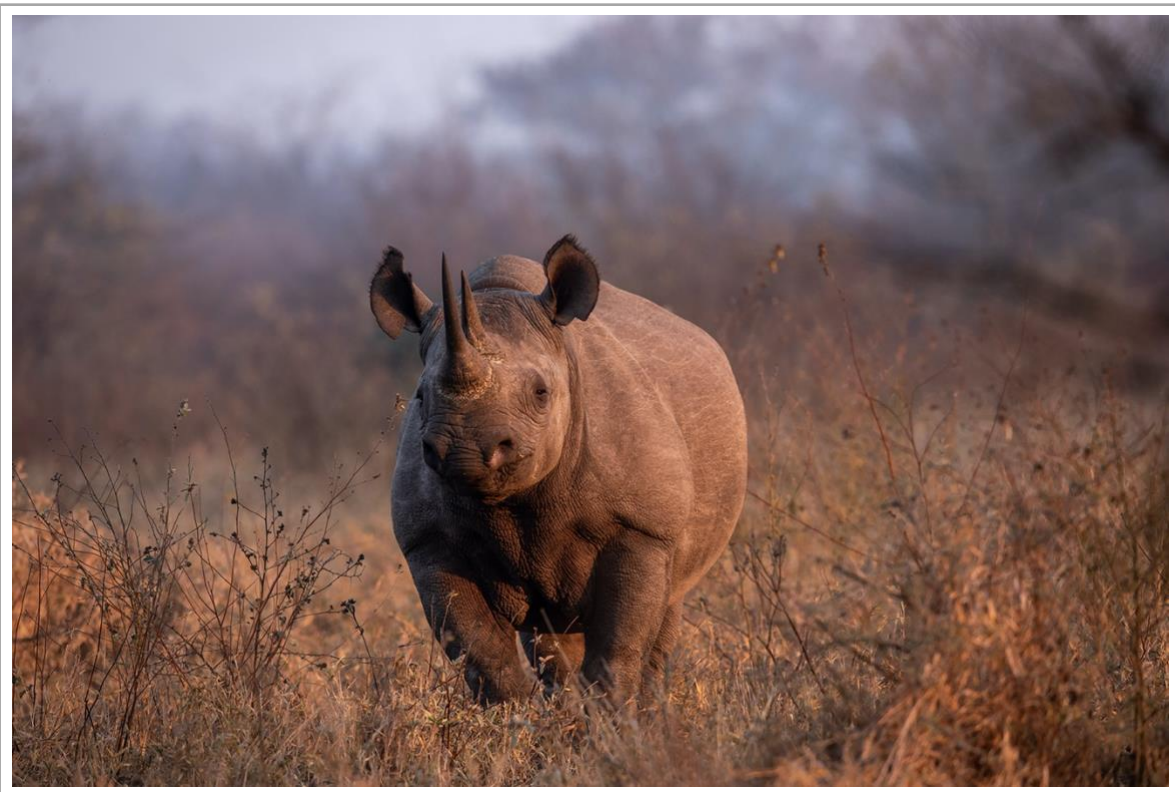


Singita



WILDLIFE JOURNAL SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE

For the month of November, Two Thousand and Twenty One

Temperature

Average minimum:	22.0°C (71.6°F)
Minimum recorded:	18.2°C (64.7°F)
Average maximum:	36.0°C (96.8°F)
Maximum recorded:	44.6°C (112.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 76.5 mm
*Season to date: 112,3 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise:	05:03
Sunset:	18:21

It's been hot, cool, windy and calm, but our summer rains have arrived spurring on a charge of fresh green growth. The brilliantly bright new leaves of the mopane look like clouds of shimmering butterflies when backlit by the sun. It's a generous time of year with lilies and other flowers displaying their advertisements to the pollinators, and the first impala lamb of the season arrived a little earlier than usual, on 7 November.

Here's a sightings snapshot for November:

Lions

- Without a doubt the lion sighting of the month went to the Nduna Pride that managed, somehow, to massacre five Cape buffalo near Nduna Dam! The pride of 12 (two males, four lionesses and six

subadults/cubs) feasted on the three buffalo calves and two cows for several days. After that they were seen sleeping on top of some sunny rocks, while the cubs still had some energy to play.

