

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 19.7°C (67.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 16.2°C (61.1°F)
Average maximum: 30.4°C (86.7°F)
Maximum recorded: 37.2°C (98.9°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 12.5 mm
Season to date: 712 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:10
Sunset: 17:31

April is a favourite month for safari enthusiasts, and it is no wonder. The weather is just like the little bear's porridge in Goldilocks – it is “just right”. We encourage all our guests to make the most of the game drives and safari cruises, but sometimes they prefer to just relax at the lodge and enjoy the luxury and landscape – as do our some of our rather cheeky permanent residents, the dassies. Caught in the act in the photograph above, they were sunning themselves on the wall next to the infinity pool overlooking the dam.

All our guests have enjoyed seeing the herbivores in prime condition thanks to the verdant landscape, while the predators have to work that bit harder to sustain themselves. Without further ado here is an overview of what's been happening, wildlife-wise:

Lions

- Five lions showed themselves on our central open area, a mating pair among them. They made sure everyone heard them, if not saw them, when all five started roaring at the same time.
- The River Pride have been seen with 13 members, including two territorial males, some sub-adults and some lionesses. At one stage all of them were feeding on an impala. However, their post meal nap was disturbed when a crash of white rhinos chased them away from a nearby pan.
- Lions were seen feasting on a buffalo carcass, west of Makeche.

Leopards

- While looking for lions that had been vocal the previous night, a female leopard surprised us by sauntering down the road.
- A busy game drive reported seeing a leopard one morning, then a little further down the road a black rhino and ten hyenas.
- There have been a few sightings of female leopards in the Ultimate Drive / West Valley area. One evening a young female leopard was seen with a wildebeest carcass. She was not nervous of the vehicle, but ran off when a large hyena appeared and chased her.
- The cherry on top of one afternoon game drive was a young male leopard sleeping on top of a rock.
- The most unusual leopard sighting of the month was of a leopard eating a squirrel!

Wild dogs

- We've had exceptional African wild dog viewing of two packs: one of 16 members, and the other of nine. Both packs have been seen hunting unsuccessfully, and successfully. On one occasion a pack killed an impala and devoured all of it within five minutes.
- The wild dogs have also had company this month. At one sighting there were white rhinos that did not want to share the space with wild dogs. While watching the interaction two black rhinos appeared! Then on the other side of the river there were wild dogs, a hyena, white rhinos and a lot of plains game. The wild dogs killed an impala and while they were feeding the hyena came and tried to take the carcass away. All the dogs went for the freeloader and drove it away. Ignoring the commotion in the background were white rhinos, wildebeest and zebras.

Rhinos

We are renowned for our rhino sightings, and, as always, they've been excellent this month. Highlights include:

- Three relaxed black rhinos, a mother and two calves, browsing bush leaves.
- White rhinos wallowing in the mud to cool down.
- A white rhino with a newborn calf.

Thanks to science-based management the Malilangwe Trust will be sending some white rhinos to neighbouring Gonarezhou National Park for re-introduction. This conservation initiative has been decades in the planning, and some guests that happened to be visiting at the time this month got to see the chosen rhinos being located, tranquilised and moved into a boma as part of the operation.

Elephants

- A great experience was to dedicate a drive to finding a breeding herd of elephants. Hundreds of round and oval tracks were found crossing Binya Road near Zero 2 Pan, heading south-east. Following the tracks ultimately led to finding the breeding herd, and spending the rest of the morning watching them.
- A breeding herd engulfed one of the game-viewers and their wide-eyed occupants as they crossed a road in front and behind the vehicle. The calves stole hearts as they played among themselves. An enormous bull elephant came to investigate our vehicle, stopping a short distance away.
- It was interesting to watch a breeding herd focus their feeding on thorn tree bark as they stripped it from the trees.
- A few elephant bulls were feeding on the edge of the dam, but by next month that vegetation will most likely be trampled.

- An unusual sighting was watching a big tusker chase some wild dogs.

Hyenas

- Most of the hyena sightings this month have been of the clean-up crew trying to score a meal from the wild dogs or leopards.

Buffalos

- Five white rhinos drinking at a pan were persuaded to move along by a herd of over two hundred buffaloes.
- While a pack of wild dogs fed on an impala carcass a large herd of buffalos grazed unperturbed in the distance.
- More than five hundred buffalo congregated at Ray's Drift to drink and splash through the water.

