

# Singita



Photo by Mark Saunders

**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE**  
**For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty-Six**

**Temperature**

Average minimum: 21°C (69.8°F)  
Minimum recorded: 18°C (64.4°F)  
Average maximum: 31°C (87.8°F)  
Maximum recorded: 38°C (100.4°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month: 232.5 mm  
For the year to date: 428 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise: 05:37  
Sunset: 18:37

Every game drive in the wild holds the promise of a new encounter. Whether it's the flick of a leopard's tail vanishing into the brush, the distant call of a ground hornbill, or fresh spoor on a dusty path each sign is a story waiting to be told.

This journal is a record of such moments: detailed sightings of species observed in their natural habitats, here in the Lowveld of Zimbabwe. It captures not just what was seen, but where, when, and under what conditions building a deeper understanding of wildlife patterns, behaviours, and seasonal changes.

Guiding in this landscape teaches humility, often it's not the big predators that leave the strongest impression, but the quiet movements of lesser-known creatures, the calls at dawn, or a track pressed into morning sand.

### **Here's a Sightings Snapshot for January 2026:**

#### **Lions**

- The Nduna Pride has successfully brought down large male buffaloes on three separate occasions.
- The River Pride has been seen on nearly every game drive. One pair from this pride has also been mating recently, so we may be expecting new cubs soon.

#### **Leopards**

- Leopards have been frequently seen in the surrounding hills near Pamushana Lodge, with three consecutive sightings recorded in the area. The first was of a mother with a cub, followed by two separate males on different occasions. Leopards are among the most difficult animals to locate and are generally shy, but in these cases, all individuals were relaxed and calm.

#### **Hyenas**

- These bold survivors have on several occasions been seen at the tail-end of the African wild dog pack, either singly, in pairs, or the whole clan, as they try to out-muscle and out-manoeuvre the dogs for their kills.

#### **Elephants**

- Chiredzi River and Sosiji Dam have been popular spots for elephants. The Chiredzi River is especially favoured because of the abundance of *Vachellia tortilis* trees, which elephants feed on heavily.

#### **Rhinos**

- The recent rains did not change movement patterns of the white rhinos. We have frequently found them wallowing in puddles to cool down and to get rid of blood-sucking insects.
- Black rhinos were often seen in the bushes adjacent to open grasslands. With the entire area now thick and lush, there is no need for them to venture deep into the bush. We recorded several good sightings of black rhinos.

#### **Buffalos**

- Three large herds of buffaloes have been seen on separate occasions grazing and drinking at the Hwata waterhole. All buffalo observed appeared to be in excellent health, with every sighting showing strong, well-conditioned animals.

#### **African wild dogs**

- This month, the sightings of a pack of wild dogs around the Nyari area have been nothing short of spectacular. We have frequently caught glimpses of the pack as they chase impalas, showcasing their remarkable hunting skills and teamwork. The number of wild dogs in the pack has decreased to thirteen. Each sighting is critical not only for appreciating the beauty of these animals but also for understanding the pressures they face in their natural environment.

### **Plains game**

- The surge in sightings of plains game around Nyari, Banyini and Hwata can be attributed to a natural phenomenon where animals concentrate in more open areas as the surrounding vegetation becomes more dense. This behavioural shift highlights several important ecological trends. As the bush and grasses grow, visibility and accessibility for grazers diminishes, therefore they favour open areas where they can graze more easily and keep a lookout for predators. Open areas provide better access to nutrient-rich grasses, making them more attractive feeding grounds. Thicker bushes can provide cover for predators, prompting prey animals to move to more open habitats where they can better detect potential threats.

### **Rare sightings**

- During a sunset drive along Ultimate Drive on a rainy afternoon we spotted a lone, low-slung shape on the road. Utilising the open space of the road ahead of the game viewer it appeared like a small rock moving slowly, but as the vehicle drew closer the distinct white-grey mantle on its back became unmistakable. It was a honey badger!

### **Birds**

- The intra-African migrant carmine bee-eaters have now vacated their breeding sites after fledging their chicks and are frequently seen hawking insects disturbed by passing vehicles.
- Other notable sightings include black coucals, purple herons, African crane, long-crested eagle and yellow-throated longclaw. The vibrant woodland kingfishers have also become more vocal, particularly within the woodlands along the Chiredzi River.