- The Nduna Pride also managed to kill a zebra in the early hours one morning, north east of Mapanzani weir.
- There have been several sightings of the River Pride doing what lions do best, including feeding on a buffalo carcass.
- Guests enjoyed spending over two hours watching a lone male lion stalk a herd of buffalo. At sunset he closed in and caught a calf.
- A male lion was also spotted at Simbiri Dam early one morning, just about to start feeding on a young buffalo bull he had brought down.

Leopards

- It would appear that the best way to see leopards this month was to not look for them at all... One was sauntering along the Pamushana Access Road, one was sitting on the shoreline as guests departed on an afternoon safari cruise, and one was seen sleeping in a tree, right next to the road, near to the lodge.

African wild dogs

- It's hard to tell what's happening with the dog dynamics this month. Last month a pack of six adults and six pups were seen, but this month a pack was seen twice with 13 members, and then the last sighting of them has been of seven members – six adults and one pup.
- They've been seen feeding, chasing off hyenas and regurgitating food for the pups. At the last sighting they were clearly full and happily playing around in a muddy puddle.

Hyenas

- There seems to have been some political dispute between the hyena clans of late.
- Individuals have been seen scouring the plains, loping along and looking for baby impalas.

Rhinos

- As is always the case the sightings of white rhinos at Singita Pamushana have been extraordinary, and there have also been great sightings of black rhinos, from vehicles and on foot.

There was a sad loss however, an old cow with a particularly long, straight, front horn has died. She was known as Njakeni, and was one of the very few rhinos who made it through the 1992 drought, before The Malilangwe Trust was formed. Since then the Trust has been monitoring her (from 1994) and she has had seven calves (four females and three males), and following only the maternal lines, we find that to date, she has 17 grandcalves, and 1 great-grandcalf. So she contributed 25 calves through herself, her daughters and her granddaughters.

She died of natural, age-related causes, at the old age of over 30 years. (We don't know when she was born, but we do know that she was at least six years old in 1996 because she had a calf at this time.) She had both horns intact when she died, and she was accompanied by her grandson until her last breath.

She was an icon who made an especially significant contribution to rhino conservation, and will be sorely missed by us all.

Elephants

- Elephants have been a little harder to find this month, and on some game drives we have set out with the main aim of finding some. This often means finding tracks on the roads and then disembarking the vehicle to track them on foot when they are far away from any roads or viewpoints.

- On one walk it took two hours to find them, and they were feeding in a thicket and were very spread out. On another occasion elephants were found resting in the shade of a tree. Guide and guests spent some quality time watching these massive animals and it quickly became evident that there were more elephants than initially thought. They ended up having a memorable view of 11 bull elephants, moving on from their rest, slowly walking right past the group causing everyone to feel their hearts beating hard with the excitement of the experience.
- There was a splendid sighting of a breeding herd of about 30 elephants drinking and swimming in the Nyamasikana River.

Buffalo

- Great herds of buffalo have been seen drinking at some of the pans. Some herds are in excess of 500 buffalo.
- Fifteen dead buffalo were seen in the river, with hundreds of vultures feeding on the carcasses. We do not know the cause of these multiple deaths.

Plains game

- Excellent sightings of plains game, especially of those that have youngsters afoot at this time.
- We have had particularly good sightings of sable and hartebeest at the pans.

Unusual sightings

- Guide Tyme Mutema had a fantastic sighting of a caracal crossing the airstrip, heading south.

Photographic hide

- A group of guests enjoyed sundowners and a bush dinner at this pan while watching wildlife coming down to drink. It was an epic experience, with the following animals seen: 15 hyenas, 11 white rhinos, 2 black rhinos, 2 buffalo bulls and some plains game.

Fishing

- Fishing has been great with many bream and a few tigers caught by those trying their luck.

Day trips

- We've taken some wonderful meanders into Gonarezhou National Park – it is always a pleasure viewing this wilderness and the impressive striated Chilojo Cliffs.

A selection of bush stories follow, as well as a November Gallery.

Pure bliss

One of the greatest joys we can enjoy is seeing the joy we give others - like watching a loved one receiving a thoughtful gift, or watching someone thoroughly enjoying themselves. This elephant is known to us because of his big tusks, stocky form (we call him "Butch") and his good nature. He is generally calm, gregarious and loves nothing more than an enthusiastic bout of splashing and spraying and mudbathing. On this day he made a beeline for the water, strode in, squirted water all over himself, and then proceeded to churn up the shallow water into a mud pit!