Plains game

- Giraffes and zebras, two of many peoples favourite animals, are in abundance. It's lovely to spend time with giraffes, and it was a treat to see about 45 zebras at Hwata Pan.
- There have also been some lucky sightings of eland and sable antelope.

Unusual sightings

- It's been a great month for honey badgers! One was seen trotting along in the riverbed at Ray's Drift, and a pair seen trotting on the road at the swamps on Hippo Valley.
- A highly unusual sighting was of a serval kitten that was lying on the road on Banyini. Despite looking for the mother we did not see her.

Birding

- Our attention, now that the migrants have left, has turned to the raptors such as crowned, martial, Verreaux's and Wahlberg's eagles. We even saw a Verreaux eagle-owl flying off with a guineafowl it had killed.

Boat cruises

- This month's boat cruises have confirmed that the hippos have now found suitable places to dwell. They relocated to new places due to changes in water level.

Fishing

- I can scarcely believe I am typing this sentence, but one of our guiding team this month reported that a guest caught a nine kilogram tigerfish!

Rock art

- A highlight of any stay is seeing the rock art on the property, and when combined with a walk to the nearby "Big Baobab" close to one of the sites it makes for an awe-inspiring morning.

Gonarezhou National Park

- Guests have enjoyed the full day outings we offer to Gonarezhou National Park. One of the highlights was seeing lots of elephants swimming in Masasanya Dam, while another was witnessing the Runde River flowing bank-to-bank at the base of the famous Chilojo Cliffs.

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

Sweet giraffes and thorn trees

It had rained and the clouds were departing when we drove through an area of thorn trees that have a particularly sweet scent. You can smell the delicious aroma before you see them. Once amid the bright green leaves and yellow blossoms we saw a mother giraffe and her curious young calf. The calf was adorable and had long black tufts on his ossicones that were all wet and wavy from the rain. The ossicones of adult female giraffes have short black hair, while males are usually bald from sparring. However, all giraffes are born with long black hair on their ossicones.

Both mother and calf were relaxed and curious enough for us to step calmly off the vehicle and photograph them from ground level up, which is a good way to get perspective on their towering height.

