

Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL
SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE
For the month of July, Two Thousand and Twenty Two

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.6°C (56.4°F)
Minimum recorded: 09.9°C (49.8°F)
Average maximum: 26.4°C (79.5°F)
Maximum recorded: 30.2°C (86.3°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 1 mm
*For the year to date: 549 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:26
Sunset: 17:34

July is an excellent time for safaris here at Singita Pamushana, and the lodge has been wonderfully busy. There've been a few cold days, and a spot of rain, so our climate certainly seems to have shifted somewhat. A very interesting scientific paper was published recently – it states that as African wild dogs like to breed at the coolest time of the year, climate change has shifted the average timing of birth by 22 days in just 30 years. That is a frighteningly dramatic change for this endangered species, with many ramifications. Here on the Malilangwe Reserve we saw our wild dog litter leave their den-site on 13 July.

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for July:

Lions

- **Nduna Pride:** This growing pride had a feast on a buffalo bull they killed, south of 07 Camp. One of the lionesses is coming into oestrous. The young sub-adults have been very playful climbing trees and play fighting.
- **River Pride:** A mating pair has also been seen within this pride. The pride have spent much of their time in the inaccessible swamp area, and also fed off a buffalo carcass for a couple of days.
- **Southern Pride:** This pride has been viewed the most during July. Their usual stronghold is around Chiloveka Dam, but that is currently as dry as a bone, so they have pushed north and have been spending their time in the Mahande area, Hwata Pan, and even up to Banyini. They have one cub who laps up all the attention it can get!

Leopards

- Most of the sightings have been fleeting, but during a cruise on the peaceful waters of Malilangwe Dam a male leopard was seen just below Malilangwe House as it came down for a drink, before heading west towards Crocodile Creek. This was most likely the same male seen the next day at Sosigi Dam, in the story that follows later in this journal.

Hyenas

- Hyena sightings are so less frequent than they used to be in the central areas. That is possibly one of the reasons the wild dogs chose to den in the central regions. That said, most of the hyena sightings have been of individuals following the hunting wild dogs, or out patrolling the roads in the early hours.

Elephants

- There have been some great sightings of bulls, particularly one huge tusker west of Banyini. These bulls are starting to target a wider variety of vegetation in an attempt to get all the nutrition they need in these dry months.
- The breeding herd sightings with their little ones are as delightful as ever, and most of these have been north of Ray's Drift in the Chiredzi River region.

Rhinos

- **White:** White rhinos are seen numbering into the twenties if one is to spend several hours at a favoured waterhole. It is a spectacle hard to believe. The star trail image at the end of this journal tells the story. However, the most interesting white rhino sighting this month was when 11 were seen together - ten bulls and one cow, with the males all fighting for an opportunity to mate with the female that was in oestrus.
- **Black:** Black rhino viewing involves quite a lot of luck, and being in the right place at the right time. The alternative is to track them on foot. Guests have had good sightings this month, such as the cow and calf coming for a drink at a pan; the bull marking his territory; and, seen on foot, the mother and calf sleeping in the mopani shrub – they were watched undetected for about 10 minutes before the wind direction changed.

Buffalos

- There are huge herds amassing at the waterholes, sometimes in excess of 700 buffalos. The sheer number, clouds of dust and bellowing are awesome to witness.

Wild dogs

- Pups were seen! At least five white-tipped little tails, but only a distant visual through binoculars. We hope to get a better idea of the new litter now that they are running with the pack.

- Wild dog sightings for the first weeks of July were prolific as they hunted at dawn and dusk in the central areas near the lodge, in order to feed the pups back at the den.

Plains game

- Lichtenstein hartebeest, eland and sable have been seen regularly, due to the limited water supply at this time of year.
- There seems to have been a giraffe baby boom, with many youngsters staggering about on stilts.
- An interesting sighting was watching kudu, nyala and impalas feeding together under umbrella thorn trees with baboons feeding in the tree tops. As the baboons were feeding they were knocking down some of the nutritious pods which the plains game were eagerly eating.

Unusual sightings

- A small python, about one metre long, was seen. Our guests loved looking at its beautiful markings.

Birds

- A highlight was seeing an osprey at Sosigi Dam, as well as a marabou stork, knob-billed ducks and white-faced whistling ducks. Scarlet-chested sunbirds can be seen feeding on nectar from the aloes that are in flower, best seen on the side of hills during a boat cruise.

Fishing

- Winter is not the best time for fishing, that said a few bream and tigerfish have been landed.

Water safari

- Our water safari sunset cruises are so popular with our guests that we've acquired another boat – a sleek and luxurious Watermark pontoon.