Elephants' optimum body temperature is the same as ours at about 36 °C (96,8 °F) (don't we know this so well from Covid and having to take our temperatures everywhere we go) and they have several ways of maintaining this, even on sweltering days. Their large ears, the largest of any animal, have a lot of tiny blood vessels that are close to the surface. They flap their ears to create a breeze, fan themselves and cool down their blood supply efficiently. Their blood vessels can also dilate to increase the flow of blood to their ears and increase cooling. They spray water and mud on their bodies, especially behind their ears, to help the cooling effect. When they spray themselves their wrinkly skin and sparse hairs trap the liquid and keep it on for longer. During the hottest hours they seek out the shade of trees or riverbed reeds. Another interesting technique is that scientists have noted that their skin is somewhat permeable. Most mammals, including humans, sweat through glands connected to pores, but elephants only have pores between their toes. By their skin being permeable they lose far more moisture via evaporation and are thus able to cool down faster. But they have to drink a lot of water to keep from dehydrating, up to 200 litres per day in the height of summer.





Front end loader black rhino encounter

I've found that the best way to boost your black rhino mojo is by getting up really early. On this morning I picked up a staff member's little family – mom, dad, and their two young sons, at about 05:30, and headed for the Ganyani area. There was a beautiful low mist shrouding the land and colouring it in a pastel palette.

We spotted this black rhino cow in an open area, some way off, I got my camera ready and we reminded the youngsters to keep quiet, sit still and keep calm – and they did just that.

The black rhino cautiously approached at a steady walk, then a little trot, then an abrupt stop. She would lower her head and horns like a front end loader trundling along, then lift them skyward to peer at us with her dark eyes. This went on and on until she was right next to the vehicle – too close for photos. She would study us quizzically, then turn on her heels and canter off. She did several of these investigations, each time from a slightly different angle, until she was satisfied that she'd seen enough of us and went on her way. At no time was she overly threatening, but at the same time every one of us, including the little boys, knew we needed to stay calm in order for her to feel unthreatened.



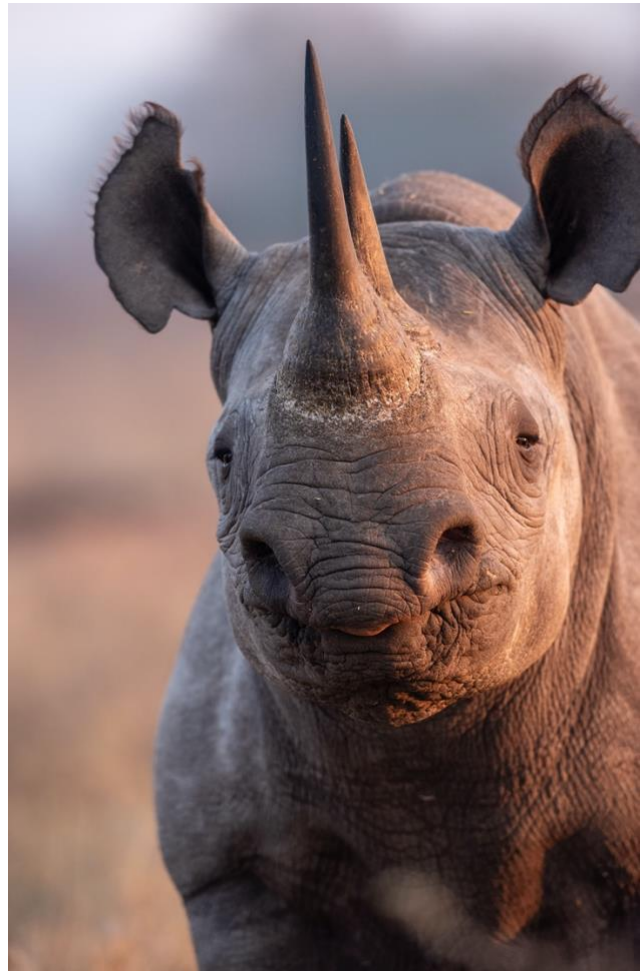
In sending these photos to our Resident Biologist she was able to identify the rhino by her ear notches. She let us know that the cow's name is Ganyani. (Ganyani means "wild dog" in Shangaan, but she is named after the Ganyani area rather than the dogs!) She is a playful 3rd generation black rhino cow of nine years old, and hasn't had a calf yet which is very late for the standards documented here on the Malilangwe Reserve. Ganyani has gained a reputation of running up to vehicles and performing.



