

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA PAMUSHANA / MALILANGWE, ZIMBABWE
For the month of June, Two Thousand and Twenty-Three

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.1°C (57.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.2°C (50.3°F)
Average maximum: 29.8°C (85.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 35.9°C (96.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
*For the season to date: 686 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 17:24

The Sabi stars are shining cerise and white, the weather is perfect, as is the game viewing and the lodge. Without further ado here is a sightings overview for the month:

Lions

Thanks to daily tracking, the lions sightings have been excellent, including seeing two different male coalitions.

- River Pride: A terrific sighting of these lions was of them on the main Binya Road with a wildebeest kill, surrounded by 12 hyenas. The lions fought among themselves for the best share as well as protecting the kill from the hyenas.

- Nduna Pride: This pride were seen feeding on a giraffe kill this month. They were also seen trying to hunt a buffalo calf, but the buffalo herd retaliated sending the lions dashing away for cover – the herd then had a leisurely drink at the nearby Manyuchi Pan. This pride also spent some time below Malilangwe House, and up near Pamushana Lodge.
- Southern Pride: This pride was seen in the Hwata area. Two of the coalition were seen challenging each other for mating opportunities with one of the lionesses.

Leopards

There've been some lovely after dark sightings of leopards, often sauntering along the roads in their invisibility cloaks. Their eyes reflecting in the tracker's spotlight is what gives them away.

- A notable sighting was of a mating pair in the Croc Creek area.

Elephants

- The best place to find breeding herds of elephants is along the banks of the Chiredzi River.
- The breeding herds never venture as far as Hwata Pan in the east, but the bulls certainly do, and they have been seen drinking there regularly (and squirting one with water should you be inside the photographic hide).

Rhinos

Incredible, as always, and definitely the highlight of game-viewing on this reserve.

- White rhinos: Almost guaranteed sightings at the permanent water sources, often of three or more drinking at a time.
- Black rhinos: Being mostly nocturnal they are harder to find, but sightings in the early/late low-light hours are good. Every now and then one hits the jackpot – like this month when, after three days of searching, a guide and his guests found three black rhinos. There were two adults mating and a very young calf.

Buffalo

- There are so many chocolate-brown buffalo calves, and the herds are looking in excellent condition.

Wild dogs

- We are delighted to report that the larger pack of wild dogs on the property, has puppies! Seven patchwork bundles of floppy ears and sharp milk teeth are the centre of the pack's attention. The pack have been hunting far and wide to feed themselves and the pups, and they've moved their den-site once already.

Hyenas

- Once the Nduna Pride were finished with the giraffe carcass the hyenas tucked in with alacrity.
- Another interesting, albeit emotional, sighting was finding a mother and calf giraffe surrounded by hyenas. The calf was dead but the mother was not convinced and kept checking and trying to lift her youngster.

Plains game

- No drive takes place without seeing a variety of plains game, and it's particularly pleasing in these dry months to have better chances of seeing sable and Lichtenstein's hartebeest too.

Unusual sightings

- One of our trackers spotted a caracal darting across one of the main roads. We only seem to spot a caracal once every few years.

- Members of the Nduna Pride were seen at Sosigi Dam, with a leopard in the same area.
- A speedy sighting of a honey badger was had.
- A crocodile was heard more than seen in the dark, crunching and munching on a terrapin.

Rock art

- It's an ideal time to walk the rocky ridges and discover the rock art. Having rock art on this reserve, as well as the Malilangwe Dam for boat cruises and fishing, really sets this property apart from other safari destinations.

Photographic hide

One of the best things about being inside the underground photographic hide is that it is nice and warm on chilly mornings, and shaded during the hot afternoons. Here are some of the incredible highlights seen from the hide for the month:

- 11 white rhino and two hartebeest.
- One sub-adult male lion and a lioness coming over for a drink at the pan, and later joined by a mother and sub-adult calf white rhino.
- 25 white rhinos, sable, eland, a hyena trying to grab a baby rhino, and black-backed jackal watching the proceedings. Hyena 0 - rhino 1.
- 12 white rhinos came to drink. Whilst we were having our sundowners a pride of five lions appeared from the east and started roaring. The sound was deafening!

Walks

The walking season is upon us, much to the delight of guests and guides.

- One group tracked three male lions on foot and saw them, as well as a black rhino, and discovered a new piece of undocumented rock art!
- Another drove to the Lojaan area and hiked up the hill to the viewing point. They watched as a breeding herd of buffaloes came to drink, and were also rewarded with an amazing leopard sighting.