Bush walks

- Now is the best season for doing a bush walk, with the vegetation dry and starting to be grazed low. Guests, led by their very experienced guides, have even done walks specifically tracking lions, rhinos and elephants. The ideal goal of these is to observe the animal undetected, and then leave without it knowing you were there.

Rock art

- Having incredible rock art on the property adds another dimension to safaris at Singita Pamushana. Our guests this month have been fascinated with the rock art, especially those for whom this was the last stop on their African safaris, and they'd seen all the animals on their wishlists.

Photographic hide

- Our eye-level-with-the-water hide has been very popular this month, with animals and guests alike! It's the best place to view white rhinos, and the Southern Pride of lions has been drinking from this pan too. It can be quite an overwhelming experience when it's so busy with animals.

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

- Visitors have been shown how to make fire, forge iron, pound sorghum, weave baskets, do beading, use a bow and arrow, divine water and more!

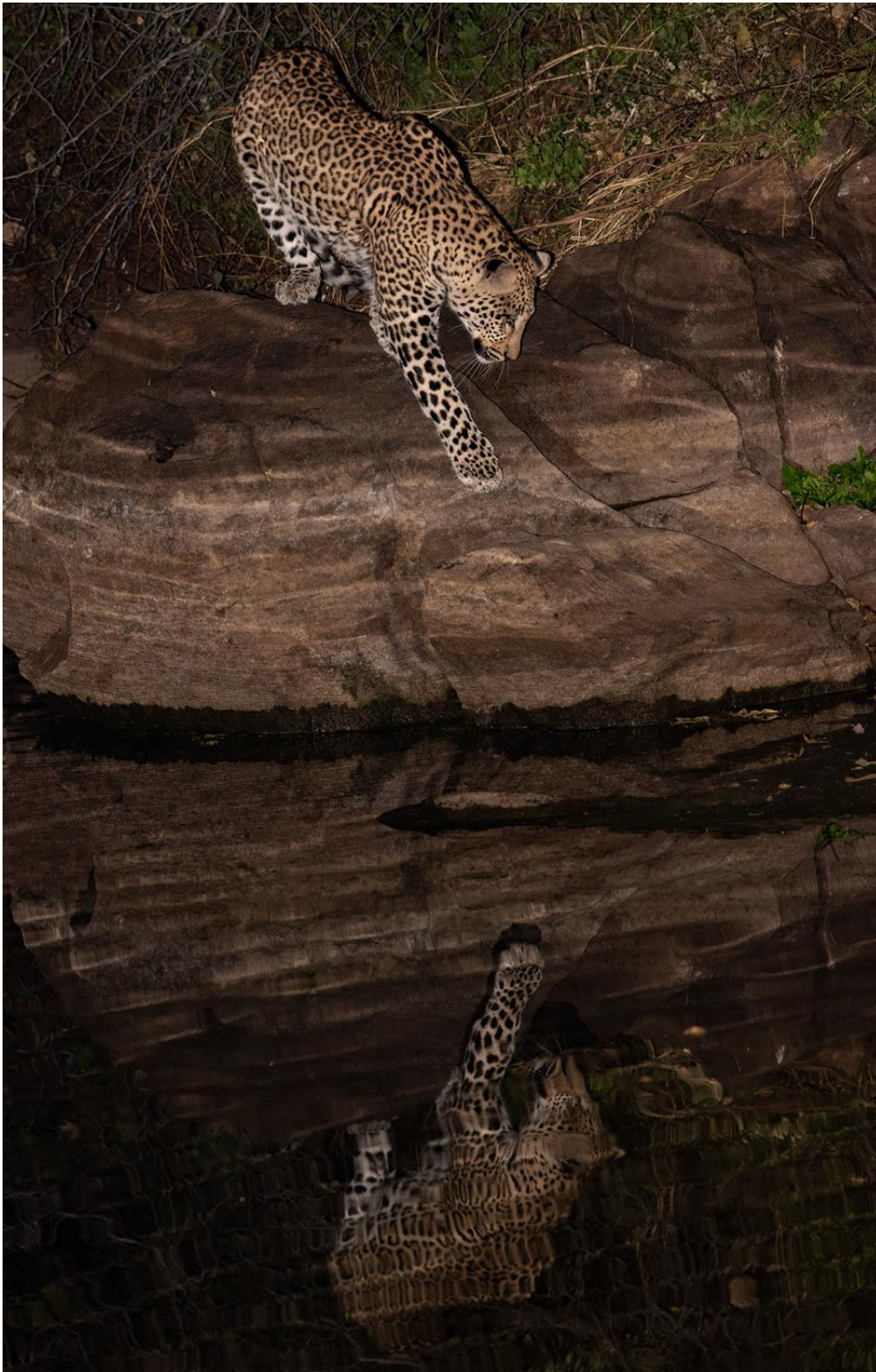
Some Bush Stories follow, as well as a July Gallery of images.