Running up to our vehicle and performing was exactly what she was doing! She is in excellent condition and will, of course, stay closely monitored by our various teams.

After the exhilaration of this highly endangered, very special, animal-form front end loader we did a drive around the central parts of the reserve, purposely finishing off in an area where earth works were underway with tractors, trailers, diggers, excavators, bulldozers and real front-end loaders because, after all, when you are a little boy no sighting, no matter how rare, beats big mechanical earth moving machinery!

Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) are also known as hook-lipped rhinos because of the hook shaped upper lip – so clearly visible in this image. The name differentiates it from the white rhino, so named for the wide flat upper lip. Somehow “wide” morphed into the word “white”, and wide-lipped rhinos became known as white rhinos, and their opposites, the hook-lipped rhinos became known as black rhinos.



When aggression evaporates

We've had some sweltering sizzling days, when the mercury has risen above 40°C and it's just too hot to bicker or bite or budge. In this first image you can see an elephant, clan of hyenas, small herd of zebras and even an impala gathered at the water and the cool shade of the large trees nearby.



Unlike most predators hyenas seem to enjoy being in water. They sometimes even stash a carcass in water to keep it safe and preserve it, and will go and fish it out to feed on some time later. Some of the members of this clan couldn't resist going to sit and lie down in the water to cool off, regardless of this enormous bull elephant a few steps away.



Pretty awesome

Saseka (meaning 'pretty') is an unmistakable white rhino cow, thanks to her unusually shaped horn that dips low rather than curving up. Thanks to her instant recognisability she has become a firm favourite of many, and seems to be a real character too.

On this afternoon she was at a well-frequented pan, with her calf that's near the age of independence. They were calmly ambling about and having a drink. A bull approached from some way off and invaded her space, and she became very agitated. She moved off, huffing and puffing, then sniffing the air, twisting her lips and bellowing. This went on for about 10 minutes, a real production, and the bull seemed a bit bewildered by it all. It's not impossible that he was trying to approach her to ascertain if she was nearing a state of oestrus, or to drive off the calf to accelerate a state of oestrus.

What was clear was that Saseka had decided she was having none of it, still wanted more to drink, and that he needed to leave the water's edge. She made quite a few mock charges at him, and then drove the message home with the charge you see below. Even one of the poor oxpeckers on her back fell over with the force of it, and the bull slammed on anchors sending dirt flying! With the status quo re-established she and her calf began drinking at the water's edge again, and the bull respectfully socially distanced himself, rather demurely, on the other side of the pan and finished his drink.



What becomes more and more apparent is how complex and sensitive rhino dynamics are. The cow mentioned in the Overview that died, Njakeni, was treated for fighting wounds three years ago. Since then Rhulani, her six-year-old grandson, seldom left her side. It is believed he took on the role of protector, and even after her death he was seen to be protecting her body by chasing off hyenas and vultures.

Fierce fishing competition

I had one of the most fun and exciting afternoons of my life recently, during a tigerfishing competition on Malilangwe Dam. Guests at Singita Pamushana can replicate these good times when they choose to go on a fishing safari on the lodge's dedicated and spacious fishing pontoon.

Between game drives I went out fishing on the pontoon with guides Jephath Diza and Tengwe Siabwanda. We did some bream fishing which was excellent - the water had warmed up and the fish were biting. Then I "jumped ship" to go out with two young gentlemen, Joshua Clegg and Murray Wenham, sons of Malilangwe Trust staff, on the Trust's small research boat. These boys, along with the other children of staff, are avid fishermen, and spent much of lockdown on the Malilangwe Dam perfecting the art of tigerfishing. (You can take a look at the YouTube channel and Instagram page called, This Is Africa Outdoors, that is dedicated to fishing and bushcraft, and the video of this competition can be found at <https://youtu.be/IgDPOsvOuZ4>)

It wasn't long before we decided to have a tigerfishing competition - young Murray and I against the very experienced (and lucky) Josh. I can only hint at the afternoon's epic-ness like this: There you are floating along the wild waters surrounded by the most breath-taking wilderness scenery. Absolute paradise. A fish eagle soars overhead, a tilapia in its talons. A pair of Verreaux's eagles circle and land on the cliffs. A hippo snorts a warning and a buffalo grazes calmly at the water's edge... It's hypnotic.



The scenery you gaze upon while floating along.



The fishing party, before the competition started...

