

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE For the month of March, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 20.5°C (68.9°F)
Minimum recorded: 17.5°C (63.5°F)
Average maximum: 33.6°C (92.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 31.0°C (87.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 122 mm
Season to date: 707 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:01
Sunset: 17:03

Despite the wonderful rain that we've continued to enjoy, and the thick jungle-like vegetation, we have had a month of excellent sightings. We've welcomed first-time-safari guests, repeat guests, and keen birders.

At this time of year animals often use our roads as they offer the paths of least resistance. A drive that started out quietly gathered momentum when white rhinos, elephants, buffaloes and plains game appeared, and then the finalé was when a male lion walked parallel with the game viewer vehicle, while roaring. We tend to forget how special it is for first-time-safari guests to see the so many different new animals – not just the Big Five. Our guests loved every sighting of nyalas, kudus, wildebeest, impalas, jackals, giraffes and warthogs.

Towards the end of the month the Chiredzi River was low enough to cross to the Hippo Valley side where, one afternoon, we notched up lots of plains game, wild dogs mating - then later hunting impalas, and one elephant bull in musth. While sundowners were being sipped under the umbrella trees a male lion strolled by... And on the way back to the lodge a leopard was spotted.

A sightings snapshot for March follows:

Lions

Some of the standout lion sightings were:

- A mating pair.
- A lioness hunting a buffalo.
- A family of two big males, four lionesses and one cub.
- A male lion feeding on an impala - and a white rhino bull not far from the lion.
- Two male lions roaring on the airstrip - a fitting end to our guests' safari experience.

Leopards

- Again, thanks to the roads being the preferred routes, we had a beautiful female leopard appear in front of the vehicle and walk towards us, sidling close to the front of the vehicle. On another morning safari we had a leopard walking from the Ultimate Drive turn off, all the way down until it went off the road at the Old Hyena Den-site.
- There were two good sightings of male leopards – one was sitting on the rocks, in perfect view, and the other was a relaxed adult, east of the 06 Road after the Mahande Crossing.
- The boat cruises provided two lucky leopard sightings. The one of a territorial male is detailed in this journal, and the other was of an adult female that had possibly killed a waterbuck calf, with the mother waterbuck in full pursuit of the carnivorous cat, trying to prevent it from eating the calf.

Wild dogs

Two packs have been seen, which is great news:

- The large pack, seen on various occasions with 14, 17 and 18 members have been hunting impalas in all directions of the central area, and at one sighting were seen feeding on an impala calf.
- On the Hippo Valley side a pack has been seen with nine members, including the alfa male and female that were mating. On one occasion this pack was relaxing in the shade a few hundred metres away from a herd of buffaloes.

Rhinos

- There have been some picturesque sightings of white rhinos, often with them grazing close to the game-viewers in a relaxed manner.
- An interesting encounter was seeing three young white rhino bulls stand their ground against a fourth territorial bull rhino. The big bull wanted to push them out of the area, but they weren't budging.
- At Hwata Pan guests had the highlight of watching a male lion being chased off by a white rhino cow and calf that came to drink at the pan.
- In a different area guests were watching and waiting for a pride of lions to become active, only to see two black rhinos gate-crash the party!

Elephants

- There have been sightings where guests have been able to watch breeding herds of elephants feeding and interacting below the hill near the lodge, and then swimming in the dam below Malilangwe House.
- Other herds of over 50 animals have been seen in the east, and in the west along the river.
- An eye-opening sighting of elephant bulls was when we were watching a pack of wild dogs at 02 turn-off, and two bulls crossed the road. They picked up the scent of the dogs and then chased them!

Hyenas

- The most dramatic hyena encounter this month was when we found a clan trying to attack a zebra foal. The mare chased the hyenas off, but they kept returning. Thankfully they eventually gave up and moved away.

Buffalos

- It is a delight to see buffalos at this time, purely based on their condition – big, fat, and shiny black. They are bulking up in the best grazing areas, sometimes 200 individuals together.

Plains game

- Like the buffalo, the plains game herbivores are all looking well. It's such a lovely time of year to see them, and their young.

Unusual sightings

- On a cool and rather quiet morning we were alerted by Meves's starlings dive bombing a black mamba on a leadwood branch.
- A far more tranquil unusual sighting was of hundreds of fireflies dancing in the open grassland near Sosigi Dam.

Birding

- There been some good sightings of black-chested snake eagles (*Circaetus pectoralis*), but a highlight was seeing a long-crested eagle (*Lophaetus occipitalis*).