Catfishing

Leopard viewing at Singita Pamushana is not infrequent, but it's more often a quick glimpse of a secretive cat after dark, that's out hunting. The way leopard viewing normally is. If you're very lucky the leopard might have

a kill stashed in a tree, giving you the chance of seeing the elusive predator in the same tree for a day or two.

Very early one morning in July I caught a leopard in my spotlight, at the edge of Sosigi Dam. In typical style he crawled away into dense mopane bush cover and our fleeting affair was over. But that evening I went back to the area and sat at the water's edge waiting for him. A romantic sunset came and went and needless to say I'd been stood up. I packed up all my photographic kit and started driving back to the lodge, in the pitch dark, half-heartedly swiping my spotlight back and forth across the landscape. After a few hundred metres two eyes shone back green and I knew I'd found my man. I'll save that part of the story for another journal, because getting to know and trust one another was quite the story in itself.





After an hour or so we found ourselves back at Sosigi Dam and he disappeared along the shoreline and behind a small set of rocks that jut into the water. I couldn't follow but drove along the bridge, turned around on the other side and drove back halfway on the bridge to see if I could spot him again. I cannot tell you how my heart soared and thumped when he nonchalantly strolled over the rocks and then flopped down on top of one with his huge paws dangling down in front of him.

By this stage I had managed to reassemble all my camera gear and flash set-up in the inky darkness, my fingers flying over the knobs and buttons as though I were speed-reading braille. I was alone as I'd been on a scouting drive, so there was no one to hold a spotlight or assist me. My eyes filled with tears of gratitude when I hit the playback button to check focus, exposure and flash reach.

He lay there for ages, watching the water, and every now and again getting up and scuttling about between the smaller rocks. I think he was searching for little crabs or anything edible between the rocks, but I'm sure his main idea was catfishing. There are many catfish in this dam, and they are active at all hours of the day and night and some tend to feed in the shallows in the evening. He is a young male leopard who hasn't quite refined his hunting techniques yet, and I think he was hoping to swish out a catfish with his paws as it swam past. Alas, fish was not on the menu that night, and, as we all know, fishing takes a lot of patience. After about half an hour with no luck he decided to pursue other interests and we parted ways as he went off hunting.

This male leopard is impossibly handsome. He has perfect nick-free ears, no scars on his face, a pink nose, 1:1 spot pattern on his topline of his whiskers, and let me mention those big perfect paws once more. He may not have had much luck catfishing that evening, but he certainly caught my heart hook, line and sinker.

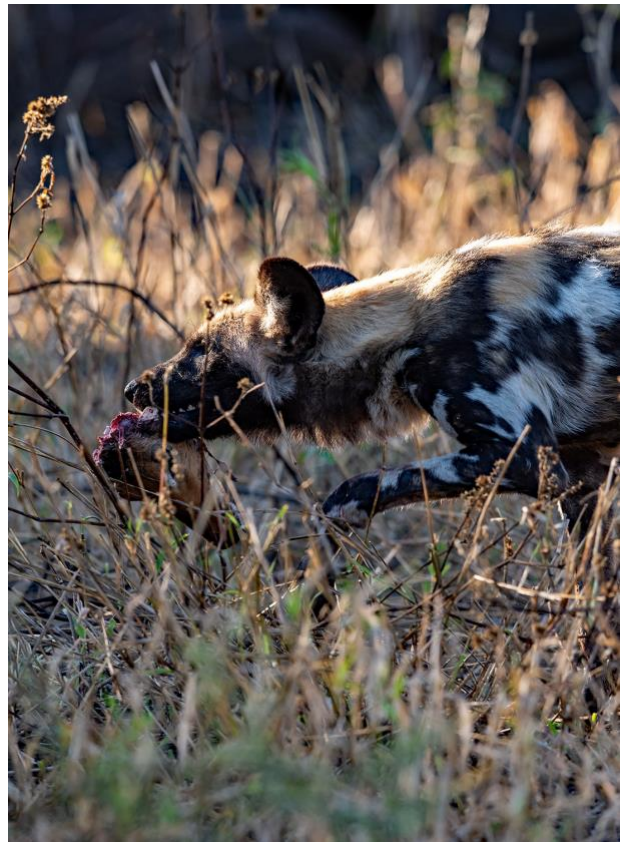
Teamwork



Like a pack of wild dogs that have shotgunned out hunting, we guides do the same on our drives, in that we disperse in different directions, heading out to hotspot areas, and calling each other over the radio to share any sightings that the others would like to see too.

This morning we headed out before everyone else, and it was my hope that if we didn't find the wild dogs out hunting, then the other guiding stations would. As it turned out it was actually someone from the environment team that spotted the wild dogs on the airstrip and called them in, as they were passing by.

