

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 15.2°C (59.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.9°C (51.6°F)
Average maximum: 28.4°C (83.1°F)
Maximum recorded: 35.7°C (96.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 2.5 mm
Season to date: 714.5 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:23
Sunset: 17:19

The landscape is looking decidedly lush for this time of year, for which we are thankful, but the temporary pans have mostly dried out which attracts wildlife to the permanent water sources of the river, dams and permanent pans. Our game drives now make sure to check these water sources for any animals drawn to them, and for the predators that set up ambush there.

The weather is sublime! Cool enough that you need to bundle up in the early mornings, but shed layers as it warms up into glorious winter sunshine – the kind that requires you to bask in its embrace!

There's been a lot happening on the property this month, and some incredible sightings and news. Here's the overview for May:

Lions

- The majority of the Hippo Pride were seen in the swamps, with the youngest members looking well. Other sightings included seeing three lions at Ngwenyeni Pan, one male and two females, with one of the lionesses mating with the male.
- Five adult lions feasted on a buffalo carcass on the Banyini. The three males and two lionesses kept five black-backed jackals at bay until they'd had their fill. Again five lions fed on a buffalo kill north-west of Hwata Pan, this time keeping a wake of vultures waiting. Also, probably the same five lions killed a wildebeest this month.
- The three territorial males have also been seen together patrolling in the Mahande Loop area.
- Six lions from the Nduna Pride, one male and five females, made a short meal of a nyala. Members from this pride were also seen at the picturesque Madhope Pan when a foolishly brave herd of buffalo came to drink.

Leopards

There is such wonderful leopard news: there are two sets of young cubs!

- We were introduced to the first set, probably ten to twelve weeks old, on Ultimate Drive when their mother brought them a scrub hare. The story follows in this journal.
- The second set of cubs, about five to six months old, were glimpsed at Simbiri Dam.
- Both the mothers of these cubs have been hunting often and have been seen in the West Valley/Ultimate Drive/Pamushana Access region, and the Banyini/Airstrip/Simbiri areas respectively.

Wild dogs

Denning season has begun!

- We've narrowed down the area where the big pack of wild dogs is denning, so this makes checking for them at the surrounding waterpoints of Manyuchi Pan and Sosigi Dam a best bet.
- Eight wild dogs were seen relaxing in the middle of the road, on the Hippo Valley side.
- At one sighting there were wild dogs, one elephant bull, and a hyena in one area. The wild dogs were calling for other pack members, the hyena was following them, and then a male lion came to investigate the commotion but kept a discreet distance.
- An enthralling day included watching wild dogs trying to hunt two warthogs, but the warthogs fought back and chased the dogs. Then the dogs took off in pursuit of a nyala but missed that too.

Rhinos

It's a milestone month for rhino news. The translocation of 30 white rhinos from Malilangwe to Gonarezhou has taken place. The story follows in this journal. Also, our annual rhino operation of notching new calves has occurred.

White rhinos:

- Many of our guests were in the right place at the right time, and invited to witness the proceedings of a rhino being immobilised and moved into a transportation crate. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and an opportunity to learn more about rhino conservation in action.
- A newborn white rhino was seen, tottering along next to its mother.
- Rhinos were seen sharing space with elephants at a couple of the waterpoints.
- Three rhinos were seen on Hunters Road - a bull and a mother with her calf. As the guests were taking photos, we noticed blood on the rump of a calf and it was limping. We suspect hyenas had attacked the calf the previous night, and the parents had fought vigorously to defend their calf.

Black rhinos: With the bush still thick and all the activity of the translocation the sightings have been less prolific, but highlights include:

- An incredible sighting of an adult bull black rhino in the open plains of Banyini.
- Three black rhinos at Ray's Drift, comprising of a mother, sub-adult calf and an adult male, right in the open before entering the Chiredzi River.
- A drive notched up two particularly beautiful black rhino sightings first thing in the morning.

- While following a black rhino off-road a “nest” of lions erupted out of the long grass where they’d been curled up.