### **Fishing**

- Fishing this month has been exceptionally good! The dam has received a lot of debris washed in by running water, and the rising water level has begun to submerge the grass surrounding, providing plenty of food for fish.
- Mozambique tilapia have been biting more along the edges, while tigerfish have been active among the dead trees standing in the water. One guest even landed a 4.2 kilograms tigerfish, which put up a thrilling fight.

### **Rock Art**

- Our guests have enjoyed exploring the various rock art sites. Each piece of rock art tells a story, revealing the cultural and historical significance of the area.

**Some Bush Stories follow, as well as the January Gallery.**

## Gold and green

Story and photo by Time Mutema

Today, just before sunset, within the Chikwete area, we spotted an adult male leopard resting within the tall array of grasses. His golden coat blended almost perfectly with the fading light, and only the flick of his tail betrayed his presence. He appeared relaxed but alert, eyes scanning the bush as impala grazed nearby. We observed him for nearly half an hour. At one point he moved silently and paused to scent mark, then melted into the mopane scrub. The guests were in awe - his elegance, power, and camouflage stirred deep appreciation.



You'll notice he has a damaged or blind left eye. We don't know what caused the damage but it could have been from hunting, fighting, confrontation or navigating thick bush. Less likely would be disease or infection, or a developmental or genetic cause.

**Hunting:** When tackling prey, leopards may sustain injuries from struggling animals. A sharp horn can easily poke a leopard in the eye.

**Fighting:** A fight with another leopard (for territory or mates) - a vicious swipe from a claw can easily hook out or severely damage an eyeball.

**Confrontation:** It's not impossible that a leopard could be confronted by a snake such as a Mozambique spitting cobra, and venom spat into the leopard's eye would cause severe damage.

**Navigating thick bush:** A sharp thorn or branch in dense vegetation can poke the eye - especially if a leopard is being chased by a rival.

**Infection from injury:** A minor scratch or corneal ulcer from a branch can become infected, leading to severe ocular inflammation, corneal scar tissue, and eventually loss of sight.

We've seen this resilient male on various occasions over the years and he appears to be doing very well despite this handicap. Each leopard sighting feels like a gift. They teach patience, stealth, and the art of silence. In guiding, such moments deepen our connection to the wild and remind us how important it is to look at the details and anomalies.

## Migratory birds this summer

Story by Nicholas Gaunje

This Zimbabwean summer is proving to be a vibrant spectacle for birders, showcasing the significant influx of migratory birds. The region known for its stunning landscapes and rich biodiversity, is now a haven for avid birders.

Among the most noteworthy sightings here at Singita Pamushana are:

Lesser spotted eagles (*Aquila pomarina*) known their striking plumage and their hunting skills. These majestic birds of prey can often be seen soaring gracefully on thermals, scanning the terrain for potential meals.

Wahlberg's eagles (*Hieraaetus wahlbergi*) which captivate observers with their distinctive appearance and bold flight manoeuvres. Birders appreciate the opportunity to witness their aerial displays, particularly during the breeding season when they perform elaborate courtship flights.

The vibrant colours of southern carmine bee-eaters (*Merops nubicoides*) and European bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) bring brilliance to the skies. With their bright plumage and agile flight, these birds are not only a delight to watch but also a testament to the rich biodiversity of the area. They often hunt insects, adding a dynamic element to the birding experience.