We raced flat out to the airstrip, but I've seen this movie many times before – the one where someone spots wild dogs, can't stay with them, and by the time you get there they've gone... Minutes later we were at the airstrip where we found a pilot doing a check of his aircraft, and another member of the environment team. Neither had heard the update on our guiding channel or seen the dogs. "Same movie, same rubbish ending," is something along the lines of what I was



thinking. But then there was action at the far end of the airstrip, with impalas flying across the open land and the chase was on. The sequel had been released, and it was much better than the original! By this time quite a few guiding stations were in the area and by covering our bases we could report which direction the dogs were running in or where they were resting. Then the almost inaudible sound came of a wild dog hooting call, and

the rest of the resting pack raced to the scene, as did we, of where an impala had been killed.

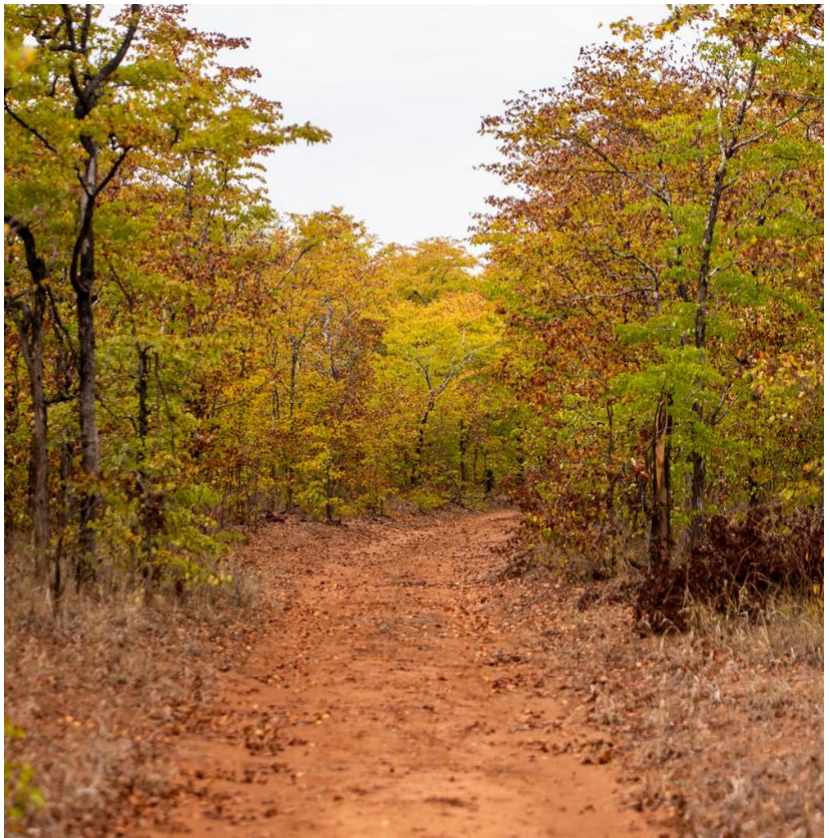
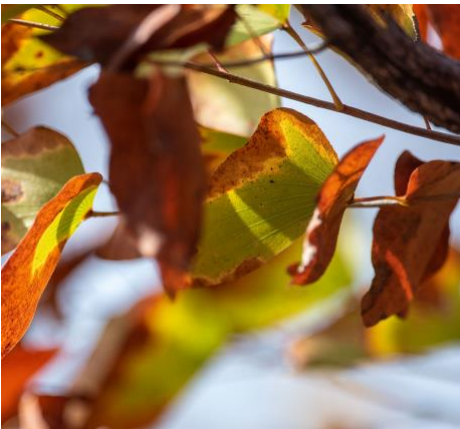
The pack fed quickly, with all our Singita guests getting a front row seat at the scene, thanks to the teamwork of everyone involved.

