

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE For the month of June, 2026

Temperature

Average minimum: 13°C (55.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 11°C (51.8°F)
Average maximum: 27°C (80.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 29°C (84.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 6 mm
Season to date: 630 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 17:23

We've had some chilly mornings (by our 'high' standards), and the thermometer hasn't hit 30°C (86°F) once this month. The clear warm winter days are simply the best, making you want to bask like a lizard in this 'place in the sun'. The sightings have really picked up this month, especially as the vegetation is thinning out and water in temporary pans has dried up. The lion sightings are prolific, and we've started to see more breeding herds of elephants too. A pack of African wild dogs is denning next to the reserve's main road, so there have been many sightings of them going to and from their den. We've welcomed many guests to our paradise this month, from first-timers to seasoned safari goers. One group of regular repeat guests requested that we focus on different trees for them in addition to the wildlife, which is such a joy.

Here's an overview of the month's sightings:

Lions

- The River Pride were seen feasting on a buffalo kill at Ray's Drift, and they were also seen eating a freshly killed warthog.
- The Nduna Pride featured heavily, with groups of four to seven lions seen feeding on buffalo carcasses and resting.
- Guests enjoyed sightings of a pride of 12 lions in the Chikwete area.
- A male lion with a buffalo kill provided excellent viewing.
- A pride of three lions was observed successfully killing a kudu.
- Guests witnessed lions mating near the roadside.
- One of the highlights was hearing lions calling from multiple directions during sundowners.

Leopards

- A male leopard feeding on an impala kill was seen at the confluence of the Nyamasikana and Chiredzi Rivers.
- Guests witnessed a female leopard stalking impala, observing multiple hunting attempts before the prey escaped.
- Twice a mother-and-cub leopard sighting provided memorable encounters.
- Two leopards were seen together near Sosigi Dam.
- A relaxed female leopard was seen around Nyari, Base Camp, West Valley Road, and along the shoreline during a fishing excursion.

African wild dogs

- A pack of 13 wild dogs made a kill of an impala north of O2 Picket, consuming it within minutes.
- Ten wild dogs were observed hunting, successfully killing an impala before returning to their den.
- Guests witnessed a dramatic confrontation when hyenas stole an impala kill from wild dogs, leading to an intense standoff.
- A pack was followed on multiple hunting attempts along the Chikwete Cliffs, providing thrilling predator-prey interaction.

Elephants

- Breeding herds ranging from 15 to over 60 elephants were encountered throughout the reserve.
- Guests spent an hour watching more than 60 elephants feeding south of O2 Picket.
- Another memorable afternoon involved watching elephants drinking and mud-wallowing at a pan in the swamps.
- Two relaxed bull elephants approached to within 10 metres of a game-viewer vehicle at Nhangwa.
- Several impressive musth bulls were also encountered.
- An afternoon was spent with a breeding herd of approximately 30 elephants as they crossed the river from the Hippo Valley side to the Malilangwe side. The herd paused to drink, swim, and feed, at times surrounding the game-viewer and providing a remarkable opportunity to observe their feeding behaviour at close range.

Buffalos

- A remarkable herd of approximately 800 buffalo was encountered near the Chiredzi River.
- Another herd of more than 200 buffalo was recorded at Banyini.
- Large breeding herds and numerous old buffalo bulls were observed throughout the reserve.

Rhinos

- Multiple white rhinos are now converging at Hwata Pan. This permanent water source is a firm favourite of theirs to quench their thirst and socialise with others.
- Guests witnessed a dramatic confrontation involving two male white rhinos and a black rhino, with the black rhino briefly charging towards the vehicle.

- Excellent sightings included a mother-and-calf white rhino, as well as the easily identifiable female with the long dipping horn defending her calf.
- A crash of four black rhinos was recorded on Buffalo Fence Road.

Spotted hyenas

- While enjoying sundowner drinks one evening, an impala suddenly came running past, closely pursued by a lone wild dog and a hyena. The impala fled into Banyini Pan, where the hyena followed it into the water and managed to kill it. Soon afterwards, more hyenas arrived at the scene, followed by the remainder of the pack of hunting dogs. It turned into an extraordinary and unforgettable evening.
- Spotted hyenas were also spotted perusing the menu at our baobab bush dinner site.