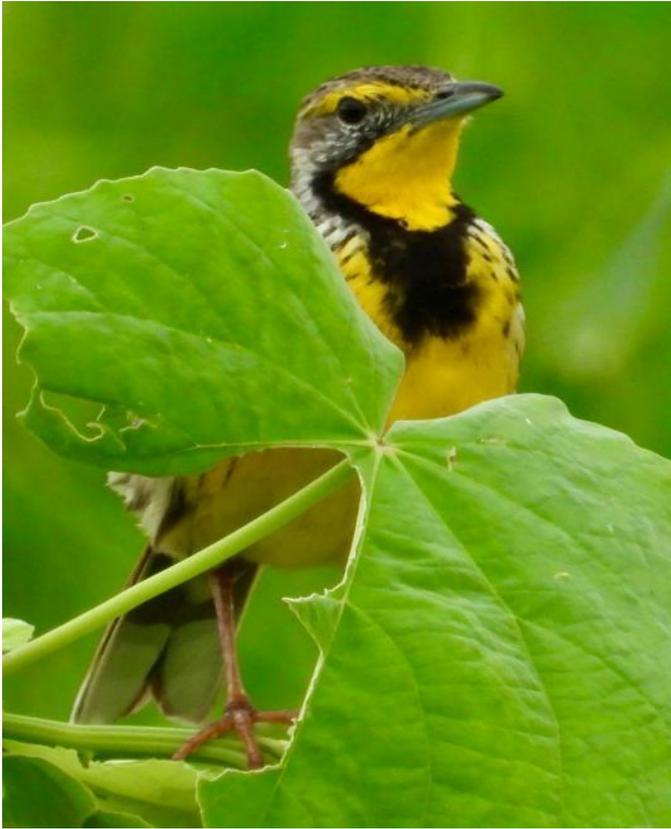
We are also excited about the European rollers (*Coracias garrulus*) and broad-billed rollers (*Eurystomas glaucurus*), both of which are renowned for their eye-catching colours and graceful presence. Their cheerful calls and acrobatics make them a favourite among birders seeking to appreciate their beauty.

Woodland kingfishers (*Halcyon senegalensis*) add to the mix with their stunning blue and white feathers and striking calls. These conspicuous birds are often seen in woodlands or near water sources, where they hunt for insects, small vertebrates, and occasionally fish, making them a rewarding sight for those that are patient enough to observe them.



White-fronted bee-eaters (*Merops bullockoides*) observed feeding on an insect.

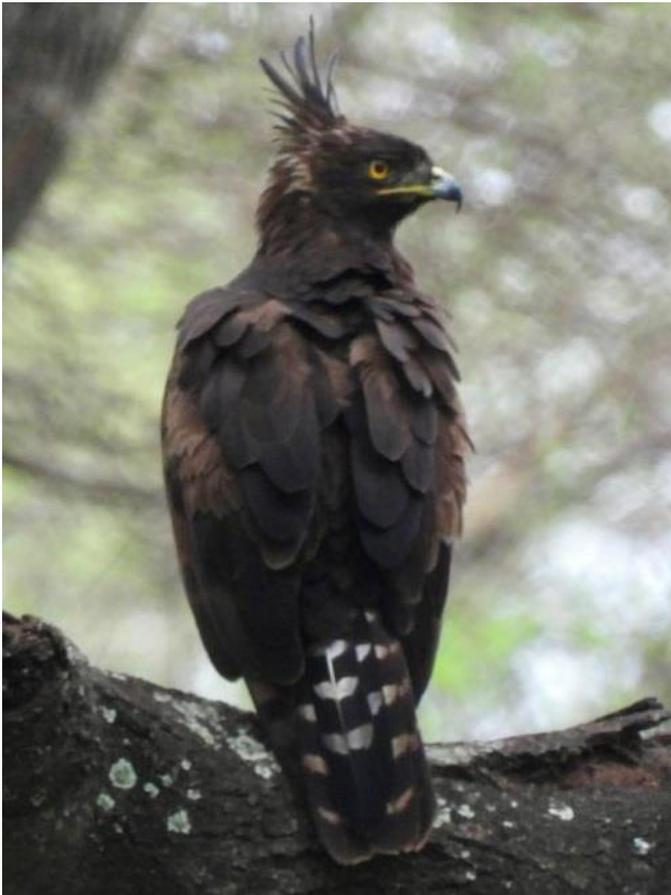
Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.