BAM! Violently your arm is yanked, your rod bends and you are, “Fish on!”. Then it’s the intense anticipation of landing it, the utter devastation of losing it, the excitement of seeing it in the water, the terror of it flying past your ear as it leaps trying to throw the hook, the despair of it swimming away as it escapes, the exultation of actually netting it and landing it, the cheers, chants and high fives from your team mate, the proud photo moment while trying not to lose a finger to the tiger’s snapping razor-sharp teeth, the thrill of quickly releasing it and watching it speed away, then it starts all over again... we were playing against the clock.

Honestly, I thought I needed to be darted with a tranquilizer afterwards. It was the best of times. The gamut of emotions that flood one are off the charts! Murray and I led by one, with 27 seconds to go, but then calamity struck and Josh landed yet another tiger snatching victory from our slippery grasp, and ending the day in an 8/8 draw. Until next time that is.



Quick pics of Josh, Murray and me (doing a toothy tigerfish impression) with some of our catches before releasing them.

Twitter

It's the best time of year for birding as all our summer visitors have arrived. That said we still enjoy the sightings of our permanent residents, such as these:



A tawny eagle (*Aquila rapax*) eyes out some unsuspecting doves, one of the many prey species in its diet, along with other birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.



Red-billed quelea (*Quelea quelea*) are the most numerous undomesticated bird on earth. They feed in huge flocks of millions of individuals. Here a “few” pause for a quick sip.



Here a secretary bird (*Sagittarius serpentarius*) does a stocktake of the situation at a pan while helmeted guineafowl muddle about and dove soars in.

Flower of the month: Bushveld gardenia (*Gardenia volkensii*)



On an early morning drive one could smell the exquisite scent of this gardenia before seeing it and, on sight, it was festooned with glorious white and yellow blooms.

The large white flowers open at night and turn yellow the next day. Each flower has a long tube and tough calyx making it difficult for birds and most insects to reach the nectar. Although each large flower is short-lived, the flowers open in succession thus extending the flowering season. What fascinates me the most about these flowers is HOW and WHY they change colour...

How flowers change colour:

The three major pigments involved in floral colour change are anthocyanins (purplish), carotenoids (orangish), and betalains (reddish). Colour changes can occur from an accumulation or loss of anthocyanins or carotenoids, or an accumulation of betalains.

Why flowers change colour:

The reasons for colour change include;

- Pollination

Some flowers are induced to change colour by pollination when pollen is deposited on the stigma. Depending on the species, floral colour change can affect an entire flower or it can occur only on parts of it. Flowers that have been successfully pollinated have reduced nectar rewards for the insect pollinator, so the colour change sends a signal to the pollinator. Pollinators prefer to visit flowers that have large nectar rewards and have not undergone colour change, so they learn to discriminate against the colour changes. This benefits both parties by allowing insect pollinators to be guided to flowers that are rewarding, while the flowers receive faster and more efficient pollination.

- Senescence (age deterioration)

Some flowers will change colour, regardless of pollination, because of the aging process.

- The pH level

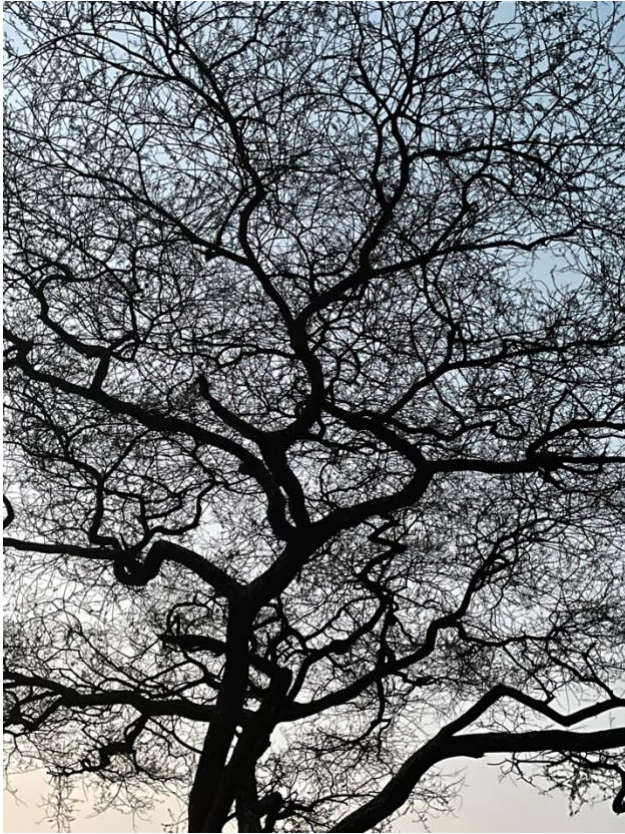
Colour change may also be caused by an increase or decrease in pH causing a reddening/blueing of anthocyanins and co-pigments. Hydrangeas are a good example of this – they are affected by the presence of aluminium ions in the soil, causing changes in flower colour from pinks, blues, and purples.