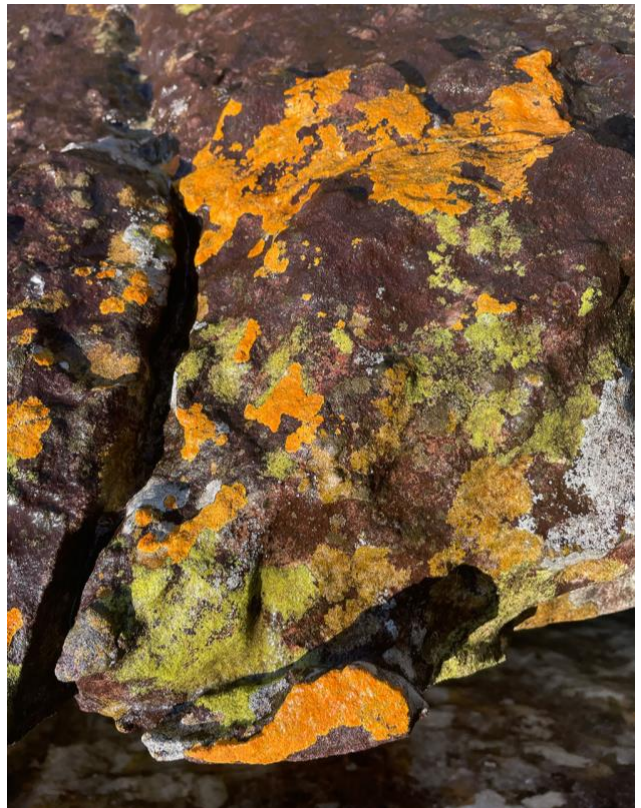
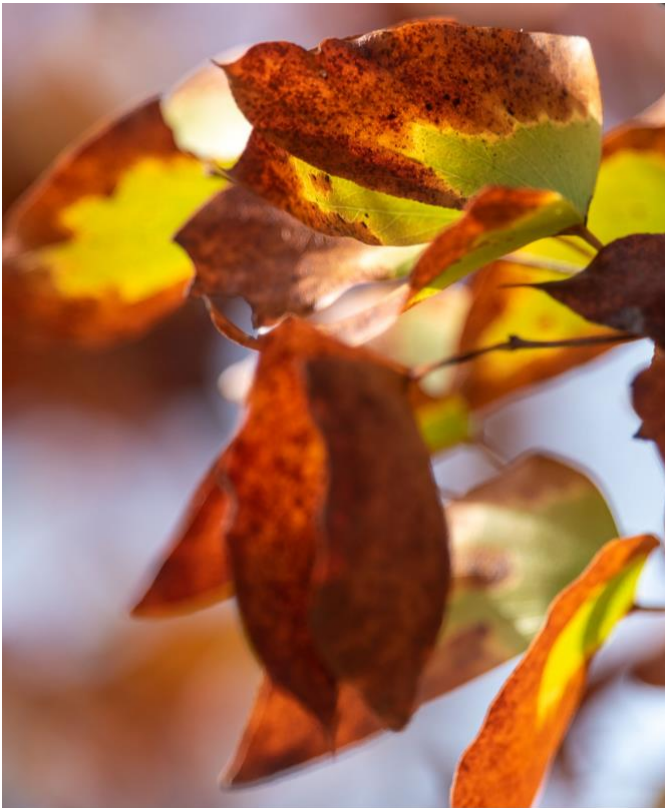
Once all the meat was gulped down the dogs would make off with bones, the skull seeming to be a sought after prize. It was wonderful to witness behaviour endearingly reminiscent of pet dogs back at home who are good-naturedly not willing to give up a bone – or a frisbee in the case of my border collie!



July palette

Gold, bronze, copper, jade, ivory and onyx lie scattered in every direction this month. The landscape is dripping in jewels and precious metals – the effect is simply dazzling.





Baboon matters

This was a peaceful scene... Five o'clock in the afternoon, and a large troop of baboons made their way down from the riverbanks to drink at this shallow croc-free edge of the river. Then a female ambled over to where



