were fighting over the remains of a waterbuck at Nhanga Pan.

Rhinos

White rhinos:

- Wonderful crashes of white rhinos seen regularly. They are in great condition and enjoying the sweet drying grasses.

Black rhinos:

- The highlight of black rhino sightings was seeing three of them feeding on sausage fruits from a *Kigelia africana* tree. They really seemed to enjoy the fruits.

Elephants

- There are quite a few bulls in musth this month. It must be partly due to their peak condition from all the good vegetation they've had on offer.

Buffalo

- Excellent buffalo herds and the best place to see them is at a waterhole where they'll be drinking or wallowing.

Plains game

- Plains game abound, especially in the open areas where you can see them congregate and graze. They've enjoyed a good season.

Reptiles

- Reptiles are not high on many peoples' lists, but we did have young enthusiasts in camp who enjoyed all the harmless lizards and skinks on offer. However, guests got a sighting never to be forgotten when, on an afternoon drive, they saw a three metre black mamba being mobbed by a flock of Meves's starlings in a knob thorn tree. The guide positioned the vehicle a safe distance away and watched as the snake failed to stay still and, in agitation, managed to strike one of the birds, catch it and consume it in full view! Further along on their drive, in the middle of the road, was another snake - this time a Mozambique spitting cobra. It raised its hood as they approached and then lowered it down before escaping into the grass.

Rock art

- Guests loved a mid-morning safari experience of seeing the Chidhumo rock art site and hearing about the hunter-gatherer San who were the custodians of the land at the time.

Boat cruising

- Relaxing meditative boat cruises are the order of the afternoon. While enjoying sundowners, seeing hippos and crocs, and listening to all the bird calls our guests also saw a male white rhino along the shoreline, and a herd of about 600 Cape buffalo feeding.

Fishing

- Some great fun fishing adventures, with bream, tigerfish and gobis caught.

Day trips

- An incredible daytrip to Gonarezhou National Park was had with breeding herds of elephants encountered all the way from the entrance at Chipinda Pools all the way to the Chilojo Cliffs. Plenty of plains game was seen with an increase in the number of zebras. Good birds of prey we spotted including the eagles – martial, brown snake, Wahlberg's and black-breasted.



Nduna Dam lit by the moon and stars.

Photo by Mark Saunders

We meet two new professional guides this month, and close with a February Gallery.

As part of your induction at Singita Pamushana you spend a considerable amount of hours learning the road network and names to enable yourself to have confident navigation with your guests. Fortunately each guide works as a team with a tracker, and that tracker will always assist if you have lost your bearings. The Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve is 45 000 hectares of pristine wilderness, well known for its majestic trees, prolific birding and all sorts of wildlife. The vast land, abundant game and large rivers and dams give the guide unlimited opportunities to showcase guiding skills and offer guests the safari experience of a lifetime.

The reserve is full of astonishments. From the day I set foot here it has been amazing with lots of interesting sightings from the small creatures to the big game. Some of the highlights have been seeing a leopard stalking impalas on the Pamushana Access Road less than a kilometre from the lodge, wild dogs hunting impalas at the airstrip, seeing 14 rhinos in less than three hours, and male lions hunting on the Banyini plains.

So far the sighting that's stood out the most was when I was out one day learning the roads with my tracker Mavuto. Mavuto is an amazing guy, enthusiastic about the bush, and spending time with him is like going back to school again as he knows every nook and cranny of this reserve because he first worked here as an anti-poaching scout. His knowledge of the area has sped up my confidence and we seem to be a perfect fit and I'm looking forward to have a long working relationship with him working as a team.

On the 21st of February he took me to two rock art sites that are 50 metres apart, and as we arrived at the second site we heard elephants trumpeting and screams coming from a north-eastly direction. I was keen to see these noisy elephants as they continued trumpeting and making rumbling noises. We quickly jumped back in our bush limousine and drove towards the area. My first assumption was that there could be some predators around, but what we found was that the whole breeding herd had surrounded the fresh remains of an elephant bull that had passed away two weeks before.