Plains game

- Large numbers of giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, warthog and impala were observed throughout the open plains.
- Sable sightings were excellent, including a herd of 17 sable antelope on Mubangweni Road.

Unusual/other sightings

- Rare nocturnal sightings included pairs of porcupines.
- Pairs of klipspringers were seen posing on rocky outcrops.

Photographic hide

- Hwata Hide is in its high season. Providing a safe and close way to view wildlife in an unobtrusive manner, it has provided guests with incredible sightings of rhinos, elephants, zebra and even a pride of four lions.

Rock art

- Guests were entranced by the rock art on the property. It is incredibly special to be able to leave the vehicle and walk to some of the rock art sites to view them closely and see the detail of the art.

Boat cruises

- Sunset boat cruises delivered memorable encounters with birds, hippos and crocodiles. With the skies being so clear, the boat also provides the perfect platform for stargazing. The planets Mercury, Venus and Jupiter aligned above the horizon this month, which gave us pause for thought.

Fishing

- Fishing excursions produced bream, a 4kg catfish and many tigerfish that got away.

Gonarezhou National Park

- A trip to Gonarezhou produced excellent elephant sightings and the amazing bonus of a large male leopard at Chilojo Cliffs.

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

Reading between the lions

Lion news on the property is that the two young males that have formed a coalition are still scouting out the central areas, and roaring provocatively, with their sights set on possibly challenging the Nduna Pride males in a takeover bid.



On the Hippo Valley side of the reserve, the River Pride has been seen hunting along the Chiredzi River and resting in the sandy riverbed. A few kilometres upstream were two lionesses and a male, with one of the lionesses in oestrus. They were seen in the middle of the day, in the middle of a road. With bright sunlight, and dark shade the stage was set to capture some of the facial expressions made by mating lions.

During mating, lions and lionesses display a remarkable range of facial expressions that communicate arousal, discomfort, and aggression. The male lion often wears an intense, focused expression, with his ears angled forward, eyes narrowed, and lips slightly curled as he approaches or mounts the female. During copulation, he may grimace, wrinkle his muzzle, and bare his teeth in a characteristic flehmen-like expression. The lioness, meanwhile, frequently exhibits signs of irritation or discomfort, as mating is brief but physically intense; she may flatten her ears against her head, narrow her eyes, pull back her lips, and emit snarls and growls. Immediately after copulation, the lioness often reacts with a fierce facial display, baring her teeth and snarling as she turns on the male, while the male may respond with a startled or defensive expression, ears flattened and mouth open.

These dramatic facial expressions are an important part of the mating ritual, helping to regulate interactions during a period when lions may mate dozens of times over several days. Knowing that they are a guaranteed part of the mating process gives us the opportunity to watch and photograph this behaviour from a discrete distance.



The various prides, and splinter prides – sometimes only two lionesses together, have made several kills this month – buffalo, kudu and warthog. They even killed a hyena, although this would have been to reduce hunting competition. However, one victim – that they don't hunt regularly – was a giraffe. We could see from the carcass that it was an old male. Two lionesses were found at the carcass first, indicating that they were probably responsible for the successful hunt. Hunting a full-grown giraffe is high-risk and challenging for two lionesses. An adult giraffe can weigh about 1 000 kilograms and deliver a fatal kick that can shatter bones. They probably chased the old male until he tired and stumbled over the rocky terrain, giving them the opportunity to make the kill.

They were soon joined by a male who chased in on their prize. Eventually hyenas and vultures got their turn too, and a few days later there was barely a trace of the giraffe left.



Results of a recently conducted lion diet survey indicate that buffalo constitute the majority of prey species taken by lions on the Malilangwe Reserve, followed by zebra and wildebeest, respectively.



This zebra was hunted during the night at the base of Hlamba Mlonga hill. Arriving at the scene before sunrise we found a large male feasting on the protein-rich muscle groups of the hindquarters. Nearby lay two lionesses and a younger male lion, awaiting their turn. Between them lay a bright red pile of innards.

Lions derive little to no nutritional benefit from plant material and are poorly adapted to digest it. For this reason, they typically avoid the stomach and intestines of herbivorous prey such as zebras, as these organs contain large amounts of partially digested vegetation and strongly scented digestive fluids. When feeding, lions often remove the digestive tract from the carcass and discard it nearby rather than consume it. These discarded organs are then left for the more desperate lions, or scavengers such as hyenas, jackals, and vultures.