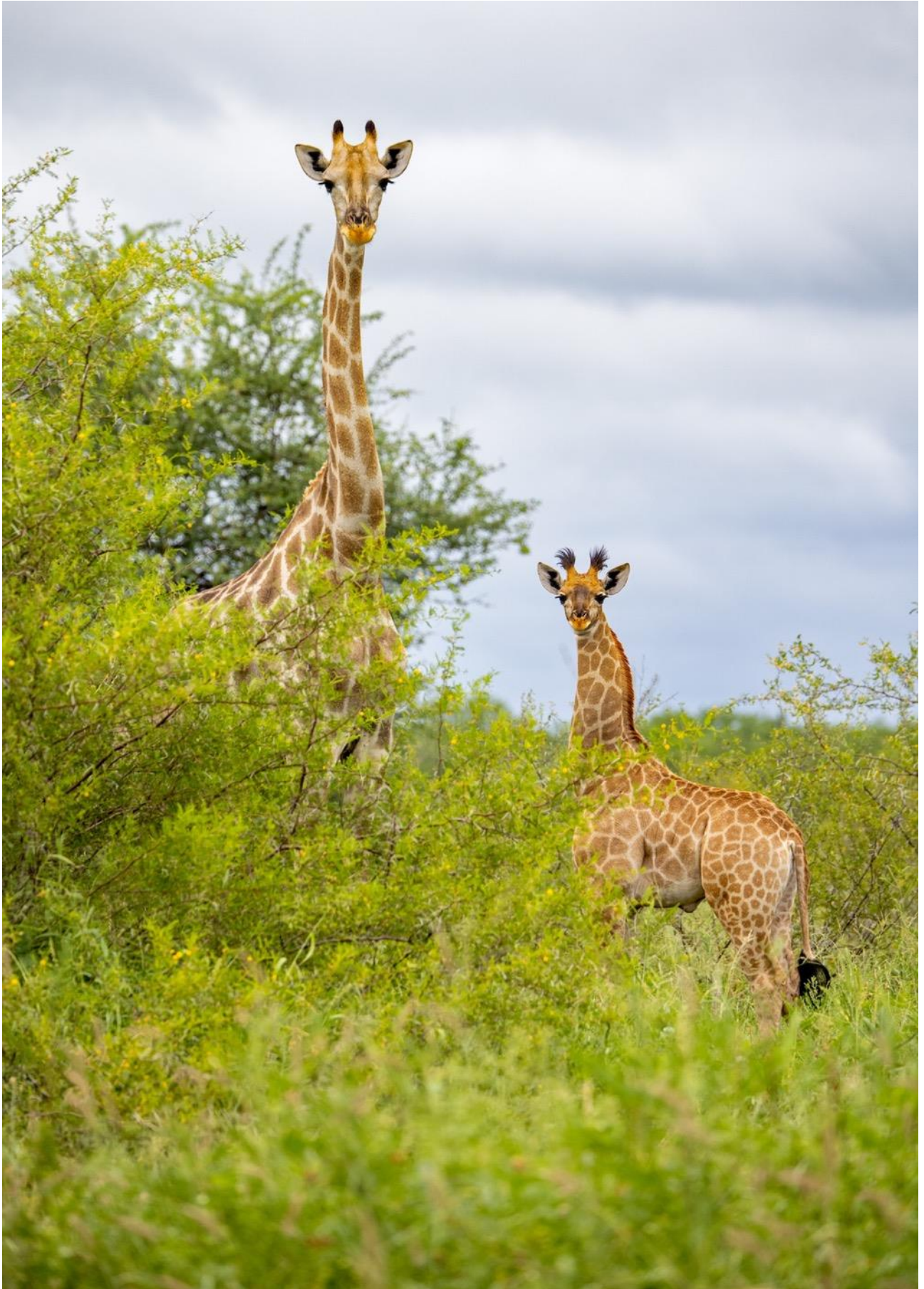
Giraffes and sweet thorn trees have an intricate, evolving relationship. Giraffes are partial to their leaves and have evolved adaptations like long necks and tongues to reach and grab leaves, even around thorns. These thorn trees, in turn, have developed defence mechanisms, including thorns, tannins, and even ant symbiosis, to deter over-browsing by giraffes and other herbivores.



Let's take a more detailed look at their interaction:

Giraffes have long necks and tongues to reach high into trees and access leaves that are otherwise out of reach for most other animals. They can use their tongues to pull leaves from branches, even those with thorns. They have thickened lips and hardened palettes that protect their mouths and throats from sharp thorns.

Thorn trees have their sharp, protective structures to deter many herbivores from eating the leaves. In addition their leaves also have tannins. These tannins have a bitter taste and can interfere with an animal's digestive system, making the leaves less palatable and even toxic in high concentrations.





Ethylene signalling is when a tree is being browsed, it releases a chemical signal (ethylene) that alerts neighbouring thorn trees to prepare for potential attack from herbivores by releasing more tannins.

Another interesting defence is that some thorn trees have a mutualistic relationship with certain ant species. The ants live in swollen thorns, feeding on nectar produced by the tree, and in return, they protect the tree by attacking any animal that tries to eat its leaves.

This interaction is a classic example of co-evolution, where the adaptations of one species (giraffe) have influenced the evolution of another (Vachellia thorn trees). Giraffes have adapted to overcome the tree's defences, while the tree has continuously evolved new defences in response. This ongoing process shapes the distribution and abundance of both species in their environment.

Knowing a little about what's going on in the background to a sighting like this of a mother teaching her calf how to browse on the trees makes the scene that much more special. However, I think there was another silent game at play here – that of the fluffy-topped baby giraffe stealing everyone's hearts!

Expect the unexpected

A sunset boat cruise on Malilangwe Dam offers many attractions and some guarantees. You can absolutely expect unparalleled tranquil beauty, hippos, birds, water monitor lizards, terrapins, crocodiles and sundowner cocktails that you'll enjoy more than anywhere else in the world. Fact.

What we didn't expect was to see the sun reflecting off a whitish object floating in the middle of the dam. We motored closer to see what it was, and were amazed to discover a dead crocodile. There's not a lot that can kill a croc, but sure enough it was dead, and floating belly-up. It possibly had a fight with another croc, or died of old age. It is not impossible that an elephant could have killed it. It was peculiar sight to see its toes and claws displayed in a seemingly delicate way.