Elephants

- The bulls have provided great viewing as they drink, mud bathe and bully one another at the pans.
- A lone elephant bull was seen feeding for a long time on a huge umbrella tree that had fallen down.
- A breeding herd of 30 elephants were drinking at Ngwenyeni Pan, with a crash of six white rhinos in close proximity.
- A breeding herd of well over 60 individuals was drinking from the Malilangwe Dam, just below Malilangwe House, with a backdrop of a pod of hippos and basking crocodiles.
- A huge herd of elephants enjoyed the splash of rain we had. They fed spread out, with the calves vocalising and playing in the wet conditions.
- Stopping the vehicle a distance away from an approaching breeding herd allowed the herd to accept the vehicle as part and parcel of the landscape. They engulfed the vehicle and calmly fed around it in very close proximity.

Hyenas

- A clan was in great evidence on West Valley Road spending a couple of days there, and having a “sing-off” with lions at about 04:00 on consecutive mornings. It was incredible to lie in bed and hear the roars of lions and the instant volley of whoops from hyenas.
- The hyenas are looking extremely well fed at the moment. We’ve seen one carrying a head of an impala on Old Binya Road, and one carrying a buffalo leg near the Malilangwe Dam wall.

Buffalos

- The large herds are in great evidence, with quite a number of chocolate brown calves trailing their mothers.

Plains game

- The plains game gather in herds in the open areas. There was an incredible sighting of about 100 zebras in the area surrounding Hwata Pan.
- Sable antelope have made an appearance too, and some were seen along Hunter’s Road with very small calves at heel.

Photographic hide

- The hide is back in use after the rainy season and has been delivering incredible viewing! Guests have delighted in being safely inside the hide, at eye-level to the water, and seeing elephants, rhinos, buffalos, giraffes, zebras, wildebeest, impalas, warthogs, sable, eland, and even one hartebeest.
- A Cape turtle dove escaped the talons of an African goshawk, just by an inch!

Other sightings/observations

- It’s encouraging to see good numbers of warthogs rooting around. They’ve had a couple of good seasons and are doing well.

Boat cruises

- Sunset boat cruises on the Malilangwe Dam enjoying the hippos, crocodiles and birdlife is a firm favourite. Every now and again there are some lucky sightings too, like drifting very close to a malachite kingfisher, and seeing elephants and buffalos drinking together on the shoreline.

Fishing

- Even though the water is a few degrees colder there have still been some great catches of big bream and some explosive hits from tigerfish with a few big ones landed.

Rock art

- Having a vast collection of rock art hidden among the stone galleries is something we love to share with our guests, and they often reflect that seeing it was a highlight of their stay.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- Tours to the living museum are a real eye-opener to human skills of survival and advancement.

Gonarezhou National Park

- A full day safari to Gonarezhou included seeing the Chivilila Falls and then Chilojo Cliffs.
- One lucky party spotted a large male leopard with an impala carcass up in a tree.

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

The ultimate sighting

Ultimate Drive is a beautiful, somewhat bumpy, winding track between a network of ridges, and it is the chosen denning area of a leopard we see regularly in the area that's close to the lodge. It was tracker Robert's sharp eyes that spotted her lying on a rock at sunrise.

She last had a litter of two cubs born in about November 2023. Leopard cubs typically leave their mothers at around 12 to 18 months old. However, this can vary depending on individual circumstances and survival rates. In some cases, they may stay with their mother until they are about two years old. A leopard's gestation period is about 100 days.

She seemed to be focused on something at the base of the rock, and was quite brazen in the way she lay in full view. We viewed her from some distance away, using binos or long camera lenses as to not disturb the situation, but every now and again we thought we detected movement at the base of the rocks.