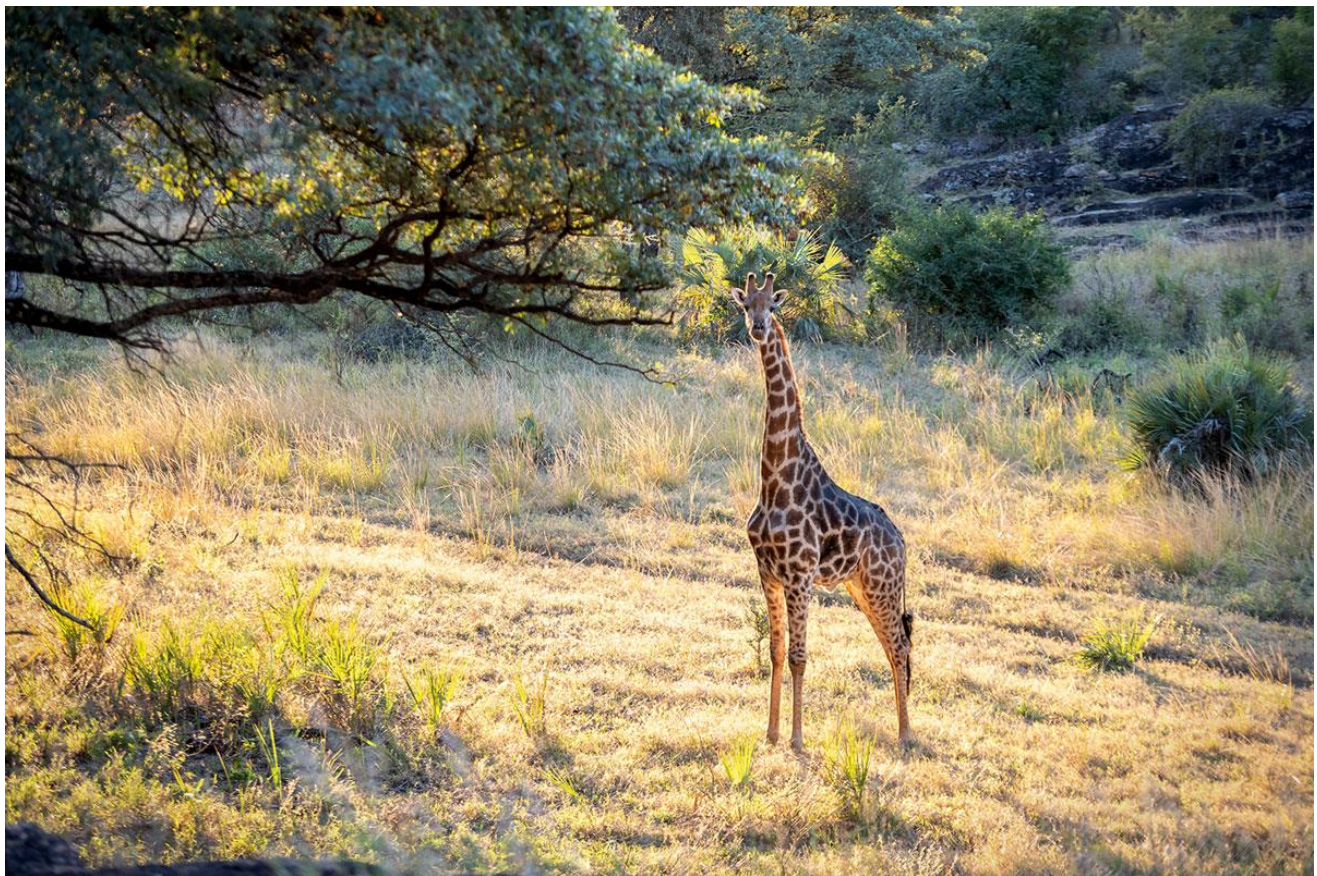
another female and infant drank, grabbed her and yanked her away from the baby. I have no idea the politics behind the situation, and it resolved quite quickly, but I do admire the exclamation mark tails of the infant and sub-adult!



Tall orders

There's a giraffe baby boom at the moment, and their long-legged lankiness is just too cute. We are all swapping stories of where we saw the latest