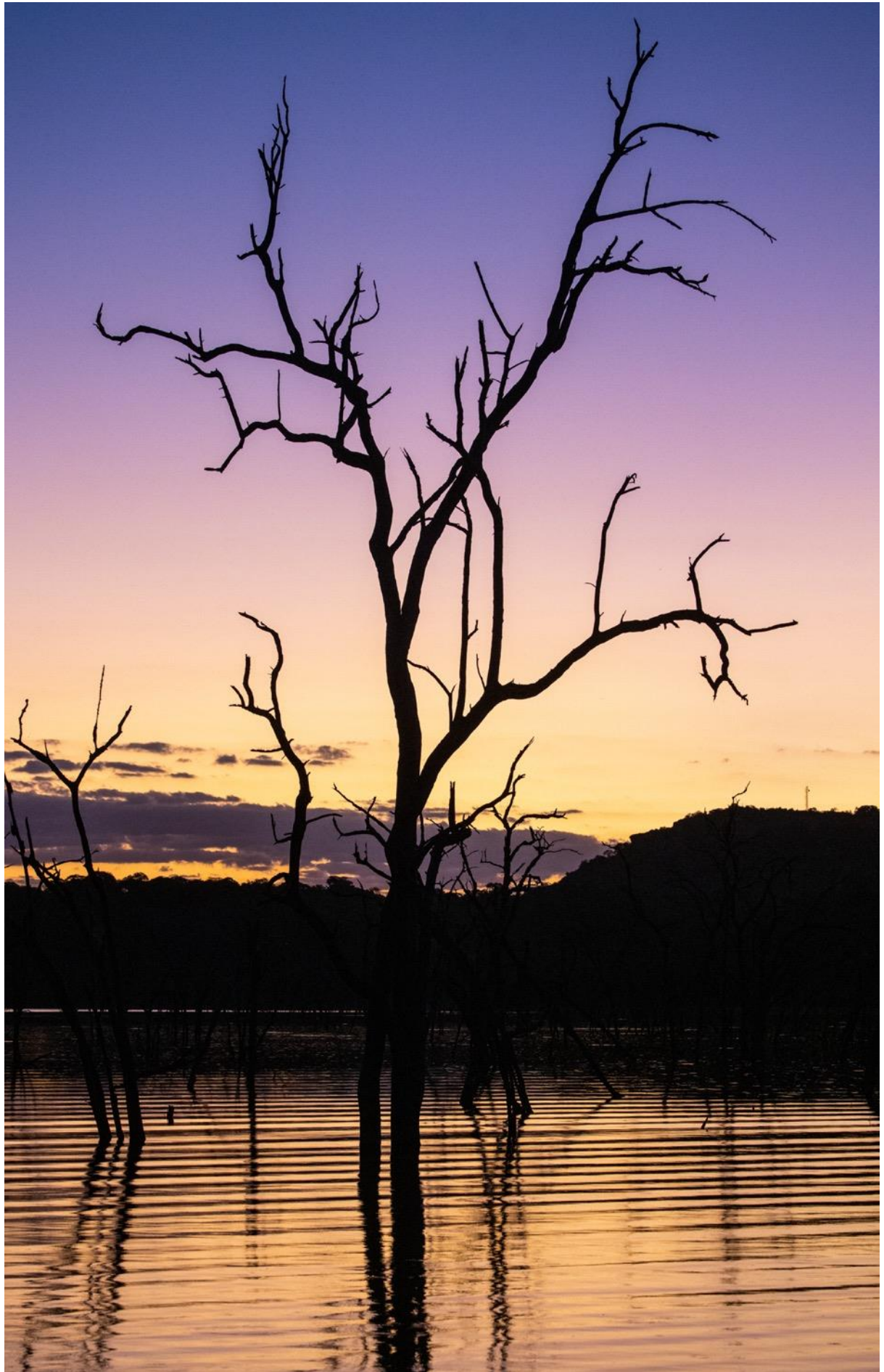
We cruised along and were delighted with another find – a large kudu bull browsing on the banks. They normally dash off, but this one stayed long enough for a photograph.



