

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 18.1°C (64.5°F)
Minimum recorded: 14.2°C (57.5°F)
Average maximum: 32.6°C (90.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 39.4°C (102.9°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 5 mm
Season to date: 5 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:33
Sunset: 17:52

September has given us some toasty days, as well as the first seasonal rain of 5 mm. Before you know it we'll be on the lookout for the first impala lambs of summer.

One of the highlights, for all of us, was hosting guests celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary. As part of the celebrations they had a vow renewal ceremony, while on a sunset boat cruise. Our team had arranged a beautiful setup, and it was all very special and charmingly romantic. (Trying to upstage the event was a huge bull elephant that crossed the river at sunset, as the ceremony took place.)

The sightings have been incredible, it's an especially good time to see wildlife. Several safari drives have reported seeing the 'Big Five' within a couple of hours of departing the lodge, such as this morning drive that revealed: elephants near Meso, two black rhinos at Tsvuvuka Pan, two dagga boys after Lojaan, a sable bull, five lions at Nduna Dam, and a dramatic sighting of a male leopard bolting from Mabhakweni Cave.

Here's an overview of the month's sightings:

Lions

- Multiple sightings of the Nduna Pride (nine lions: three males, five females, one cub).
- Lionesses feeding on a young sable at Makeche.
- Two males feeding on a young buffalo at Kim's Crossing, while eight members of the River Pride lounged nearby.
- Two lionesses attempted an ambush at 02 Pan.
- Other memorable scenes included three males walking in line at Banyini, scanning for prey; a pride blocking thirsty animals at Chiloveka Dam; a lioness feeding three tiny cubs; a pride roaring, echoing across the hills; three males feasting on a zebra carcass.

Leopards

There have been several special sightings:

- A relaxed female, seen repeatedly, resting above Old Hyena Den on West Valley.
- Brief encounter at Kwali Junction as a leopard stalked impala.
- Stunning male at 02 Crossing, revealed by guinea fowl alarm calls, in golden morning light.

African wild dogs

- 19 dogs at Nduna Dam alongside lions and rhinos. The same pack hunting and killing an impala at Simbiri Dam.
- 23 dogs resting under a thorn tree, later bonding, hunting impala, and successfully killing a young male. Dogs confronted a lone spotted hyena, forcing it to retreat. Incredible morning with the same pack at the airstrip: pups playing in elephant dung, multiple hunts, hyena chases, and successful kills of impala.
- Nine dogs (seven adults, two pups) were found resting north of the swamps.

Elephants

- Breeding herds seen at various points, including at Ray's Drift and the swamps.
- Herd of 23 elephants were seen enjoying a mud bath.
- Group of five impressive males, with two notable tuskers were seen.

Buffalos

- Various large herds seen, including a herd of over 300 on Hippo Valley, with evidence of lions attempting a hunt.

Rhinos

- Epic drive with double-figure white rhinos seen across Hwata and Mahande Loop.
- A dramatic clash between a male and female white rhino with a calf.
- Rare sighting of five black rhinos together at Nyari, with courtship behaviour noted.
- A timid black rhino mother and calf eventually drank at Hwata Pan.
- Along Mubangweni, a black rhino charged the vehicle before retreating.

Spotted hyenas

- On a boat cruise, five spotted hyenas were seen on the shoreline, feeding on a giraffe carcass.
- Near Malevula Hills a new active hyena den was found near the road.
- Startling moment observed when a warthog turned on a hyena, ramming it in the face and forcing it to flee!

Brown hyenas

- Rare sighting of a brown hyena in the same vicinity as a male lion, two black rhinos, and a leopard — all within just 2 km².

Plains game

- Abundant plains game, especially at the swamps.
- A herd of 20 sable at Banyini Pan.
- Nine Lichtenstein's hartebeest, including two young calves.
- Several sightings of small antelope such as Sharpe's grysbok, klipspringers and steenbuck.

Unusual sightings

- Found and tracked a massive African rock python, estimated at nearly 4m. Guests were awed by its size and colouration.

Birds

Rich birdlife added to every drive. Diverse and rare sightings included:

- African scops owls, Verreaux's eagle owls, African swamp hens, white-backed night herons, Wahlberg's eagles nest-building, crowned eagles mating, African barred owlets, juvenile palmnut vulture, a black heron, grey herons and white-backed vultures nesting with chicks, greater painted snipe, purple-crested turaco, and racket-tailed rollers.