arrivals, but I found these two out on a limb, with only a fork-tailed drongo as chaperone. Way down the track, out of sight (from my lowly perspective) were some adults, so perhaps alone time is all part of giraffes growing up.

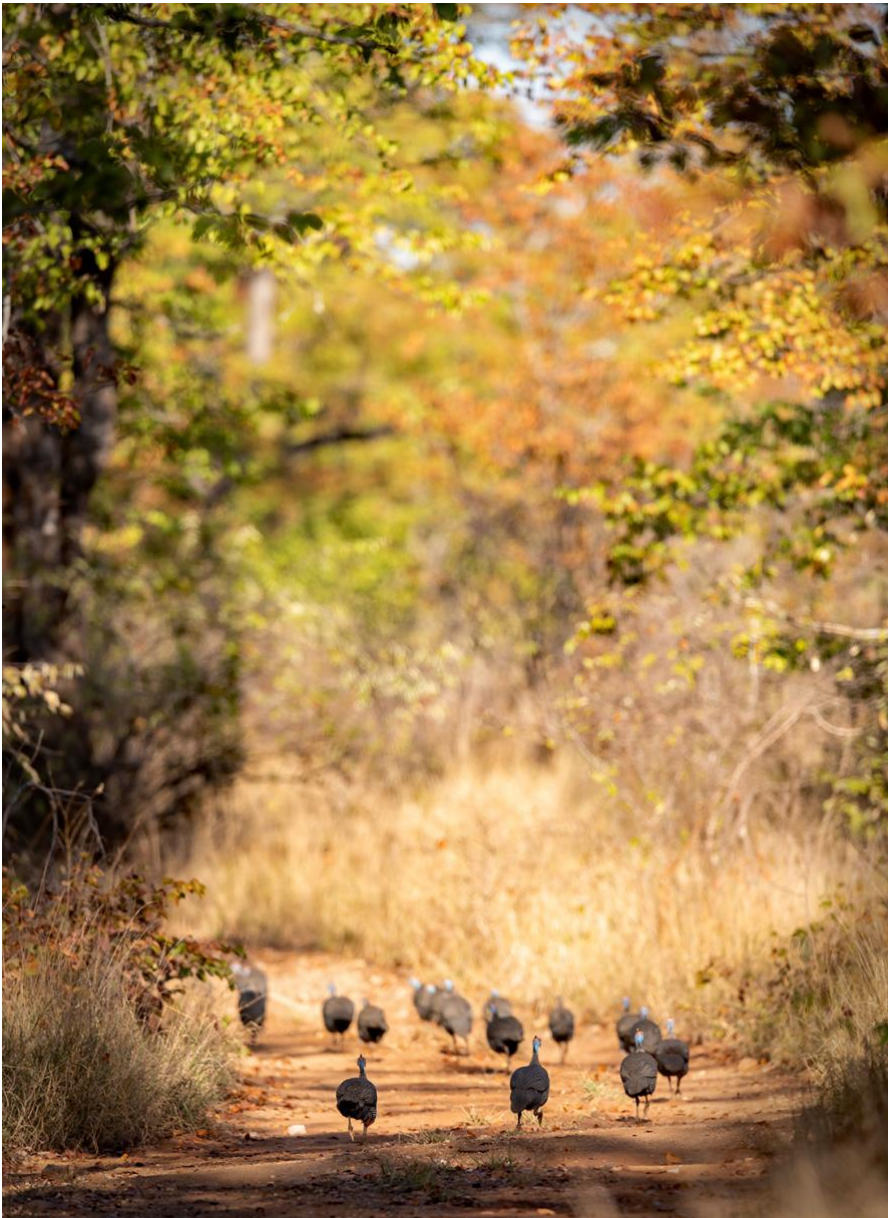
On another occasion we climbed up a rocky outcrop and found this statuesque bull in a dell of light below. It makes a change to photograph down on a giraffe for once.