Boat cruises

- One of the many highlights of our afternoon boat cruises is to see hippos. It's a delight to watch them 'yawn', 'laugh' and porpoise their way through the water. Many of them have relocated from the deep water to new shallow places.

Fishing

- In the good weather, when it heats up after the rain, the fishing has been excellent. Great catches of bream and tigerfish have been had. On one fishing expedition a breeding herd of elephants was swimming along the dam shore. For some of our guests the fishing turned out to be the unexpected highlight of their stay!

Wellness

- It's not a great time for bush walks as the vegetation is so thick, but that doesn't stop our team from providing wellness experiences. A yoga and meditation station was set up on Nduna deck, overlooking Nduna Dam, and our guests thoroughly immersed themselves in this experience to be had nowhere else in the world.

Rock art

- The Chidhumo and Chinzwini rock art sites were visited, both of which are easy to access, and the history and interpretation of these historic paintings is both fascinating and humbling.

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

The male of Malilangwe Dam

We'd been enchanted on our sunset boat cruise by all the 'regulars' including hippos honking, crocs sliding into the water, fish eagles swooping and calling, and numerous other birding highlights such as the newly resident thick-billed weavers breeding in the reedbeds. We'd drained our sundowners and indulged in the snacks, and started cruising back slowly. We were all giddy with the glory of being out on the water, surrounded by emerald wilderness, and conversation was in full swing - a reflection of our collective joy.

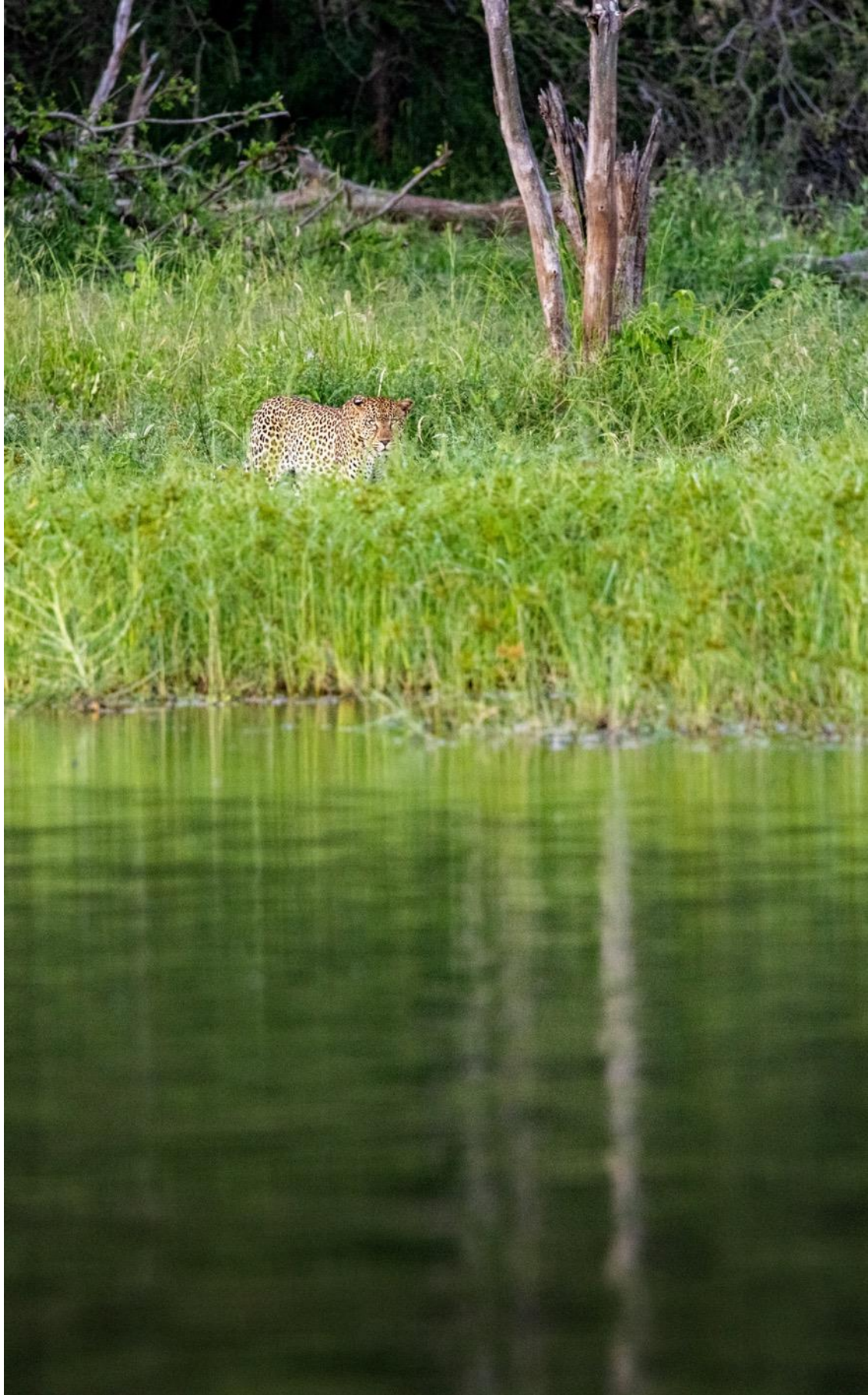
Then, with a snap of his fingers, Tracker Yeyani grabbed our attention, and we fell instantly silent. A moment later, it came again - the unmistakable sawing roar of a leopard.