We suspected that the bull's death was from a fight over dominance or a dispute, as such disputes are normally settled on a "might is right" basis. Elephant bulls can engage themselves in some titanic battles that can easily turn surrounding bushes into matchsticks, and the only way to stop such fights is when one of the combatants is badly injured or dead.

Elephants are highly intelligent herd animals with a very good memory, and knowledge is always passed from generation to generation. It was quite evident that all the baby elephants in that herd were being taught how to respect the dead as the rest of the members were mourning their beloved member - they all had tears coming from their tear glands, also known as temporal glands.

It was very emotional watching every elephant seemingly paying their last respects by picking up bones, touching, sniffing with their trunks, and there was also a moment of silence for a few minutes which was broken by a low rumble from the matriarch as she picked up the scapular bone and started to lead all the elephants from the site.

While writing this I can still feel the goosebumps by visualizing the mourning of their beloved family member. I wish I had guests with me to experience that special moment. However, I savoured the sight with my friend, colleague and tracker. I believe one day I will meet elephants again at these remains they were on a well used elephant path. Hopefully I'll have guests with me then!



Learning the lay of the land, and the various water sources.
Above is Nduna Dam and below is Lojaan Dam.



Photos by Jenny Hishin

I am so thrilled and chuffed to join the guiding team at Singita Pamushana. The warm welcome made me feel at home since day one!

The property has a wide variety of vegetation types besides the usual trees like mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) and umbrella thorn (*Vachellia tortilis*). New trees to me are the tamboti (*Spirostachys africana*), poison-pod albizia (*Albizia versicolor*) and green-apple (*Monodora junodii*) just to name a few.

Activities offered include game drives, walking safaris, fishing, boat cruises and rock art viewing. Some activities like birding can be included during a game drive or on a walk. The walks are dependent on how thick the bush is, but this has to be one of the most enjoyable destinations in Africa to do a walking safari. By walking you get out of the vehicle and learn about small things like insect life, botany and have a closer look at tracks and spoor. There are now over 123 known rock art sites, whereas before Covid-19 only 80 had been documented. Lockdown gave the guides a chance to really explore and map rock art sites and there is still the potential for new sites to be discovered. The state of some sites I've visited so far is very impressive. The rock art has been aged and varies roughly from 700 years up to 2 000 years. The animals painted give us an idea of the animals that were present at that time. The materials used to paint included ostrich eggshells, roots, red oxides from rocks, as well as blood.

I have already had some amazing game sightings ranging from black rhinos to white rhinos, African wild dogs, giraffes and wildebeest. One evening while driving from Pamushana to Kwali I saw six wild dogs lying down on the airstrip. I stopped to enjoy the not-an-everyday sighting. Not far from the wild dogs was a herd of zebra with a young foal. The wild dogs got excited and attempted a hunt but they were not successful.



Photo by Jenny Hishin

The pairing of a guide and a tracker is another added advantage from the safety point of view, as well as helping each other to spot game. On a single afternoon game drive we spotted 14 white rhinos in herds of nine, then three and two. When night time comes we are serenaded by hyenas, leopards and lions, and this is the best time for a guide to give a narrative to guests explaining the calls. I am so looking forward to explore more hidden secrets that make Singita Pamushana the place to rise and shine!

