

Singita



Photo by Sarah Ball

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

Temperature

Average minimum:	22.6°C (72.6°F)
Minimum recorded:	19.3°C (66.7°F)
Average maximum:	31.7°C (89.0°F)
Maximum recorded:	39.7°C (103.4°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month:	254.0 mm
For the year to date:	254.0 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise:	05:37
Sunset:	18:38

Our rain dances have received thunderous applause, and still it continues to pour! The dams have burst their banks, the roads have turned to rivers, and even the crocodiles are finding it a little too wet at the moment! (More on that in the overview.) It's the time of dung beetle battles, fungi extravaganzas, *Gloriosa superbas* and avian check-ins. We are so looking forward to guest check-ins in the near future, but in the meantime here's a glimpse of what's been going on...

Here is a snapshot of January's sightings:

Lions:

- The Nduna Pride has been very active around the Logaan area. One of the males is occasionally making appearances at Nduna Dam, possibly with the rest of the pride nearby.
- The River Pride has been hunting between Ray's Drift and Banyini. We are thrilled to report that they were seen with one very young cub, on the Binya Road, in the last week of January.

Rhinos:

- White rhino sightings are prevalent on the verges of the Orphan Road when traveling from O2. They are also seen regularly on eastern and western sides of Banyini Pan.
- Black rhinos have been seen around the airstrip and on the Orphan Road to Nduna. The bush is really thick at the moment and it forms a very effective invisibility cloak around the more reclusive animals.

Elephants:

- There is a healthy population of bull elephants frequenting the middle part of the property from south of Banyini all the way to Mahande Drainage and from the Chiredzi River to Malevula Hill.
- Breeding herds of elephants are frequenting the Sosigi Hill side of the Chiredzi River and moving with their little ones in tow through Manyuchi to the north around Nyamasikana Pan.

Buffalo:

- Two large herds of buffalo are grazing on the lush grasses on the verges of the Binya Road around Chikokovela and Chiloveka areas. The cows are rotund with nourishment and pregnancy.
- The cantankerous old dagga boys are holding court at our HQ centre.

Wild dogs:

- The pack of wild dogs was seen mid-month on the central open areas. There is a healthy population of baby wildebeest there which make for easy hunting. The plains game on Banyini is always an attraction for the wild dogs and they never miss an opportunity to scout around there before travelling north.

Cheetah:

- The cheetah brothers were seen in the south, on the Gonarezhou side of our boundary.

Leopards:

- Leopards are lying low but there was a small female seen on Old Access Road recently. We see leopard tracks everywhere, so they are very active but not so keen on being seen amid the sea of grass.

Plains game:

- The plains game is absolutely fantastic now - because the bush is so waterlogged most plains game species are frequenting the roads as the ground is dryer and more compacted.

Unusual sightings:

The most unusual sighting from the area, but not on the property, was of a huge crocodile that showed up at the men's ward of the hospital in our closest town of Chiredzi. It arrived with no mask, no use of the hand sanitisers and was not respectful of social distancing protocols. It was denied admission and relocated to a more suitable wildlife environment. But it doesn't stop there; a lion was tracked by game scouts to the hill at the back of Triangle town, which is the second closest town to us. It seems the predators are not enjoying the rainy deluge as much as the plains game, and are seeking out drier land and safety!

It doesn't rain, it pours – and makes you appreciate more

Story by Brad Fouché

Trying to write a story on the best sighting or experience for the month of January has been more than challenging as it has just been such an epic month for many reasons. The first being the bumper rainy season we have had and the fact that all the bodies of water on Malilangwe have spilt over this season. The main water body being Malilangwe Dam, last spilt over the dam wall in 2017. There has been so much surface and river water around that driving to work is an adventure to say the least!



All in a day's work...

Photos by Brad Fouché

Secondly, it's the season of birthing for many species and it's such a privilege to see the nurseries of baby impala and all the little wildebeest running around. It is definitely a smorgasbord for predators! This is also the season for the majority of the migrating birds arriving in our neck of the woods, indirectly brought on by what



Photo by Mark Saunders

we know as the ITCZ (The Intertropical Convergence Zone) that moves down through southern Africa and, in turn, sets off the flight of the winged breeding pairs of termites. The termite bounty is the attraction for many of the migrating birds besides the warm weather for breeding.

In fact the reasons are endless! It's an extraordinary time of year from spotting the red velvet mites that emerge after the first rainfall to the many species of wild lilies flowering in the bush. From seeing how clean elephants look and how white their ivory is after a downpour, to how pitiful a drenched male lion looks like in a downpour. The first smell of rain on a dusty road and the relief on all living creatures faces when that first drizzle falls on them. Its blue-black skies and neon light on the green lush bush. It's a time of year when Mother Nature shows you her true power!