Twitter



This photo of an African hoopoe (*Upupa africana*) is pretty ordinary, and I nearly decided not to include it, but then I realised just how brilliant their camouflage is. On the few occasions I've photographed them they are always in the road, probing the soil for insects with their long beaks, and always in this 'impossible' contrasted dark/bright light. Their biggest threat are hawks and eagles which hunt them from above, so it makes perfect sense for hoopoes, with their cinnamon coloured plumage broken up with dark/bright bands of black and cream to search for food in these dappled light spots, where they are best overlooked.



Helmeted guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*) have the worst road sense there is. It just does not occur to them to move off left or right, but they are the best kind of traffic to get stuck behind.

July Gallery



People play that game of, “What I wish to come back as.” Often the answer is something big and strong like an elephant. But, without a doubt, I would like to come back as a dassie at Singita Pamushana. They amble about nibbling on this and that, then chill out at the pool or on the rocks sunbathing. Their eyes are even adapted serving as built-in sunglasses. And elephants are their relatives so they could probably call on them if needed.



The lions’ coats perfectly match the colour of this long shaggy grass at the moment, and they are completely concealed in it. You really need to have your eyes on stalks to spot them.

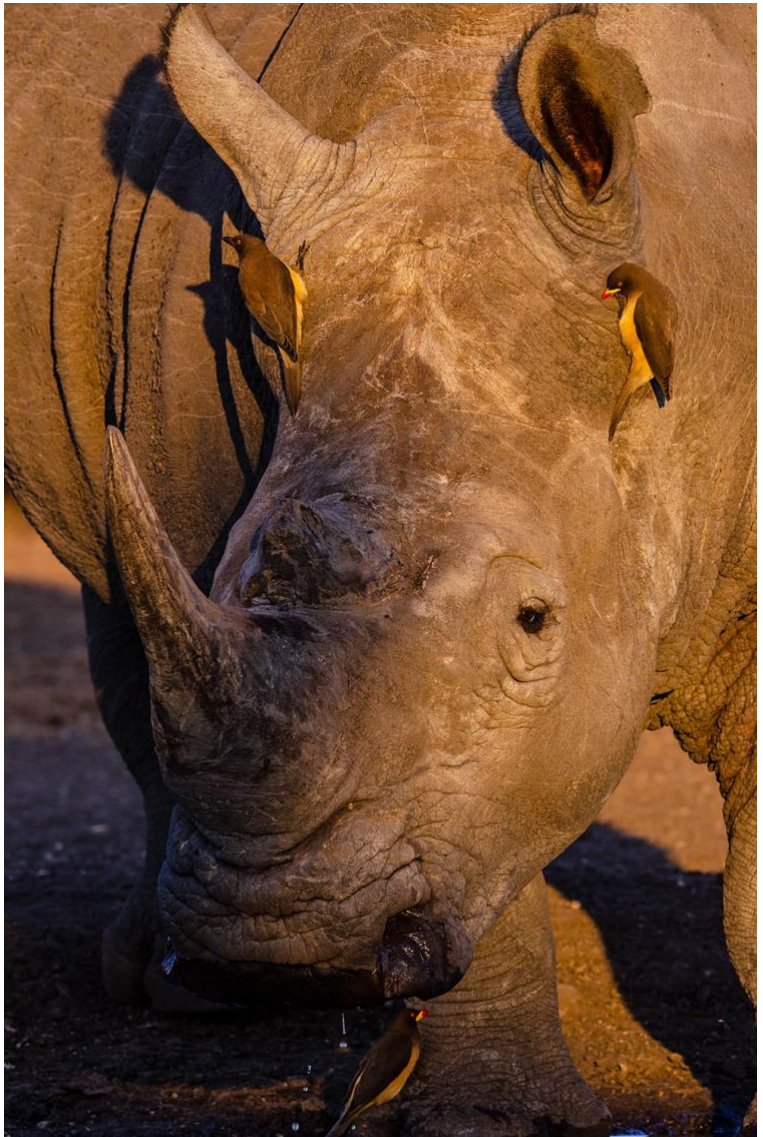


The hustle and bustle as buffaloes jostle for position at a waterhole.



A white rhino with a very insistent
bevy of spa therapists.

The beguiling smile of a crocodile.

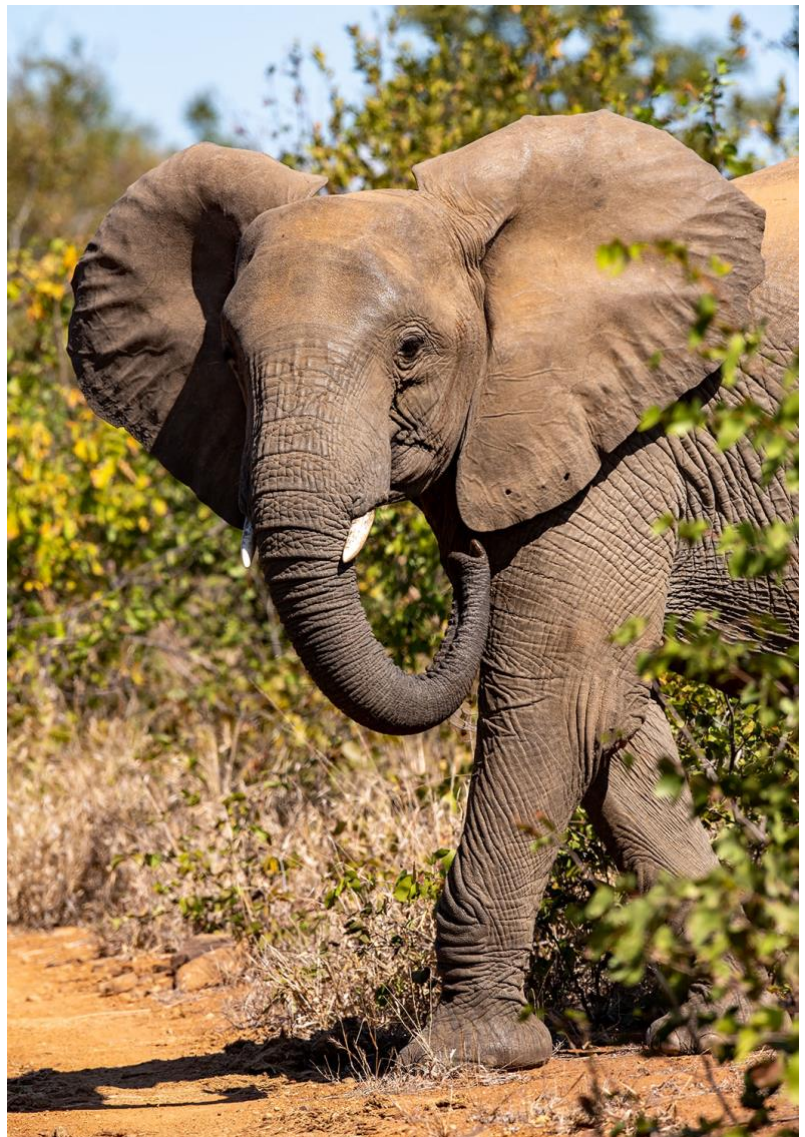


Caper white butterflies (male left, female right) feeding from a *Kleinia* species. The female has had a bite taken out of her wing, probably by a lizard.



Below: An encircled trunk holding stripped mopane leaves.

Right: An elephant in Gonarezhou National Park forms a perfect heart shape with its ears and trunk.





Star trails, 'southern lights' of after sunset clouds and the magic of more than 11 white rhinos at a waterhole.