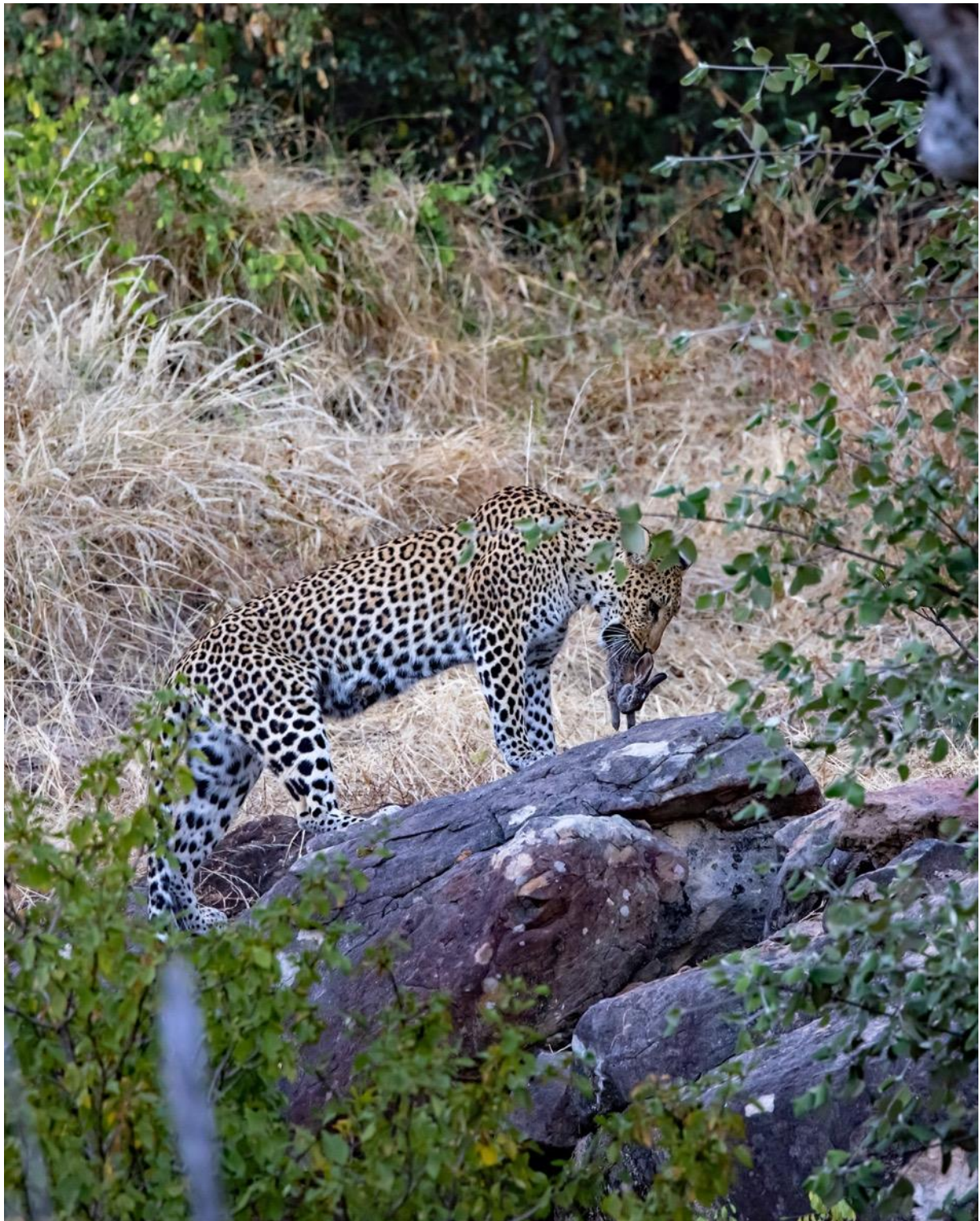


Then she got up, walked down to the base of a rock and picked up something in her mouth that was stashed in a crevice. Was it a cub? No, our binos confirmed it was a young scrub hare. She carried it up to the top of the rock again, and then batted it about a little – as if it were still alive or trying to make it look alive.

Then she made the most glorious sound in the world, the soft, unmistakable “ooowwwhh” sound that's used to call young cubs. Eventually two little blurs of spots moved behind her – her two new cubs. They were so young they still had that bluish baby tint to their eyes. They were only about 10 to 12 weeks old. It was hard to glimpse them, let alone get a photo. They must have been born in March 2025, so that's a very short time to have raised a litter to independence (if that is what has happened) and had a new litter.

She then spent some time trying to entice the youngsters to “catch” the hare and feed on it. I've seen this particular leopard catch hares for previous litters and it is such a clever choice of prey. A hare is the right

size meal for young cubs, it is relatively easy to catch and carry back to the den, and the meat is tender and easily torn apart into little bite-sized chunks.



However, the cubs didn't really seem to be lapping up their introduction to solids. You could see they weren't exactly sure what they were meant to do with the furry offering, other than play with it. No doubt they would have preferred to suckle from their mother – you could see her suckle marks, but this wise and accomplished mother was enforcing the weaning and introduction to solids stage. After a while you could see she became quite cross with them and vocalised far more fiercely. Then she picked up the hare and walked off determinedly into the bushes, with the two of them scampering behind her in chastised pursuit.