I had an amazing time watching dung beetles excavate a bolus of elephant dung. (Researchers in Kenya once counted 16 000 dung beetles, in two hours, in one pile of elephant droppings; anyway, I digress.) What was fascinating was watching this one huge dung beetle that had his female and had already started rolling his ball away from the dung pile to go and bury it. Almost immediately he was challenged by another male and the ferocious fight that ensued was just unreal. I am glad to report that no beetle was injured and our dung beetle managed to fend off his attacker.

As you can see there is so much more to our wild planet than just the big creatures that we encounter. Make no mistake we love them just as much, but sometimes you have to just look up... or down to the ground.

As I write this, I am already looking forward to the African buffalos' calving season, which will be upon us soon.



Photo by Jenny Hishin

The latticed stinkhorn

Article by Jenny Hishin, photo by Josh Saunders

Josh Saunders, one of the young residents at Malilangwe, photographed this remarkable fungus. Scientifically it is known as *Clathrus ruber*, and commonly referred to as a latticed stinkhorn, basket stinkhorn, or red cage fungus because of the fruit bodies that are shaped like oval hollow spheres with latticed branches.

The fruit body can reach heights of up to 20 cm (7.9 in). The colour can range from pink to orange to red, due to the carotenoid pigments lycopene and beta-carotene. The colour also appears to be dependent upon the temperature and humidity of the environment. The fruit body bursts the egg open as it expands, a process that can take as little as a few hours. The egg releases the spores.



The unusual shape of the receptacle has inspired some creative comparisons: the German Mycological Society—who named *C. ruber* the 2011 "Mushroom of the Year" - described it as, "like an alien from a science fiction horror film". Imagine the fright that the 19th century Italian botanist Ciro Pollini got when he discovered one growing on a human skull in a tomb in a deserted church!

The fungus is saprobic, feeding off decaying woody plant material. It has a fetid odour, somewhat like rotting meat, which attracts flies and other insects, even dung beetles, to help disperse its spores. The inner surface is coated with a dark substance known as gleba that is partly responsible for the odour. Like other stinkhorn fungi, *C. ruber* bioaccumulates the element manganese. It has been postulated that this element plays a role in the enzymatic breakdown of the gleba with simultaneous formation of odorous compounds.

We are fortunate to be able to call on Dr Cathy Sharp, a renowned mycologist living in Zimbabwe who has been studying mushrooms for most of her life, and she asked us to press this beautiful specimen for her. Now this is a trickier task than it seems when you consider that in 1862 Mordecai Cubitt Cooke wrote, "it is recorded of a botanist who gathered one for the purpose of drying it for his herbarium, that he was compelled by the stench to rise during the night and cast the offender out the window."

The latticed stinkhorn is generally listed as inedible or poisonous in many mushroom publications, but the smell alone should be enough of a warning to any person or animal considering eating it.

To follow a honeyguide – myth or marvel?

Story by Alex Kadziyanike, photo by Brian Rode

In most cultures, including the African culture, there are a lot of beliefs and myths some people follow. Some can be true and some folklore. Growing up I was taught a lot things, including some skills that inspired me to be who I am today, but I didn't understand why my grandfather would spend almost half a day in the bush looking and following a chattering small bird which he believed would lead him to a beehive.



A greater honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*) is a very important bird in most African cultures whereby one is not allowed to kill it because of its skill to locate beehives. Honey is a very good alternative to sugar and has been used in our everyday diet because of its healthy nutrition values. It is believed, when one sees a honeyguide and follows it, that it will lead you to a beehive, but on the condition that when you harvest the honey you must leave some for the bird to consume as way of saying thank you. If you became greedy and don't leave some, next time you follow it it'll lead you to dangerous creatures!

One day, out of curiosity, I wanted to find out whether it was true or just a myth that honeyguides can lead you to beehives. My young friend and I decided to follow one of the birds that we used to see within the vicinity of our village, as the birds are believed to know the locality of most hives. As if the bird knew that we were going to follow it, it came flying above us and greeted us with a chattering song. Now that we had located it or it had located us, our next worry and question was, did its last symbionts thank the bird after harvesting the honey or were we going to be victims led to dangerous creatures...

We decided to embark on our mission anyway and see what the outcome would be - that is if we survived to tell the story. I think the bird's patience was running out as it started initiating the guiding by chattering fervently while perched to attract our attention. As we started following it would fly to another perch, so we kept on following, but, interestingly, when we stopped the bird would come back and try to engage with us. We walked and followed the honeyguide for about two hours. We went through gullies, crossed streams, climbed kopjes until the bird stopped and subtly changed its behaviour and call - and we knew we had arrived at something. The bird didn't show us anything so we had to look around ourselves. We heard some bees buzzing and we checked around nearby trees, being cautious. We noticed that one of the big msasa trees (*Brachystegia spiciformis*) a few metres above us had bees going in and out of a hole. We looked at each other with astonishment and knew our mission was accomplished. The honeyguide was still chit-chatting above us and flying from branch to branch of the same tree, and we knew it was waiting for its share.