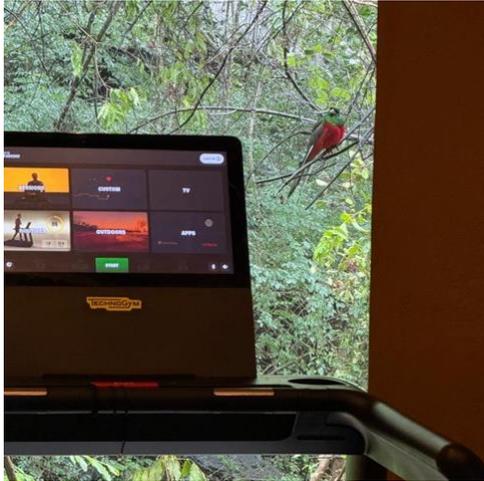
Yellow-throated longclaw.  
Photo by Bradely Fouche.

Carmine bee-eaters.  
Photo by Mark Saunders.

Long-crested eagle.  
Photo by Bradely Fouche.



This sighting goes to show just how good working out is for you. The Narina trogon (*Apaloderma narina*) is one of the holy grail birds for avid birders to tick in their lifetime. Many have travelled far and wide in search of this colourful specimen, and come up empty-handed. They live in dense forest habitat, and deforestation is one of the reasons they are so rare and hard to find. We occasionally spot them in the forested area around the Malilnagwe Dam, but imagine our surprise when one turned up at the lodge's gym! It was first spotted by the gardening team, and then photographed, with an iPhone, from inside the gym. The call is a grating, low repeated hoot, given by males only, in defending territory or attracting mates. The male's bare, blue-green throat patch is expanded when calling and both sexes may fluff out the breast feathers in display.



Seen from the treadmill in the gym.  
Photo by Brad Fouche



The male's bare, blue-green throat patch as he calls.  
Photo by Tyla Fouche



Narina trogon, as seen from the gym, on a rainy day. Photo by Brad Fouche.

January Gallery



A beautiful emperor moth with striking eye-spots. Photo by Emily Capon.  
A black rhino and calf fleeing into the thickets. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.



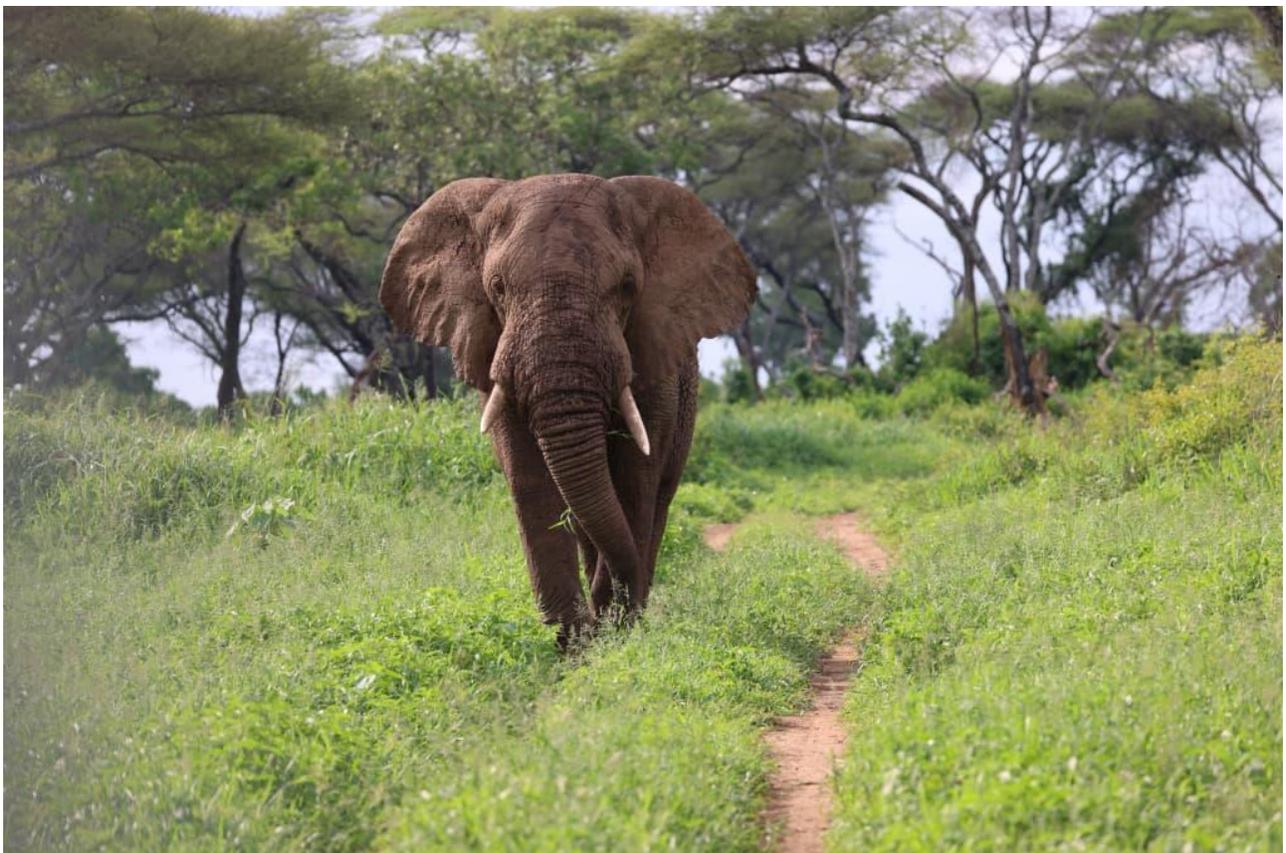
Black rhino beauties. Photos by Mark Saunders.