We drifted near a pod of hippos and watched as they submerged and resurfaced. It was the perfect time to pour drinks and offer a selection of snacks around, and the hippos grunted with approval and laughed indulgently at our jokes. Some very much alive crocodiles basked on the sun-warmed sandbanks or slid into the watery depths, and the fish eagles called to one another across the water, adding to the symphony of sounds.

As the sun began its descent behind the sandstone ridge, the sky transformed into a canvas of warm golden and amber tones, then tanzanite and purple hues. The dead trees stood like century old sculptures. In the distance, on top of the hill, we could see the twinkling lights of Pamushana Lodge beckoning us back for dinner. To see the landscape bathed in moonlight and the water's surface reflecting the stars in a continuous panorama is quite something to behold – to say the least. It's best that you come and experience it yourself!

Don't forget that we are unique in the fact that we not only offer sunset cruises in this private pristine wilderness, but also fishing safaris. These waters team with tilapia, catfish and tigerfish. Fishing is such a rollercoaster of tranquillity, adrenalin, peace and action. Fishing expeditions can be done after morning game drive, or in place of an afternoon game drive – or whenever the fish are biting!

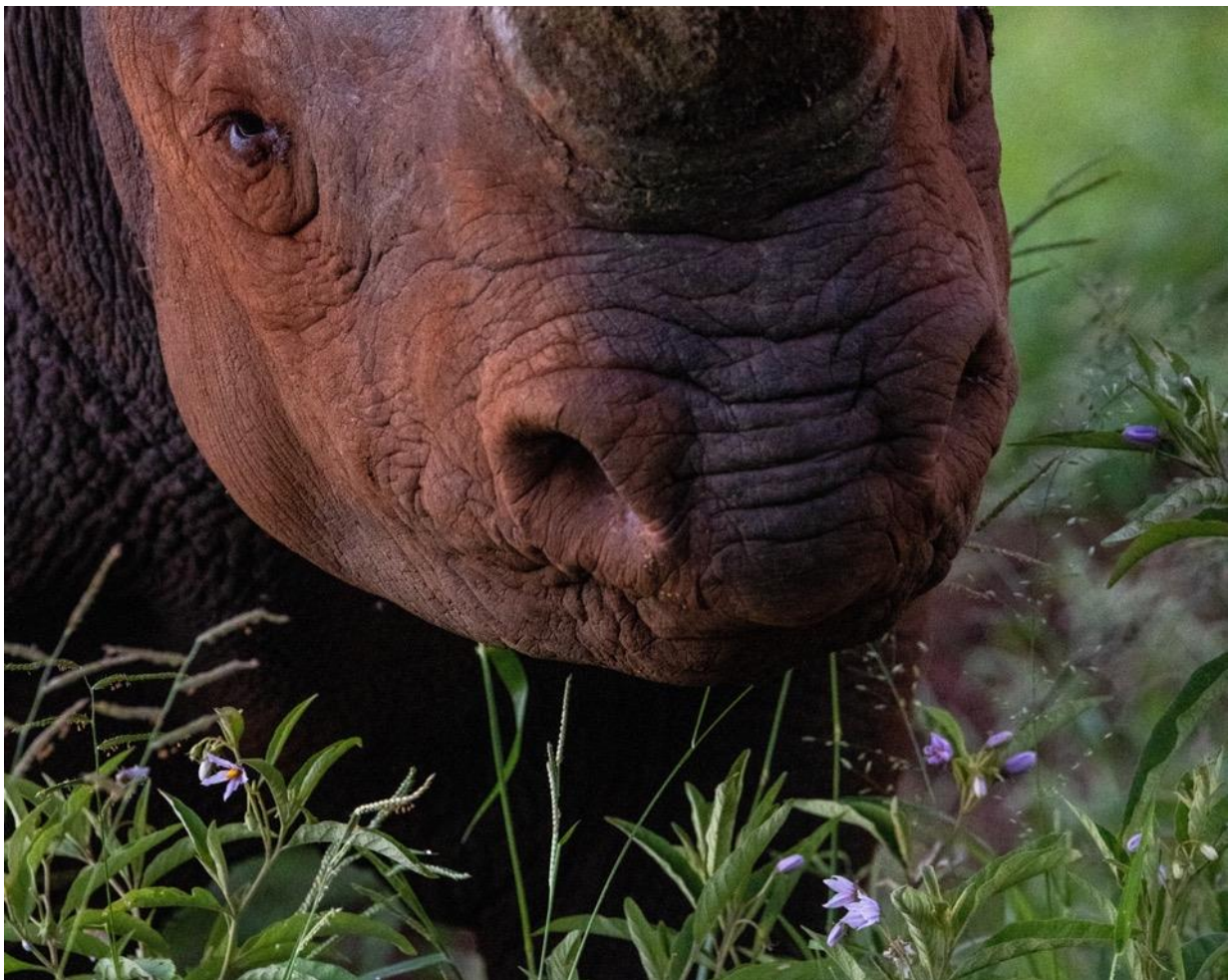




Black rhino, mauve flowers

We had a wonderful experience at first light, heading down Pamushana Access Road. There, browsing in the shorter vegetation on the side of the road, was a black rhino. He was immediately curious and came right up to the vehicle, inches away from the front bulbar, but was simply curious.

Other guests who had not yet seen a black rhino were still having coffee at the lodge. In a low whisper I radioed them and told them to make their way directly. Black rhino sightings normally only last a few seconds, sometimes minutes, but this black rhino had settled nicely thanks to our near silence, and was now grazing on the flowers and grasses. It was so beautiful to see an animal as formidable as this settled and unflustered. Invariably they'll run off when detecting human/vehicle presence, or mock charge the vehicle once or twice before high-tailing it into the distance.



Five minutes later we heard the slow and steady approach of the second vehicle, and they managed a good sighting of this bull black rhino before he wandered off. A rare event to get two vehicles with guests to see a black rhino sighting simultaneously.