The first glimpses of the blue-eyed cubs as their mother tries to entice them to feed on a scrub hare.



Reintroduction of white rhinos to Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park

Singita Pamushana is the proud and grateful ecotourism partner of The Malilangwe Trust. The Malilangwe Trust is dedicated to biodiversity conservation on the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve where Singita Pamushana and Malilangwe House are situated. Some of our visiting guests this month had the great fortune of witnessing a conservation milestone – the translocation of 30 white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum*) to the Trust's southern neighbour, Gonarezhou National Park.

It has been over 100 years since white rhinos roamed Gonarezhou, and this exciting introduction builds on the success of an earlier reintroduction of black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) that took place in 2021.

The Malilangwe Trust began their black and white rhino conservation programme over 25 years ago. Due to their science-based management, dedicated protection and ideal rhino habitat, the populations of both species flourished to the point that they are now able to restock rhinos to other protected areas. This fact speaks to their decades of conservation success.

Relocating rhinos is a complex endeavour that involves meticulous planning and expertise at every stage - from selecting the animals, to their capture, transportation, and release. Choosing individuals based on their physical condition and social compatibility increases the chance of a successful translocation. Information on age, sex, lineage, and social behaviour is vital to selecting a cohesive group of animals to begin a new healthy population.

For this translocation the Malilangwe scouts received a list of the selected rhinos. When one was located, an eruption of intense activity took place. It's incredible to witness, and goes something like this:

- The veterinary team prepare darts and equipment and set off by helicopter.
- The pilot steers the rhino into terrain that's accessible to the ground team's vehicles, and once it is darted the ground team comes in.
- The rhino is restrained with ropes, and a blindfold and ear plugs are applied to reduce its stress.
- Any obstructing branches are cut away with an electric saw.
- Oxygen is supplied, vitals are checked and monitored, measurements are taken, DNA and other samples are extracted.
- The rhino is cooled by spraying water and shaded with a tarpaulin.
- The horn is tipped and a tracking device inserted, then the hole covered with a sealant.
- Timings are critical as the immobilising drugs interfere with the rhino's thermoregulation, respiration and blood pressure.
- An injection to partially wake the rhino is administered and the rhino is rolled onto its feet and assisted to a standing position. This takes an enormous amount of manpower and muscle.
- Then it is marched, assisted and guided into an awaiting crate.
- Once the blindfold and ropes are removed the crate is lifted by crane onto a truck and secured in place.
- Then the truck transports the precious cargo into Gonarezhou National Park.
- Upon arrival at the specially constructed bomas the crate is lowered to the ground, the immobilisation drugs are reversed, and the rhino is released into the boma.

The boma provides a sanctuary where rhinos can recover following their journey, and where food, water and safety is guaranteed. An adjustment period in the boma facilitates a smooth transition to their new home. Rhinos are social creatures with selective relationships, and it is heart-warming to see the other rhinos in the boma gather around the new arrival to see who it is, and squeal with joy when they realise it is a family member or friend they recognise.

An arrival that caught everyone by surprise one morning was seeing a newborn calf on the drone's screen (the rhinos were monitored in the boma by a distant drone so as to minimise stress). A cow had given birth

to a healthy calf even though she wasn't expected to be so far along in her pregnancy. Thankfully the little one and its mother are doing well.

All the rhinos have been released into the Intensive Protection Zone of Gonarezhou now, and we look forward to following their story as they establish a new viable population in a Zimbabwean national park.



The team attends to the immobilised rhino and keeps its temperature regulated by spraying water on its body.