He was sitting right out in the open and clearly a territorial male - huge and confident in his demeanour, and roaring to let every living thing know this was his domain. The nesting water thick-knees, crowned lapwings and even some doves were not at all happy about his presence and started mobbing him as he got up and strode across the floodplain. The grass was high, often engulfing him, but the birds kept us in the know as to his whereabouts.

By now, it was past 18:30, and the light was fading fast. Photography from the moving boat at full zoom was challenging, but every so often, his golden form appeared in stark contrast to the surrounding landscape. He even approached the shoreline, pausing for a moment to regard us, his notable light eyes locking on to our gazes. There was something strikingly jaguar-like about the way this powerful rosetted cat stood at the water's edge.







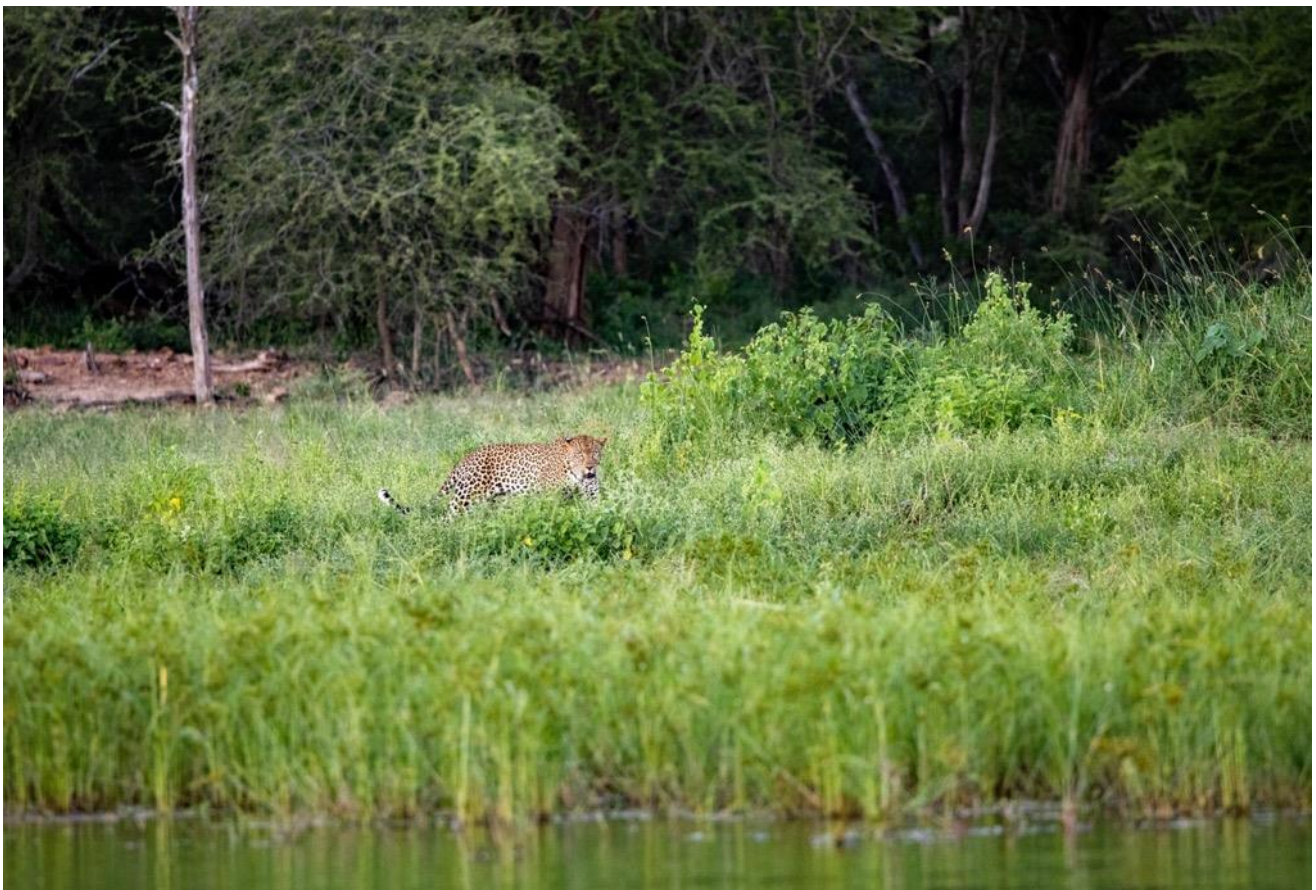
Eventually he disappeared into the darkness and dense jungle, and our jubilation poured out at having had such an incredible sighting, that had lasted for half an hour.