Male elephant in musth. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.

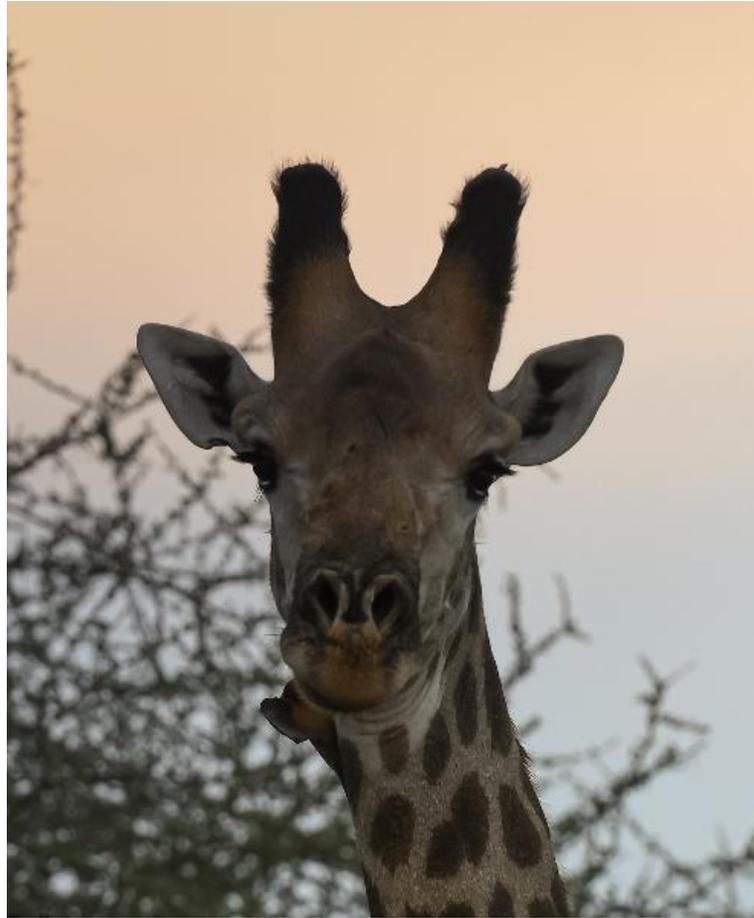
A peaceful forest scene. Photo by Mark Saunders.



Buffaloes taking advantage of the water to regulate their body temperature and avoid heat stress.  
Photo by Nicholas Gaunje.



Wild dogs scanning the area for potential prey as the day cooled down. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.



Male giraffe at sunset.

Klipspringer relaxing on a rock. Photos by Daffwell Marumahoko.





A zebra in heaven!  
Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.

Waterbuck with horns mirroring the forest  
background.  
Photo by Mark Saunders.





Males from the Nduna Pride. Photo by Nicholas Gaunje.  
A lioness from the River Pride accompanied by her two cubs. Photo by Daffwell Marumahoko.