In this photo you can see his eyelashes and small eyes, thick wrinkled skin, large nostrils and pointed upper lip. Black rhinos are also called hook-lipped rhinos because of their distinctive pointed, prehensile upper lip that is used for browsing, or picking leaves and twigs from trees and shrubs. This lip shape helps them grasp and pluck vegetation from higher branches. (In contrast, white rhinos are grazers and have a broader, flatter lip for cutting short grass.) Black rhinos have relatively poor eyesight and rely more on their strong sense of smell and hearing for navigation and survival.

The Malilangwe Trust K9 Unit

Patrolling the reserve where our Singita Pamushana and Malilangwe House guests go on safari, are these two new recruits: Kairo and Djemba. They are the latest members of the anti-poaching team that continues to be proactive and intuitive, and are the founders, along with their dedicated handlers, of the Conservation Canine Unit.

While they are still youngsters these two Doberman x Bloodhound dogs have had 12 months of intensive training during the critical development phase in their first year.

We are delighted to say that since they have been with us they have settled in well and are proving to be enthusiastic and highly talented workers. These dogs, selected for their exceptional tracking abilities, play a crucial role in detecting poachers and preventing illegal activities. Dogs possess remarkable olfactory capabilities, allowing them to detect scents at incredibly low concentrations - up to 100 000 times better than humans. This acute sense of smell enables them to track both animals and humans over long distances and through challenging terrain. While humans mainly rely on visual cues and technology, dogs can pick up on subtle scent trails that often go unnoticed, making them invaluable partners in conservation efforts. Their instincts and agility in the field provide a significant advantage in tracking down poachers before they can inflict harm.



Smiles all round for Kairo and Djemba, and two of their dedicated handlers, on an orientation walk.

As these dogs continue to demonstrate their prowess in tracking and detecting, they embody a powerful symbol of hope for anti-poaching efforts and conservation. We all wish them a warm welcome and a long successful career, doing what they love!



In their full working harnesses Kairo and Djemba run through a training schedule, noses to the ground.

Twitter

These white-backed vultures (*Gyps africanus*) on the left, and the hooded vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) on the right, are both currently, tragically, listed as Critically Endangered birds on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.



In contrast the resplendent Meve's starlings are common localised residents in this area. They look similar to Burchell's starlings, but the long pointed tail is diagnostic. Male starlings have iridescent feathers primarily to attract mates and signal their health and quality. This eye-catching shimmering blue effect is used as a visual display to impress female starlings, particularly during mating rituals.