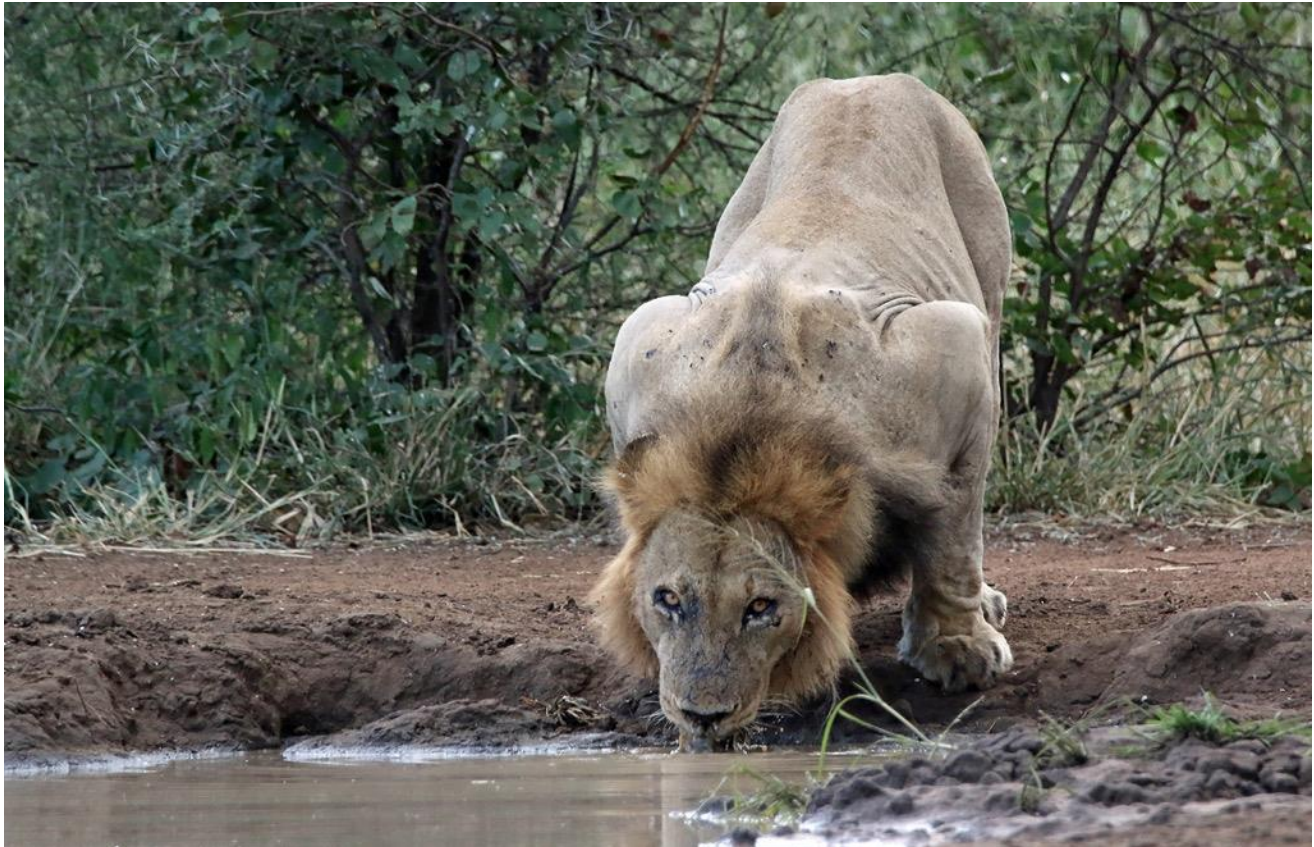
Right: This juvenile fish eagle (*Haliaeetus vocifer*) was engaged in a clever opportunistic activity. The red-billed quelea are here in their thousands. As they swooped down to drink from the pan on the Banyini this young eagle would wait for them to drown, or get into difficulty in their frenzy to drink, and then swoop down and snatch a soggy snack.

Below: This little marsh owl (*Asio capensis*) was found on a road outside the reserve, having been hit by a car. It was given first aid and tender loving care, then sent to a vet with experience in raptor rehabilitation. Its broken wing was tended to and it is showing promising signs of good recovery.





This big male lion spent the afternoon in the shade of a bush, panting and scanning the skies above. That night he killed a zebra. In the morning 11 hyenas had gathered and were all intently staring in the same direction. At some unseen signal they darted forward emerging from the long grass with trophies! They carried them just far enough to be out of danger but still kept glancing up from their feast to make sure the lion wasn't about to reclaim it. Later that afternoon the satiated lion drank from the pan.





Let wallowing buffalos be.





One of our quiet eco-friendly lawnmowers.

Compiled by Jenny Hishin