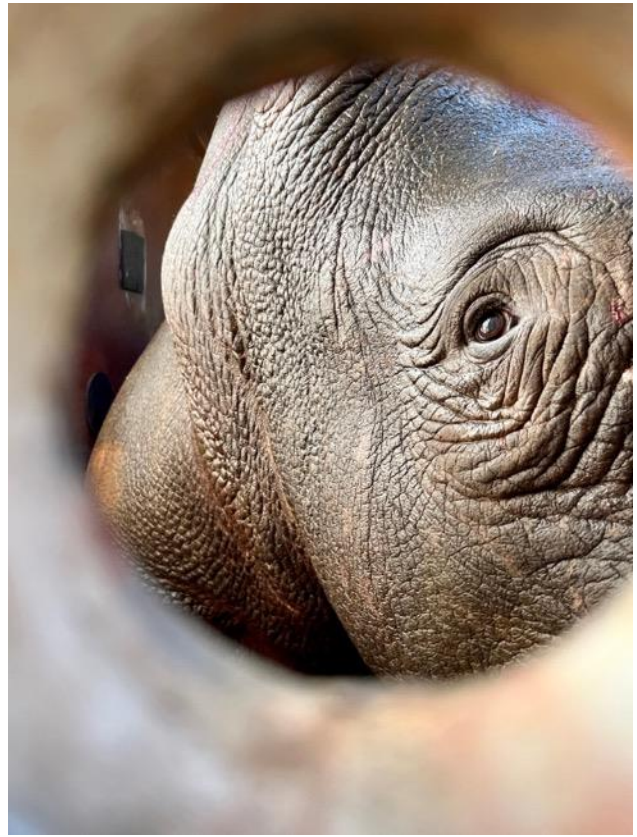
The rhino is rolled onto its feet...



...and then assisted to a standing position.



The rhino is marched, assisted and guided into an awaiting crate.



The view inside the crate from the hole that the guide rope goes through.
The rhino once inside the crate, and the blindfold removed.



The crate holding the rhino being loaded by crane onto a truck.

Bird and wildlife photography from Hwata Hide

Hwata Hide is a sunken photographic hide that puts you at just above eye level to the water of Hwata Pan, and conceals most of your body from disturbing the birds and wildlife that come there to drink.

We were keen to do a special session on bird photography, so got there just before sunrise to make the best use of backlight. I love the dramatic effect of backlight that highlights the subject's shape by producing a gold outline around the bird or animal. Before we even had our gear sorted out two hyenas loped into view and drank thirstily, but briefly, after their night's pursuits. This is when you need to know your camera's settings like braille so that you can immediately dial in the shutter speed, aperture and ISO that you want in order to override your camera's auto setting that will not give you as pleasing a result with this type of lighting when the low rising sun is positioned behind the subject, shining towards the camera.

The hyenas left just as soon as they had arrived, with one of them catching scent of something, curling its tail in excitement and setting off into the bush following its nose. A short while later we heard the unmistakable sawing noise of a leopard roaring, so its highly likely that a leopard had drunk at the pan before they arrived and that's what the hyenas were smelling.



But back to bird photography...

Ideally you want a camera with a fast autofocus. The autofocus capabilities on the new mirrorless cameras are a complete game-changer. They lock onto the subject and keep it perfectly sharp, all the time – as long as you keep the camera moving along with the bird in flight.

(The very latest mirrorless cameras have a pre-shot mode which means the camera is taking images by itself, even before you push the trigger. So, if you are wanting to take a photo of a bird flying off a perch, and you have focused on that bird, and it flies off before you pressed the trigger, the camera would have recorded a couple of seconds of images before you pressed the trigger and you would get the shot!)