Photographic hide

- Spectacular wildlife concentration: breeding buffalo herd, multiple white rhinos, elephants, eland, and lions on a buffalo carcass.
- At the pan, elephants bathed, hartebeest with a new calf arrived, and zebra and rhinos surrounded the area.
- Guests experienced close-up encounters, including a young elephant bull playfully spraying muddy water into the blind.
- Dramatic scene when a lion approached the blind, drank and was later chased away by a dominant white rhino bull.

Rock art

- Visits to Chinzwini Rock Art, and other sites, with cultural history explained, a highlight for guests.

Walks

- Guests taken on a walk to Hippo Pools, enjoying close views of 30 hippos, crocodiles, and excellent birdlife.
- A walk revealed lion tracks; guests tracked and briefly saw a lioness before startling a pack of 16 wild dogs.

Boat cruises

- Sightings included buffalo bulls, black rhinos, elephants, warthogs, waterbuck, nyala, giraffes, crocodiles, and numerous hippos.
- Highlights included a leopard on the floodplain; crocodile catching and eating a tilapia; a herd of 20 elephants swimming across the river, framed by hippos.
- Even when mammals on the shoreline aren't seen the sunset cruises offer the most idyllic and unique way to enjoy a safari!

Fishing

- Good catches of tigerfish and tilapia.
- Special moment: a lioness appeared at Nyamasikana River while guests were fishing.

Stargazing

- A group of guests enjoyed a magical stargazing session at the airstrip, lying on rugs and pillows while learning about the night sky.

Gonarezhou National Park

- Epic 13-hour trip with over 200 elephants seen.
- Other sightings: kudu, impala, wildebeest, giraffe, steenbuck, klipspringers, hyrax, buffalo, zebra, mongooses, and hippos.
- Breakfast and lunch enjoyed at Sililijo Loop and Chilojo Cliffs.
- Birding highlights: tawny eagle on a nest, Wahlberg's eagle, multiple bateleurs, four martial eagles (including a juvenile), brown snake eagle, shikra, Dickinson's kestrel, kori bustard, and a southern white-faced owl on a nest.

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

Drama queen

World Rhino Day was celebrated on 22 September, as it is every year. It's a day to encourage the human race to take a moment to reflect on the state of rhino conservation. It's a chance to celebrate achievements, acknowledge setbacks, and renew commitments to the actions still needed. Here on the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve rhino conservation is happening every second of every single day, since the arrival of our founder populations in 1997/8. The result is that currently the population densities of both black and white rhinos is such that we are able to supply and restock rhinos to suitable protected areas in Africa.

Focusing on good news, in August 2025, the latest population estimates for all five rhino species were published, showing a welcome increase for black rhinos in Africa. The species remains under severe threat, but strong signs of recovery in key countries, including Zimbabwe, show that conservation actions are making a real impact.

A black rhino intending to make a real impact was this young, heavily pregnant cow. She spotted our game-viewer vehicle from over a hundred metres away, and made a determined beeline for us. Black rhinos have a reputation for being extremely aggressive, and can charge repeatedly at perceived threats. That said, some of them will remain calm and amble away, while others will immediately turn and run away to avoid confrontation. But this cow was intent on giving us a full intimidating display of her power and glory! She charged three times, each time walking, then running, then thundering towards the vehicle, before slamming on brakes and sending up clods of earth and clouds of dust. Then, seemingly confused that we didn't race away (which might have provoked a more serious charge), she would snort and jinx, turning on a dime, and gallop away.



Black rhinos are very fast and can get up to speeds of 55 kilometres per hour (34 mph) running on their toes. I can testify it is a truly intimidating scene seeing one barrelling towards you, especially a hormonal cow! The gestation period for a black rhino is about 15 months. She is about seven years old, this will be

her first calf, and it should weigh about 35 - 50 kilograms (80 - 110 lb). How wonderful that another feisty black rhino calf is on its way to further bolster the population.





Cats on their favourite perch

This was a picturesque sighting that gave us the time to sit quietly and observe these incredible cats in great detail, while also listening to the birdsong and sounds of the wilderness – just soaking in all the



splendour of nature.

Members of the Nduna Pride were sprawled across the sun-warmed rocks that ring Nduna Dam. The lions looked completely at ease, unfazed by our company, stretched out, sometimes rolling over with heavy paws dangling, and golden coats glowing against the blackened lichen-covered rocks.