- Petal folding

There has been one non-chemical example found of colour changing within a species where the folding of petals causes changes to the colour patterns of the flowers.

So, back to our beautiful colour-changing gardenias... They are pollinated at night by hawk moths that have long enough mouthparts to reach the nectar. Research shows that moths are most attracted to white flowers, probably because they stand out and contrast the most against the dark of night. By opening as white flowers at night, when moths are most active, the gardenias draw in their specific pollinators. (If a pollinator visits only one species of flower, that flower is assured that its pollen will find its way to another of its kind.) By changing to yellow the next day the moths do not waste time on repeatedly visiting flowers that have reduced nectar rewards, and the flowers receive faster and more efficient pollination!

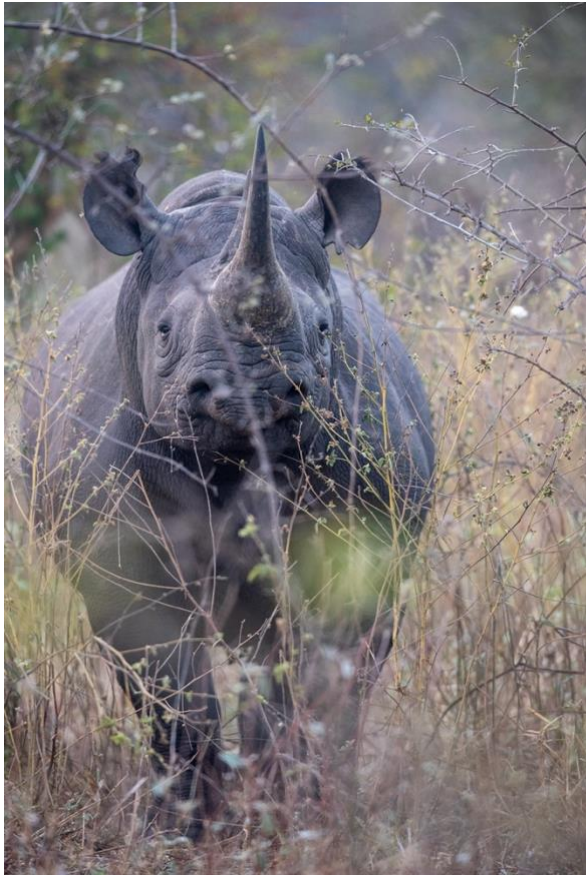
November Gallery



The abstract inky lacework of an umbrella thorn tree.

Every colour of the background landscape is replicated in the magnificent camouflage of this African wild dog's patchwork coat.





A black rhino bull lines up his sites.

This male Lichtenstein's hartebeest has big healed grazes on his knees, and scars on his neck and shoulders. Bulls are highly territorial, and will challenge one another as such. Fights begin with a series of head movements and stances, as well as depositing dung on dung piles. The opponents drop onto their knees and, after giving a hammer-like blow, begin wrestling, their horns interlocking. One attempts to fling the head of the other to one side to stab the neck and shoulders with his horns. This bull has obviously sustained a few battle wounds and survived with considerable street cred!



This zebra had particularly unusual markings on his “saddle” area – little polka dots. Every zebra has a unique stripe pattern – and this one has more black colouration than most.



A herd of sable drinking, as the green season makes a takeover bid.

Photo by Mark Saunders



Close up details of the giants drinking during the heat of the day.





Three bull elephants appeared after dark to drink and cool off after their long journey.





We found this male lion in the afternoon at the start of golden hour. As we arrived he lifted his head ever so slightly and gave us a momentary, “Do not disturb” glare. For the rest of the afternoon until sunset, with exquisite rim light happening, all we got was this silly “pawtrait”

**All stories and photos by Jenny Hishin,
unless otherwise stated.**