Gonarezhou Day Trips

- A day trip is a very worthwhile experience. You are guaranteed elephant sightings, and the diffusing landscape, towering cliffs, snaking rivers, and intricate gorges are so enriching.

Boat cruises

- Always an idyllic way to enjoy a sundowner, the guaranteed hippos laughing and an array of birds calling. Every once in a while epic sightings are included, like this month when guests were treated to three young bull elephants jousting. They looked like they had recently had a swim. Then, continuing around a bend in the river they found six bull elephants having a swim. It was tremendous as they were completely relaxed with the human presence. Whilst this was happening, in the background, was a breeding herd of elephants passing through.

Fishing

- Even though the water is cold a couple of tilapia have been landed.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- Guests enjoyed and participated in all the bushcraft activities, and loved the traditional food.

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

River crossing

The River Pride have their territory west and east of the Chiredzi River but I'd never seen them actually cross it. Lions, like most domestic cats, detest being in water – deathly dangers lurk beneath and the risk of drowning is ever present.

A young filmmaker and I had been following the lions for a short while and they'd made an unsuccessful attempt to hunt plains game on the eastern bank of the river. Then they rested on the bank, looking across the river to the west and we wondered if they'd go down to the water's edge to drink after the morning's exertion. They did saunter down, the juveniles playfully chasing each other, but then they all disappeared into the reeds and it seemed they were going to spend the day hidden in the impenetrable thicket.



But then we noticed some movement and it occurred to me that they may attempt a crossing at the narrow deep channel. I dashed the vehicle into the best position we could hope for on the high bank, and we readied our cameras firing off test shots for focus, shutter speed and continuous shooting – at this stage all we had was a channel of water and reeds – not a single lion was visible.

Then there was the most bizarre growling, snarling, spine-chilling noise, which neither of us commented on as we were so fixated on being trigger-ready, and a bolt of bronze flew through the air! A lion had launched itself out of the reeds, splashing into the water and instantly out again bounding to the other side. The rest of the pride members followed, each summoning up the courage before taking the almighty leap.

We could hardly believe our luck! While getting our breath back and anxiously checking our shots to make sure we'd got them we both laughed with the joy of the scene, the magic moments captured and the fact that

Africa's most formidable predator had let out a slew of verbal outrage at the water and its possible contents before crossing it – that sound had been the angry lioness issuing a severe warning to the water!



An airborne lion flies through the air.



A lioness creates an almighty splash to scramble out.



Two of the youngsters streak across, the second getting into deep water!



Bath time and bedtime

This was a beautiful early evening sighting. A breeding herd of elephants was leaving Sosigi Dam, where they had been drinking and bathing – or showering to be more precise. What was extra special was to see the splishes and splashes on the little ones bodies – they must have had such fun! Now their mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles were ushering them away from the water and into the relative safety of the bushveld to dry



off and spend the night peacefully.

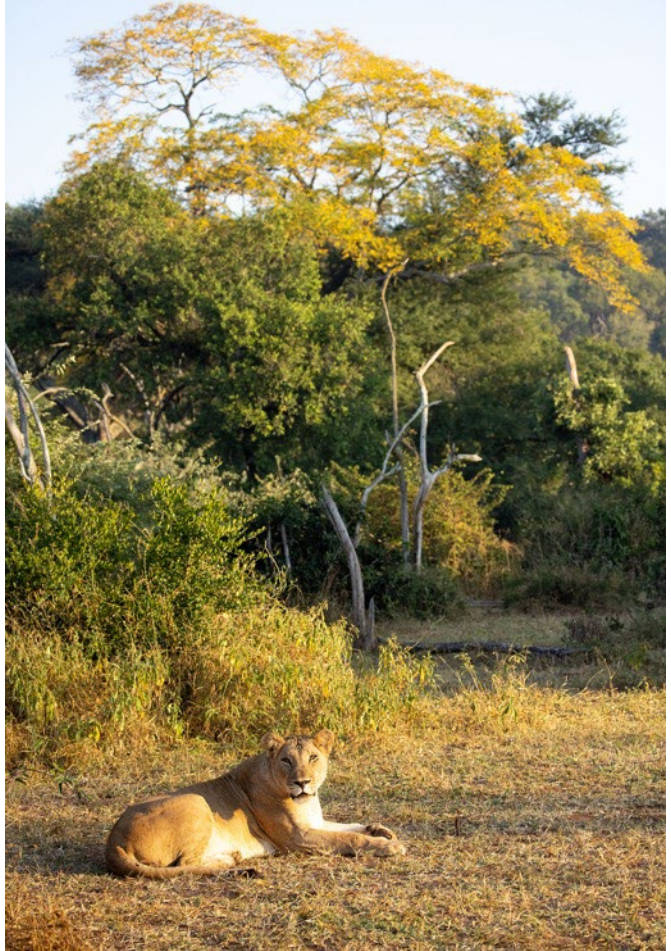
Always safeguarding the vulnerable youngsters are big bulls and matriarchs, making sure you don't get between them and their precious young family.