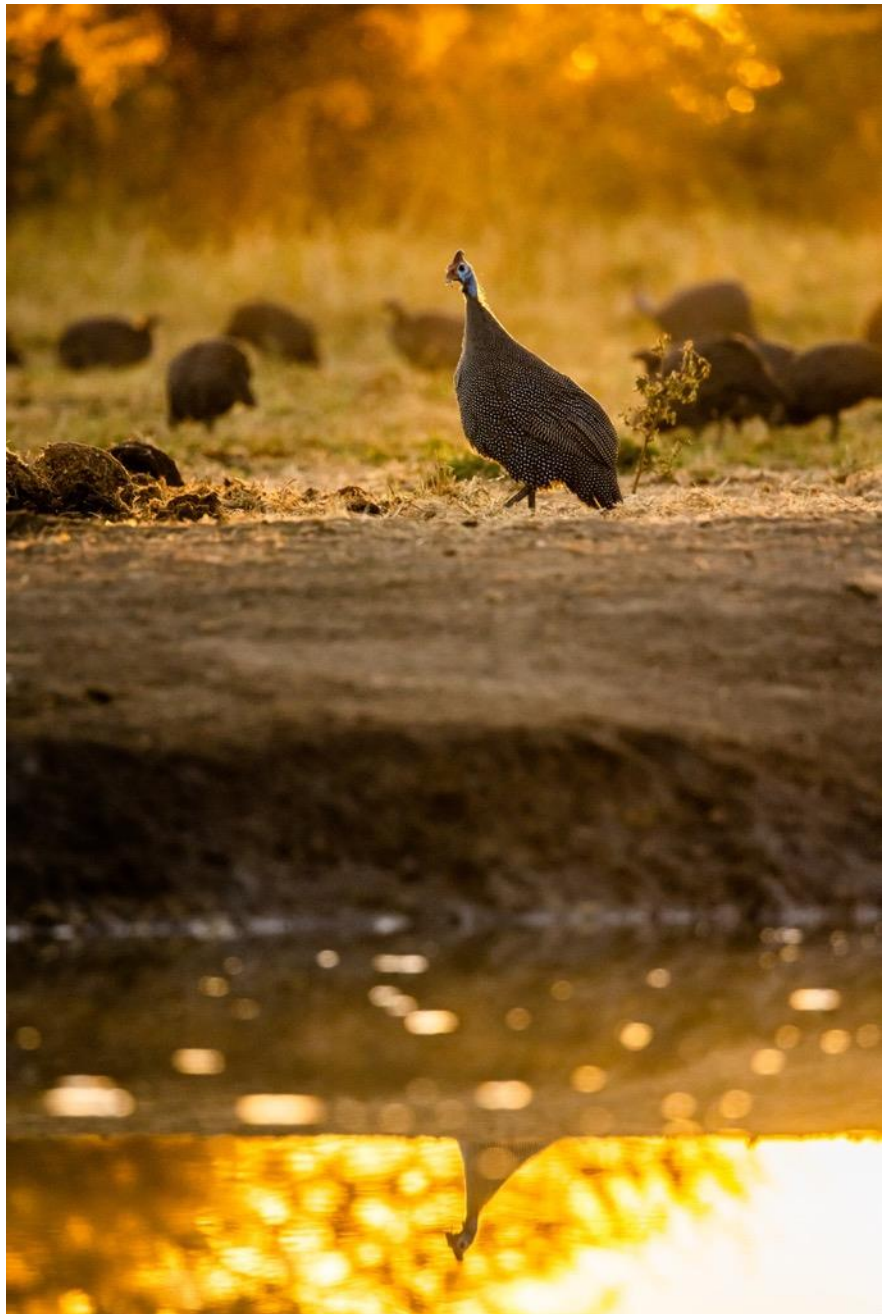
You'd also want a long lens – preferably over 400mm, and the use of a tripod, monopod or beanbag. In our photo hide are a couple of excellent bean bags for this purpose.

Focus on the bird's eyes, and if possible look for that “kick” of light that highlights an eye.

Use fast shutter speeds. I don't use anything less than 1/1600s, ideally 1/2000s or faster for a bird in flight. If it is just a still image of a bird perched in a tree you can use a slower shutter speed.

Set your camera to Continuous shooting to increase your chances of capturing the perfect moment, especially in action shots or flight sequences.

Expose correctly for the bird. Often a bird will be surrounded by a vast expanse of bright sky. Your camera in Auto mode will want to even everything out in matrix metering, and you'll end up with a dark underexposed bird and a medium toned sky. Rather expose correctly for the bird, using a setting like centre-weighted metering or spot metering that will blow out the sky by overexposing it, but give you the correct exposure on the bird. Wide apertures like f/2.8, f/4, f/5.6 are great to give a soft background effect.



It all takes a lot of time, patience and practice – and once you know the rules it's fun to break them too!

Spending an afternoon and early evening in the hide is wonderful for that golden hour when the sun is setting behind you, and those soft blues and pinks after it has set.

The photos of the rhinos and zebras on the next page are taken in the late afternoon's golden hour, and I love how the colour intensifies, saturates and glows. The rhino that is drinking is a cow easily recognised as she has an oddly shaped horn. It curves over and down instead of up and back. She needs to drink from deeper water so that the horn doesn't prevent her mouth from reaching the water, and it is probably why we see her so often at this waterhole.

Zebras are very skittish and cautious when drinking (so unlike the hyenas or elephants that just barge in), so it's lovely when they build up the courage to drink side by side.