The youngest of the two lionesses got up and carefully approached the carcass and the male lion feeding on it, but decided it would be safer for her to try the entrails instead. The expression on her face needs no interpretation – you can tell exactly how distasteful and disappointing she found this portion to be.



Texture and context

The shrub with the graphic texture (a photographer's delight) in these rhino and elephant photos is *Sebsebea orthacantha*. A common name for it in Afrikaans is *stekelbossie* – *stekel* meaning thorn or bristle, *bossie* meaning a small bush or shrub.

It's an indigenous shrub that was not in great evidence when the area was transitioning from a cattle ranch to a wildlife reserve over 30 years ago, whereas now it's quite conspicuous. Like so much of the indigenous flora and fauna, it has staged a comeback, demonstrating how resilient nature is when protected, and conserved through science-based management.



Sebsebea orthacantha relies on epizoochory (sticking to animals) rather than being eaten for seed dispersal. Instead of serving as a food source, the plant interacts with animals through its physical structure. A burr is formed from the fruiting heads and its sharp bristles hook and cling to the fur of passing animals (as well as human clothing) to hitch a ride to a new area.

While watching a sleeping lion recently I noticed how matted his tail tip was. I cannot identify exactly what





seeds are hooked in his tail – but you can see how the process works – those seeds will, in due course, drop from the lion's tail in a new area and start growing there. It's genius.

There are some other remarkable ways seeds get dispersed.

Animal ingestion: seeds survive digestion and are excreted elsewhere.

Wind dispersal: lightweight seeds are carried by air currents.

Water dispersal: floating seeds travel via rain runoff, streams, rivers, or oceans.

Explosive dispersal: seed pods burst open, scattering seeds.

Fire dispersal: heat opens sealed cones or pods, releasing seeds after fire.

Calm after the storm



The impala rut that peaks in April and May has now passed, and everything has returned to 'normal'. The ewes are newly pregnant, the rams are drifting off into bachelor groups, and the focus is back on surviving and thriving, which becomes more difficult as the dry winter with sparse vegetation takes hold.

Impala are too easily overlooked on 'Ferrari safaris', but they make the most beautiful subjects in those moments when 'light happens'. I love to stop and admire them, and immerse myself in their fragile world.



Is that a seahorse?



From a distance we couldn't make out what the funny seahorse shape in the grass was, so we inched closer until we could zoom in to see it was a newborn giraffe calf. Its mother was a short distance away, keeping an eye on her baby. Adult giraffes are one of the lightest mammalian sleepers, needing only 30 minutes to 2 hours per day, but baby giraffe calves need about 4 to 6 hours of sleep. This little one was waking up from a nap and looking around, but when they are fast asleep they can wrap their long necks around their bodies and rest their heads directly on their rumps – using their rumps as a built-in pillow.

Also caught napping were these zebras. Only some members of a herd will lie down to enter deep sleep, while at least one designated sentinel remains standing up and fully awake to scan for predators.



Twitter



A female giant kingfisher (*Megaceryle maxima*) with her catch of the day.
(The male wears a 'chestnut shirt' and the female wears a 'chestnut skirt'.)

A grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) waits patiently for a meal to swim by.



June Gallery



False alarm – not the type when your car or house alarm goes off for no apparent reason, rather a situation where you find all these vultures in a tree and presume there must be a kill nearby, but it turns out they were all just roosting together.

A male lion tests the air in a flehmen response to analyse the chemical signals and pheromones from a nearby lioness.





A bull elephant calmly drinks on his own at midday.

As dusk falls white rhinos arrive at a waterhole and engage in a 'who's who' to establish the pecking order. Tails are curled, dust is kicked, huffing and puffing commences, heads are lowered, ears flick back and forth, and squeals are heard...





A large herd of buffalo engulfed by the sea of green in the swamp area.

A healthy bouncy baby white rhino with so much to explore and discover.