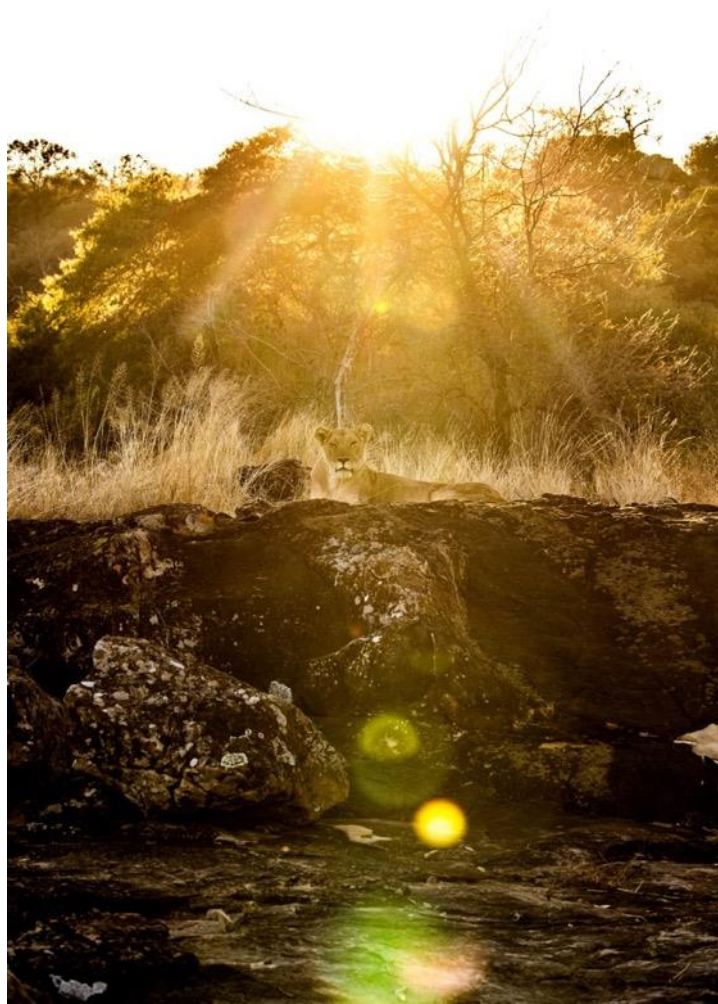
It was clear why they favoured this elevated perch (much like domestic cats do). From the rocks they could survey the water and surrounds below, keeping a watchful eye on any animals that might come down to drink - a natural lookout perfectly suited for Africa's apex predator. Also the sun-warmed stone provided comfort, allowed them to conserve their energy, and there was less chance of thorns or dust or annoying creatures bothering them.



Lions spend the majority of their daylight hours at rest. During these long hours of inactivity, they build strength for when it truly matters: the hunt. By positioning themselves here during the day, the pride not only enjoys comfort but also gains a strategic advantage. If a herd of impala, a lone kudu, or even a thirsty buffalo were to venture to the dam, the lions would already be waiting in ambush, conserving their strength until the moment to strike.

Watching them like this - half dozing, half alert - gave a sense of their dual nature: lethargic sunbathers by day, powerful hunters by night, their chosen rocks around Nduna Dam both a resting ground and a launchpad for survival.

Being so relaxed it also gave us many opportunities to photograph them from different angles, and at different zoom lengths – seeing wild lions like this in their natural environment is such a privilege, and the photos are an everlasting reminder of this.





Fun and games

Everyone was enchanted with this little elephant calf, only a few months old, and at that clumsy, enchanting stage of life - where its trunk was more of a puzzle than a tool, and its 'joie de vivre' could not be contained.

It wrapped its trunk around a stick and twiddled it in the air, half-proud, half-bewildered at the strange object it had captured. It wobbled, dropped it, and picked it up again, clearly experimenting with the strength and grip of its still-learning muscles. An elephant's trunk is one of the most extraordinary appendages in the animal kingdom, containing over 40 000 individual muscles. It can be used to delicately pluck a single blade of grass or uproot an entire sapling. But for calves, it takes months, even years, to master its full potential.

After a while, the calf tried something new. It knelt down clumsily on its front knees, pressed its face to the ground, and with a surprising gulp managed to scoop a clod of earth straight into its mouth! This dusty trophy seemed to thrill it even more than the stick. A slightly older calf spotted the prize and came gambolling over.

With ears flapping and trunk reaching, it clambered around the younger one in playful pursuit. The younger calf nearly tripped over a stick, but kept its dusty prize clenched tight, triumphant in the game.