The hive was located in a tree cavity which required us to climb the tree. Harvesting and collecting honey can be dangerous because of bee stings so we had to make a fire and use the smoke to make the bees docile and less active. With the axes we had, we opened the hive in such a way that it could be used again, collected the honey and payed our dues to the honeyguide by leaving some as a way of saying thank you, and so that we didn't befall the misfortune of being led to dangerous creatures next time we followed it.

I am still careful even now when collecting honey to leave some for the bird. For me the greater honeyguide story is not a myth, it is a true life experience.

Hamerkop – The King of Frogs

An African fable as told by Wilson Macheke , Singita Paumushana Maintenance Supervisor

Many moons ago the frog society had no ruler and needed a king to settle disputes and enforce frog law. They felt they were not recognised as a community and wanted this to change.

The frog nation gathered and started to pray to the Creator asking him for a king. The Creator answered their prayers and gave them water as a king. But water remained silent and did not help them.

Again they prayed and requested a king for the second time. The Creator gave them a floating log. But that too remained silent. This did not bode well with the frog nation so they all jumped in the water, swam across to the floating log, hopped onto it and started to croak, chirp and bellow their protest in the most deafening way ever heard!

The Creator then sent them the Hamerkop – a big brown bird with a head shaped like a hammer - to rule over them. The frog nation was delighted, as they all knew the voice of the Hamerkop.



King Hamerkop would visit all the different water sources in the wilderness during daylight hours. But, as the frogs came out of the water to debate his decisions and discuss future plans for their nation, he would gobble them up!

Since then frogs never come out of the water to protest and pray in the day. They wait until nightfall when King Hamerkop is in bed with his family... Listen carefully during the dark hours and you'll hear their prayers being sung, yet again, to the Creator.

Photo by Josh Saunders

We have migratory birds that arrive from a few countries away to birds that have arrived from as far away as Russia. In the last week of January I witnessed the arrival of the European rollers for the first time since last season. I saw blue-cheeked bee-eaters at then too. An exciting sighting was of a black egret that we saw when out on the boat – it's rarely seen in these parts.



Top left: Lilac-breasted roller
By Josh Saunders.

Top right: Marabou stork
By Sarah Ball.

Middle right: Three-banded
Plover
By Sarah Ball.

Bottom right: Green-backed
Heron
By Sarah Ball.



January Gallery



Don't you love his expression? It's like he's thinking, "You're a real thorn in my side." As it turned out there really was a thorn in his side – when he got up and walked off it became apparent he'd been lying on some thorny twigs that were poking his behind! Photo by Sarah Ball



It's the season of these captivating little wildebeest calves.

Photo by Mark Saunders



A rare opportunity to photograph a scrub hare. Photo by Josh Saunders



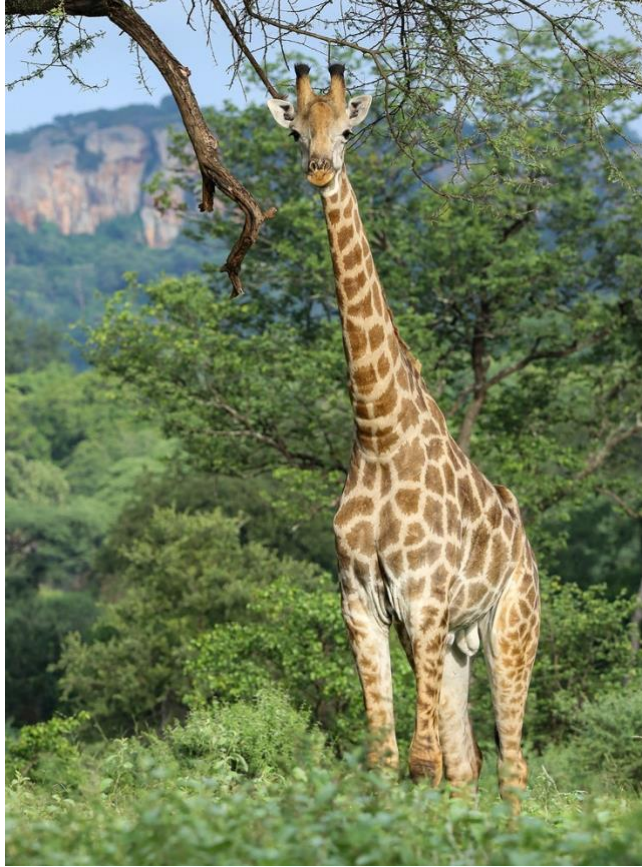
The black-backed jackal pups are doing well, and are such a delight! Photo by Sarah Ball



The pack of wild dogs regroup on the dry clear road between hunting sprees.
The innocence and cautious curiosity of impala lambs is a daily delight.

Photo Mark Saunders
Photo Sarah Ball





The ground covers is as high as a giraffe's knees in many places.

Photo by Sarah Ball



Take a look at that little smudge of fur in the middle!

Photo by Tracey Fouché