April Gallery

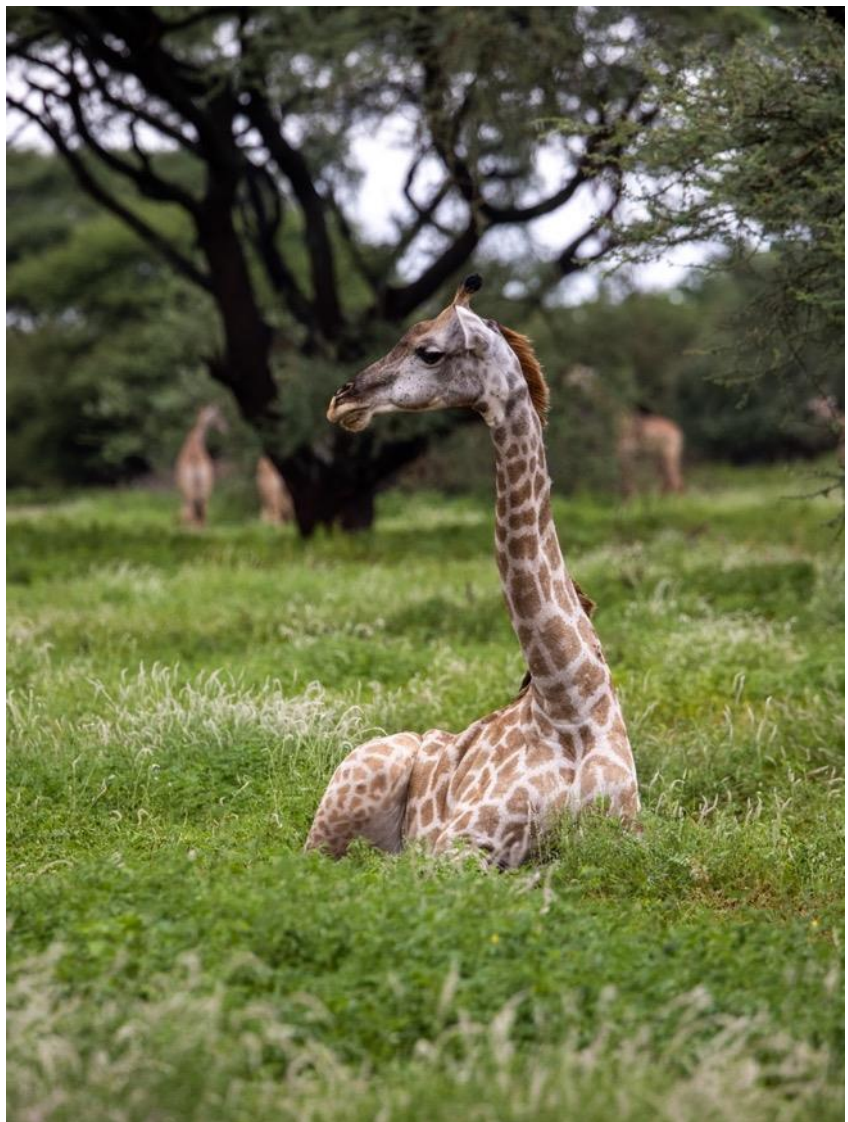


African wild dogs set out to hunt single file, then fan out before an abstract sculpture of a fallen tree.





A zebra foal lies down for an afternoon nap with the reassuring presence of mom nearby.



A female giraffe has a lie in after sunrise, while other giraffes are already up and browsing.



An elephant calf enjoys a drink of rich mother's milk, while the mother elephant supplements her diet of green foliage with some twigs and bark.



Two bull elephants guzzle as much as they can during the green season, needing to pack on the weight to get them through the inevitable dry season that will follow.



A male lion displays the Flehmen response in testing the hormone levels in the urine of a lioness. This is done to detect when mating should occur. Notice his broken front, lower, left canine.
A lioness resorts to giving herself a chin scratch.





There's no mistaking this black rhino. It has no left ear, and no tail. Despite having no doubt suffered an attack by a predator at a young age, this rhino is thriving and its wounds are well healed. The rutting season is in full swing and soon the impala ewes will be carrying next season's precious lambs.





Two white rhinos walk off into further paradise to join a herd of zebras and wildebeest.

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