Such delightful play is more than entertainment for young elephants – they're learning life skills. Through play, calves learn coordination, strengthen their muscles, test social boundaries, and even develop problem-solving skills. The games prepare them for the demands of adulthood, when the trunk must serve as both a fine instrument and a powerful tool, when social bonds within the herd will shape survival.





Notice the clod of earth in the little one's mouth, held in place by its trunk, as it steps over a stick and tries to keep its prize away from its older playmate.



Newborn giraffe calf

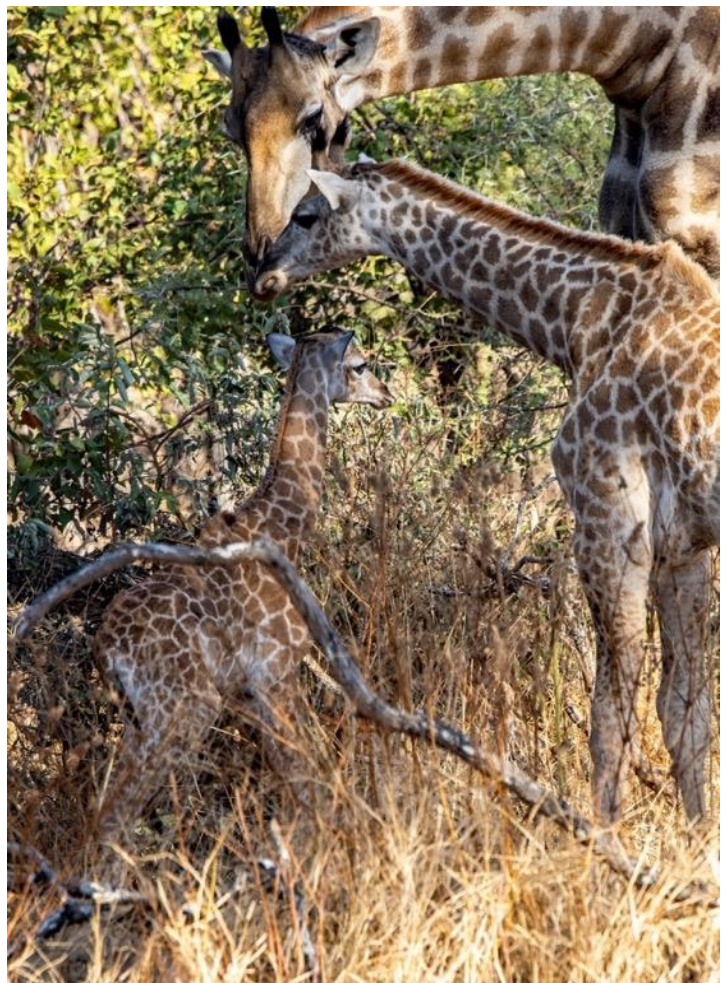
On a mission to the south of the Hippo Valley area we passed this family of giraffe early on morning. But on the return journey, with the light at a different angle, my eyes caught the unsteady movement of what seemed to be an impossibly small version of these graceful creatures – a newborn calf, still wobbly on its long, spindly legs. Its mother hovered protectively, her tall frame arched over the little one, helping it to step over a branch.