Male leopards are fiercely territorial creatures. They establish and defend territories that can span over several square kilometres, depending on the environment and the availability of resources. A male leopard's territory is essential for his survival, as it provides him with access to food and mates, while also protecting him from potential rivals.

The boundaries of his domain are marked by scent markings and regular patrols. These territories often overlap with those of females, but males generally avoid confrontations with each other by establishing clear territorial markers and maintaining a safe distance.

The size of a male's territory is also influenced by the density of prey, with more abundant resources allowing for smaller territories. To have the Malilangwe Dam shoreline as part of a territory is prime real estate in terms of leopard territories – prey has no option but to head towards the water, out in the open, to drink.

Territorial disputes between males can sometimes be intense, and these conflicts may involve vocalizations, scent marking, and even physical confrontations. However, a well-established male territory is a symbol of dominance, ensuring both reproductive success and access to critical resources.



It is a thrilling experience to be up on the hill in the lodge, be it dining on the deck or drifting off to sleep in your guest villa, and hearing the roar of a patrolling leopard along the shoreline of the dam below.

An elephant's perspective

Two elephant bulls were feeding in earnest in the aftermath of the rains, their massive frames moving with steady grace through the verdant landscape. They were taking full advantage of the season's growth, reaping trunkloads of foliage with remarkable efficiency.

During the height of the green season, an adult African elephant can consume around 150 kg (330 pounds) of vegetation daily. During the dry season they live off leaves, twigs, bark, and roots, and they may even dig for salt and minerals in the soil. We had such a long brutal dry season last year, it was hard to watch emaciated elephants searching for nutrition.

These two bulls were making up for lost time. Their trunks wrapped around the grasses and forbs, tearing them free from the earth with powerful pulls. Once they had a firm grip, they would shake the dirt off the roots, using their trunks and tusks to flick the soil away, ensuring only the fresh, tender greenery made its way into their mouths. The mud from the plants clung to the dominant tusk of one of the bulls in a thick dark layer.



We parked on the side of Pamushana Access Road to watch them. Close up they were enormous, the meadow around them only accentuating their size. Yet, when they moved closer to a large marula tree, their size became more relative. The marula, with its split trunk and over-arching canopy, stood as an impressive monument of nature. But the true perspective-shifting moment came when they wandered near an ancient baobab (the one with a big arch in its trunk that I refer to as the Archbishop Baobab). Its towering presence made the elephants look diminutive. Seeing these giants beneath a giant, where the elephants' stature was outweighed by the deep-rooted endurance of the land's oldest sentinel was truly awesome.



The bulls beneath the marula tree.



The baobab creating an entirely different perspective on the world's largest land animals.

Evolving as a photographer

As a wildlife photographer I've tried to become more discerning about each photo I take. Rather than the "spray and pray" method of firing the shutter button for a burst of frames in the hope that there's a good shot among them, I now ask myself questions such as:

"What do I want from this photo? Is it a behaviour sequence?"

"What kind of photo is this? Will it be more impactful as a wide-angle or close-up?"

"How can I make this more creative? Should I move for better light, effect or a different perspective?"

Then I choose my position, lens, framing, settings and focus. And then I fire!