A morning with the Nduna Pride

We found this pride on the western outskirts of their territory, where they were digesting the feast of a buffalo bull. If there was a lion version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs they were basking in the self-actualisation zone!

They'd chosen a beautiful area to relax in, and some of them posed on short grass areas with baobabs and kirkias towering above.



The younger lions would get up and greet the adult males and demand some attention from the pride lionesses. Under a raisin bush lay the old pride male – now a grizzled patriarch whose scars bear testimony to his long-held rule. With a chunk of his nose gone and a face covered in old wounds he got up and commanded respect and affection from the high ranking females. You can tell that he has hung onto his position not by tooth and claw alone – but by giving affection and support as well. Within the pride are two other adult males and it's interesting that they haven't driven him away yet, or vice versa.

Second page:

Top – a juvenile greets one of the adult males as a lioness grooms herself.

Below – the youngsters engage in a bout of rough and tumble.

Third page:

Top – the old pride male gets up, is greeted by a lioness, and sets about strengthening bonds with the other pride females.







After reaffirming his bonds he settles down again, with his black mane like a mayor's chain and his scars worn like medals.

A lioness at ease with dappled sunrise light washing over her.

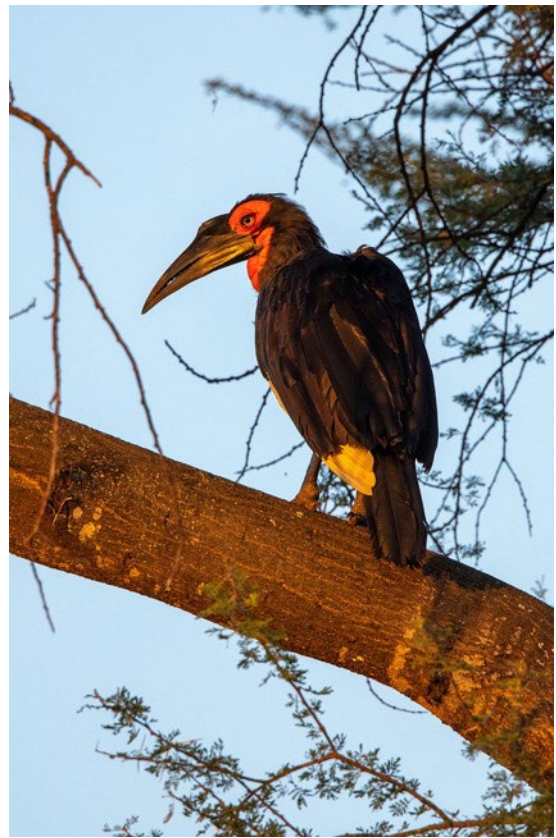
Twitter



The iridescent feathers of a beautiful emerald spotted wood dove catch the afternoon light.



A juvenile African harrier hawk inspects a broken branch for hidden edibles.



A southern ground hornbill warms up in the sunrise.

June Gallery



A nyala bull deliberately rubs mud onto his horns, and a buffalo bull drapes his horns in a tangle of riverside foliage. These adornments make their horns look bigger, thicker and more imposing and therefore make the male appear more intimidating to rivals. But the mud can also soothe wounds and the sticks scratch some itches. You'll notice the buffalo bull also has a cataract in his left eye – a real old character!





Right of way – much like certain taxi drivers this elephant bull demanded right of way.



Zebras letting the dust settle; and a spoonbill doing a good job of ignoring two white rhinos.





A warthog and buffalo of equal self-confidence!





Look at how this rhino is creating a cascade of sand over its horn. An unusual behaviour to witness, but it “powdered its nose” a few times and I suspect it not only felt nice but also soothed little wounds and scratches around that area – an area that takes a lot of hard knocks in play fights and real fights.



Leisurely sundowners at the Ray’s Drift crossing of the Chiredzi River.



Wild dogs shoo off the vultures that had descended on the remains of their impala kill.



A perfect young kudu peers from beneath the pods of a tree.

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