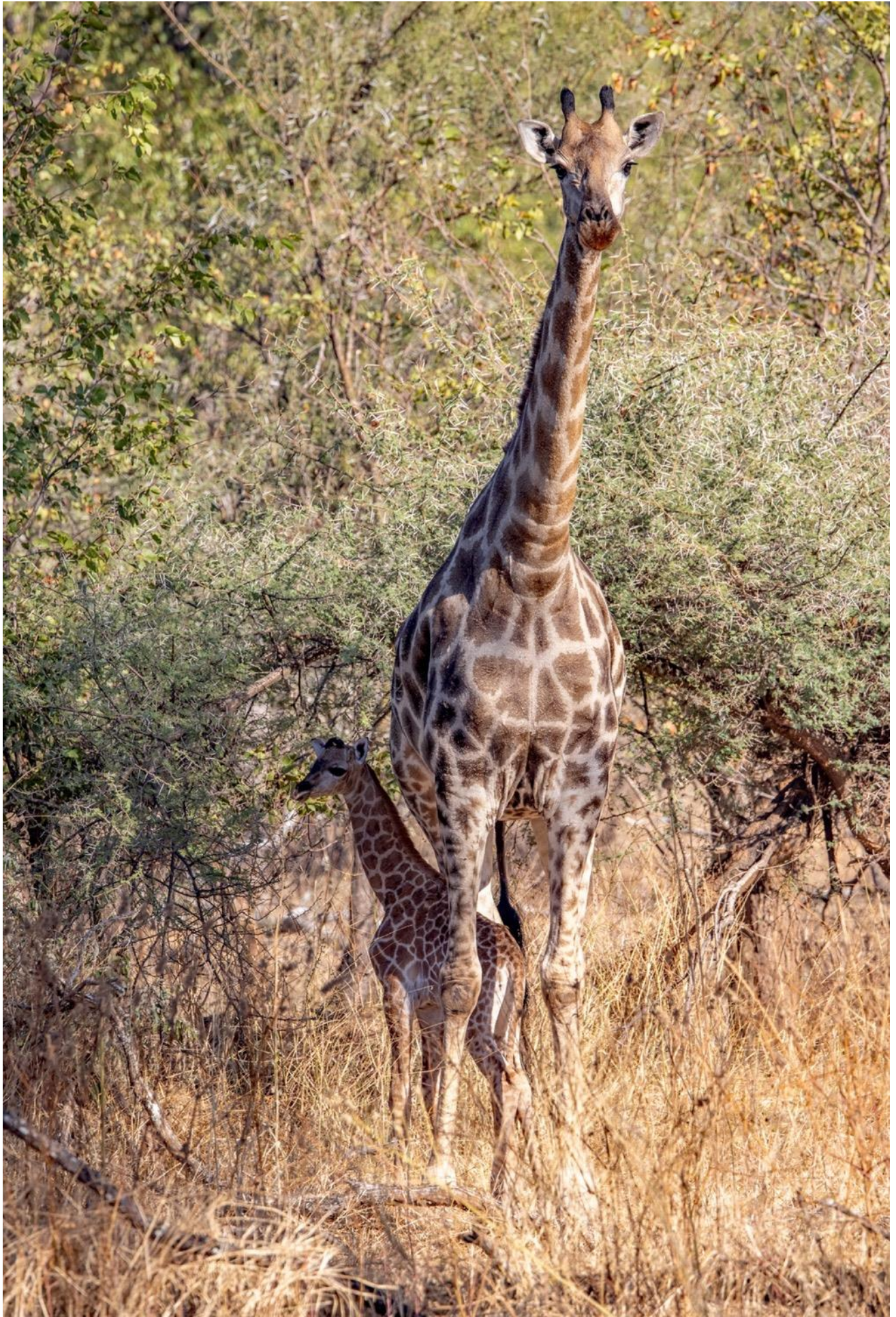


Southern giraffes endure a long gestation of about 15 months, and calves are born in a dramatic way - falling nearly two metres to the ground as they land in the outside world. This calf must have been born only hours earlier, its coat still crinkly, its umbilical cord still wet, and its little ossicones (giraffe 'horns') still folded down against its head. The mother positioned herself so that the calf stayed safely between her front legs, an instinctive shield against predators.

A little distance away, an older calf, grew restless with curiosity. Step by step, it approached, stretching its neck forward to sniff the newcomer - clearly eager to welcome the tiny addition to the family.

Despite their ungainly beginnings, giraffe calves grow quickly, often doubling their height within the first year. Yet survival is precarious; many fall prey to lions, hyenas, or leopards. Mothers have to remain vigilant, often standing guard through the night, always ready to ward off danger with powerful kicks.





Twitter



A pearl-spotted owlet (*Glaucidium perlatum*).

Pearl-spotted owlets are often confused with African barred owlets, which have finely barred (not spotted) head and back, a blotched (not streaked) breast, barring across the upper breast, lack the false 'eyes', and have a proportionally large head.

I remember it as:

Pearl-spot^{ed} owl = spot^{ed} head,

str^{ea}ked breast,

African barred owlets = finely barred head,

blotched breast, barring across upper breast.

Photo by Brad Fouché.

This was a great sighting for us – a scaly-feathered weaver (*Sporopipes squamifrons*). This small weaver can be identified by its scaly crown, pale pink bill, and a distinctive black "moustache" on its white throat. It lives in arid parts of southern Africa, including Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and here in Zimbabwe.

Photo by Brad Fouché.





A magnificent pair of Verreaux's eagles (*Aquila verreauxii*) Photo by Brad Fouché
The pair of crowned eagles (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*) are once again nesting in the Meso area baobab.
Both are on the nest in this photo. Take a look at how tiny the nearby weaver's nest is by comparison.



September Gallery



Some heavyweights make a beeline for the water to drink and cool off.