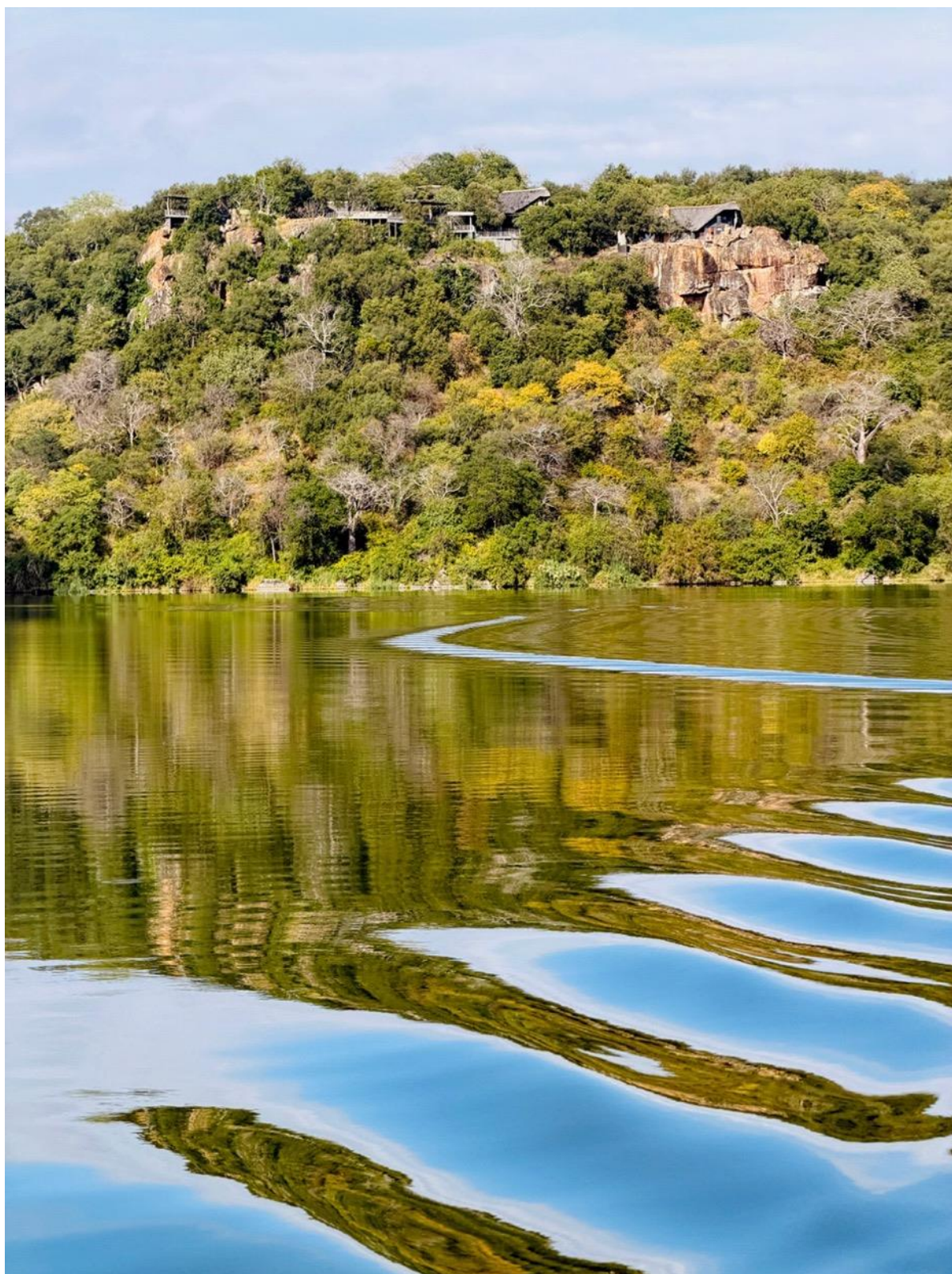


Matabele ants (*Megaponera analis*) returning from a termite raid. Notice their jaws full of termites! They are strictly termite-eating (termitophagous). They appear like speed traps across our roads as they march in column-like raiding formation. Their common name comes from the Matabele tribe, who were fierce warriors during the 1800s.



This pair of black-backed jackals have become like old friends to us – they are monogamous and territorial, and have raised several litters of pups over the years.





Winding our way on the water as Singita Pamushana Lodge looks on.