Being so very fortunate to see incredible wildlife regularly, I find myself wanting to show off the vast and complex environment in which they live, and the tiny details of every special component. Sometimes I'll make a tree the hero of the image, with an animal nearby as almost incidental.

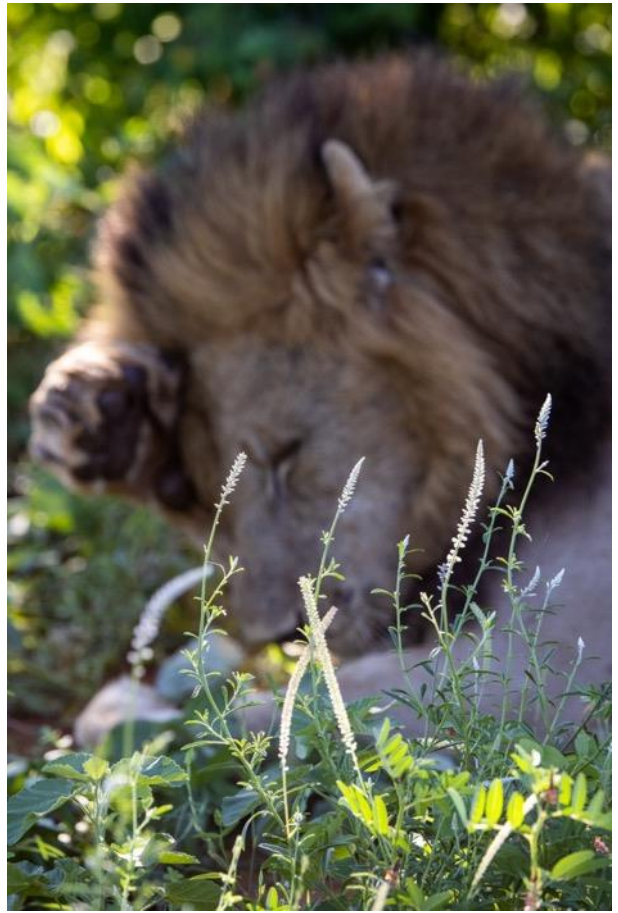
Currently *Helitropium steudneri* are flowering, commonly known as string of stars because the flowers grow alongside one another in rows, as if tiny silver-white stars have been bound together on a string. I've tried to showcase these delicate little beauties against the mite of a powerful animal in these opportunities that presented themselves, when a white rhino was grazing at sunset, and as a lion slept and then woke to groom himself.

I'm hoping to capture moments that feel authentic and immersive. Rather than only photographing an animal, I'd like to tell a story or hint at the bigger picture. My ultimate goal, and it is always a work in progress, is to evoke a sense of place, a connection to the natural world, and a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between wildlife and the wilderness. Through this evolving process I realise how much patience, intentionality, and awareness can elevate a photograph into a strong visual narrative.

I'm constantly inspired by fellow wildlife photographers, videographers and artists, the way light plays, art, design, and other wild places around the world. How lucky we are to live among such wonder, and how very precious and fragile it is, entrusted to us.



Flowers in focus as the sun sets behind the rhino.



1. Flowers out of focus as the lion sleeps. 2&3. Flowers in focus as the lion washes his face.



Twitter

The barn swallows have headed back to Europe and Asia for their breeding season.



We are delighted to have thick-billed weavers breeding in reedbeds of Malilangwe Dam. The male weaver constructs a distinctive nest which is compact, woven with thin strips of reeds and hung between the upright reed stems. Here Mark Saunders has perfectly captured the male weaving the nest, while a female considers if it's worth a site inspection...



We were alerted to these three tawny eagles atop a tree because of the raucous dissatisfaction of the pale juvenile on the right. We're not sure what it was upset about – it probably thought its parents should be providing a meal! After a while the adult in the middle with the light eyes moved closer to the other adult who was ignoring all the fuss. Tawny eagles range in colour from uniformly pale buff to heavily streaked dark and light brown. Juveniles are initially ginger-brown, fading to buff, and have brown eyes. It takes four years for them to acquire adult plumage.



March Gallery



A lioness and a sub-adult warm up in the first rays of sunlight.
Three white rhinos line up in the last light of an autumn afternoon.





Two young kudu tentatively cross the road.
An old black rhino boldly ventures forth from a mopane forest.





As the sun sets on another day in the African wilderness a white rhino pauses, while an implausibility of wildebeest don't take tomorrow's grazing for granted.





Hitting the spot...



Scratching that itch....



Satisfaction.

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