A zebra finally gets its turn to drink, while an eland waits its turn.
(In processing this photo I noticed what I assumed were numerous dust spots on my sensor that made marks on the image. In zooming in to clean them up I realised they were a swarm of wasps flying past!)

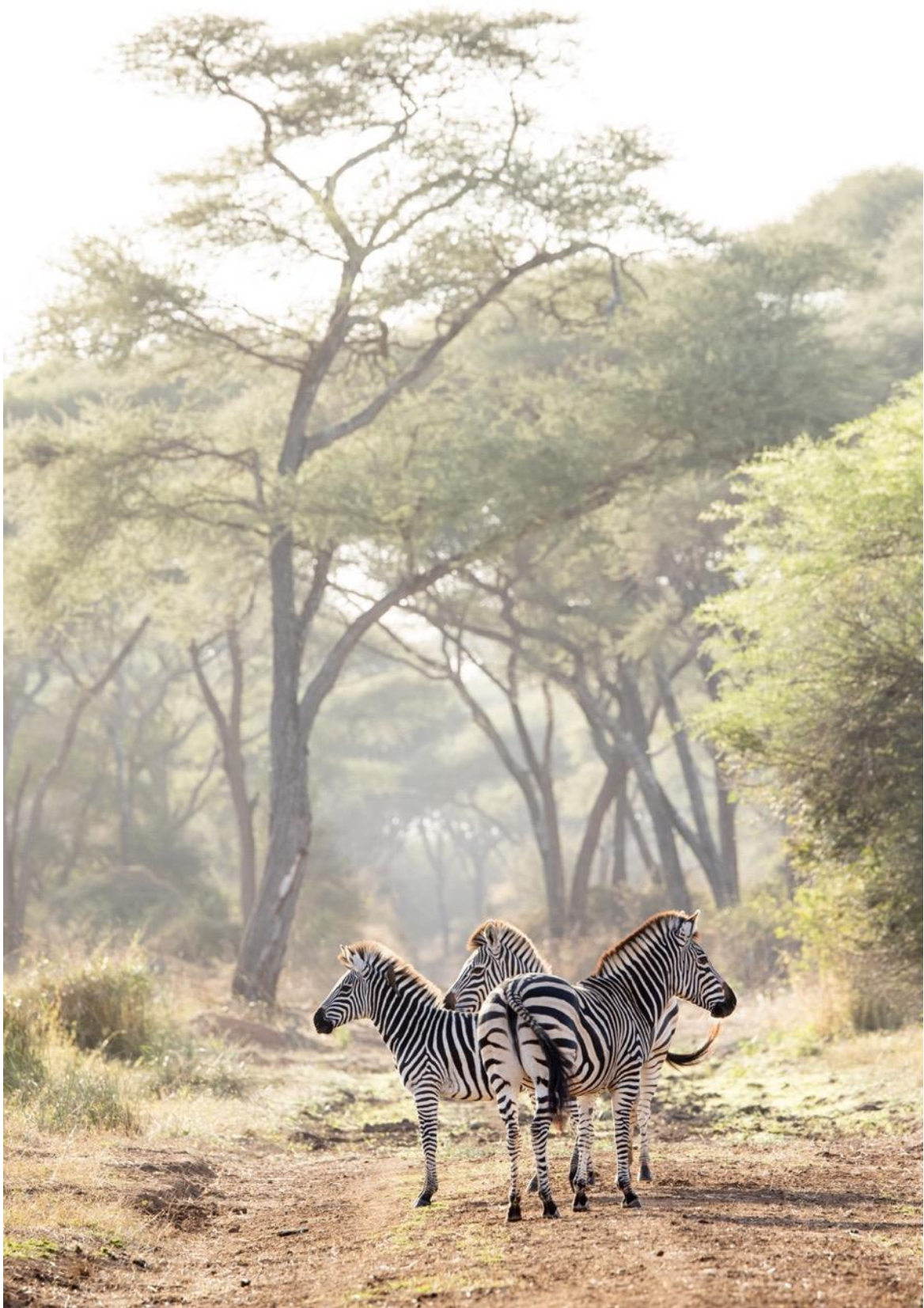


Three legs off the ground – the long-limbed stride of an African wild dog.



A wildebeest dances through a dreamscape with waterbuck.
The structural beauty amid the Sosigi shallows.





Convergent lines.



A sounder of warthogs living their best lives!



Hyenas returning from night patrol before dawn breaks.
A white rhino strides across a favoured feeding ground, the grass shaved short by its grazing.





A mother leads her calf into the sunset, but not before the little one has waved goodbye!