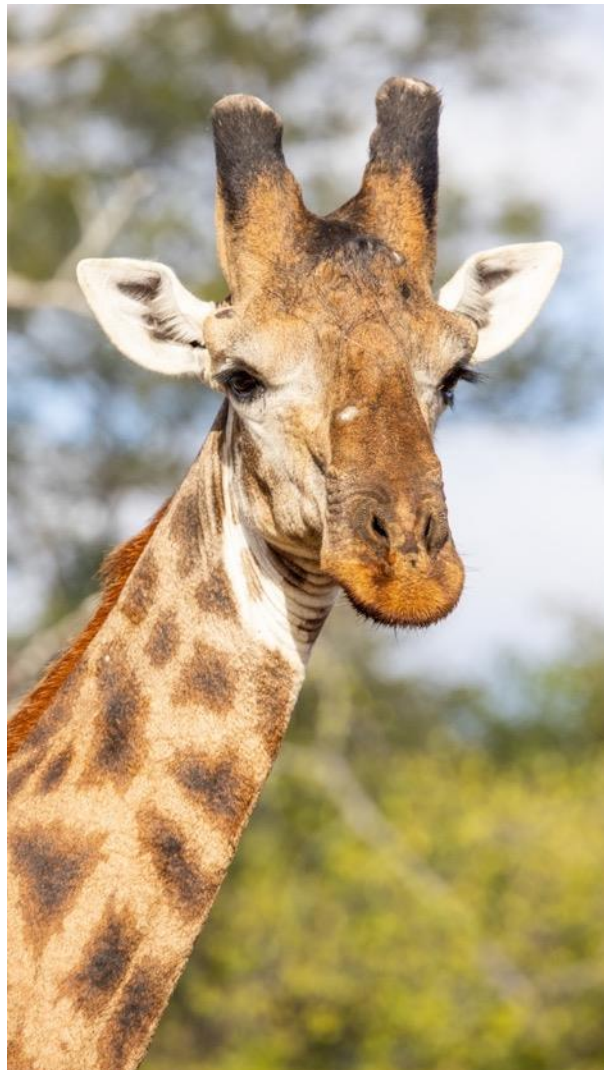
As the sun set and the moon rose, and the palette changed from gold to blue, a family of rhinos crept up to drink directly behind an elephant ankle-deep in the water. The young calf flopped down in exasperation knowing it would be a while before it could suckle. I'm sure the elephant knew very well they were there all along, but when he did turn around he made a big scene of outrage and bluster, and chased them off.

With the light almost gone you have to allow for a long shutter speed, so a bean bag or tripod is necessary to stabilise your camera, and use a high ISO and a wide aperture.

May Gallery



A male klipspringer stands on point – the principal dancer of this rocky stage.



Notice how the nostrils of this male giraffe are slits rather than round openings. Giraffes can close their nostrils in order to protect the sensitive skin from irritants such as dust, thorns and ants.

One of the many drawcards of Singita Pamushana & Malilangwe House is the opportunity to explore the Malilangwe Dam on a sunset cruise, or drop a line in the water to see what bites... Either way it is so relaxing and beautiful to admire the landscape - currently looking like a patchwork quilt with bright pops of yellow courtesy of the autumn leaves, scan the shoreline for animals, and study the rippling reflections.



Fishing is a team sport, thanks to the expertise of Alex and Alfred. Here a guest lands a large bream before releasing it back into the water.



Nicholas and Robert share a laugh while cruising back aboard the luxury cruise boat, at sunset.



Two enormous crocodiles, their breadth billowing out beneath them, catch the last rays of warmth. Harmony reigns as zebras and an elephant wade into the water for a drink.







Two bull elephants, one with shades of green around his face from feeding, and the other with shades of copper from dust bathing, calmly share a drink.

Far less calm was this elephant bull that turned around in the track and belligerently marched towards where we had respectfully stopped. Having seen only part of his rear end before, we could now see he was in full musth – temporal gland streaming and a continuous flow of pungent smelling urine. At this stage it was best to sit in absolute silence, not even a click of a camera, and see what he would do. He walked right up to the vehicle, pretended to feed to the left, then towered over the bonnet and... threw a trunkful of red powder dust all over himself!



A juvenile oxpecker changes perch from a buffalo calf to its mother.
Two baboons, still in “bed”, bask in the early morning sunshine.

