

# Singita



Photo by Jenny Hishin

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

### Temperature

Average minimum: 19.7°C (67.4°F)  
Minimum recorded: 15.9°C (60.6°F)  
Average maximum: 32.9°C (91.2°F)  
Maximum recorded: 37.4°C (99.3°F)

### Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm  
Season to date: 712.9 mm

### Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:01  
Sunset: 17:53

Singita Pamushana and Malilangwe House officially opened on the 24th of March 2021, after being closed for a year due to the pandemic, and our first guests received the most grateful and joyous welcome by staff. After being so quiet for far too long we are definitely moving forward with a determined and renewed focus and energy in the safari industry.

During the closure we seized the opportunity to improve our knowledge and skills, using technology such as the now infamous “Zoom,” as well as some practical in-the-field training with some of Singita’s own experts. After having such a heavy rainy season it caused the bush to flourish and recover properly from some tough years before, and now the cooler weather is starting to come in. With this cooler weather we are enjoying some wonderful seasonal changes, such as the yellowing of the leaves on the baobab and syringa trees. The vegetation in low lying open areas is now browning with the promise of thinning out, which helps with wildlife sightings. There are still some natural waterholes holding water from the past rains, and these are attracting some great wildlife sightings.

#### **Here is a snapshot of March’s sightings:**

##### **Lions:**

- Two adult male lions were seen on the Banyini plains with full stomachs after having been chased off their kill by a large clan of hyenas. The lion duo had taken down an adult female buffalo along with her juvenile calf.
- Another two male lions (sub-adults) were seen trying to hunt, to no avail, a herd of Cape buffalo on the Chikwete part of the Chiredzi River.
- In the Nduna area, two adult female lions along with an adult male lion were located, and time was spent watching these cats interact with each other. What became apparent later on was that the one lioness had cubs and was trying to lead the male away from the area the cubs were in. The next morning the lioness and one of her cubs were seen and the other two cubs could be heard calling.

##### **Rhinos:**

- Rhino sightings continue to be very good, with white rhino being seen often grazing on the lush grasses on the reserve.
- Black rhino sightings are also good however they require a little more effort to locate due to the vegetated areas they prefer. Our first guests enjoyed a walking safari through the bush and came across a natural waterhole. At the same time the group arrived at the waterhole, so did two black rhinos! The guide and guests were able to get into a safe position to be able to quietly watch and photograph the two black rhinos as they wallowed and socialised with each other.

##### **Elephants:**

- Some good elephant sightings are being enjoyed with various viewings of bull elephants in and around waterholes and rivers. Guests have also enjoyed experiencing quality time with elephant bulls on walking safaris.
- The breeding herds of elephants are being seen often around the larger water bodies such as the Chiredzi River, Nduna Dam and Sosigi Dam as these areas provide great water, excellent feeding, safety and shade.

##### **Buffalo:**

- Several large herds of buffalos have been seen either visiting waterholes or grazing in the grasslands. Herds continue to be menaced by hungry predators such as lions and hyenas.
- Buffalo bulls are often seen frequenting the hilly areas where there is grass for them as well as safety due to the undulating rocky terrain.

##### **Wild dogs:**

- The wild dogs remain ever so active with large distances being traversed daily. Whilst traveling back from a field training trip in the Gonarezhou National Park that borders the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve where Singita Pamushana is located, the guiding team had a great viewing of 14 wild dogs.

- Guide Dharmesh Daya saw 17 dogs, hunting on the reserve, all looking very healthy and strong. The puppies are now yearlings and are doing extremely well.
- The dogs were seen hunting again recently by guide Alex Naert with guests, along the Orphan Road.
- As the month of April approaches, we are expecting the alpha male and alpha female to copulate and, hopefully, have a new litter of pups in the coming months.

#### **Leopards:**

- Leopards continue to be heard calling around the hills that the lodge is located in, with some cats being “spotted” moving around the hills. A large male leopard has been seen and heard as he has been patrolling. A female was seen hunting along the Singita Pamushana Access Road by guide Mark Friend and trackers while they were working in the field. On another day, while the guides were out sourcing wild herbs for the kitchen, they saw a large female resting up a thorn tree near Nyari.

#### **Plains game:**

- Plains game are in abundance with excellent sightings of giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, eland, kudu and nyala. Baboons and vervet monkeys are in abundance too!

#### **Fishing:**

- Fishing has been excellent with some huge bream being caught. Some guests had their catch prepared by the chef team and enjoyed a delicious fresh meal.
- Tigerfish are very active with some good fishing being enjoyed.

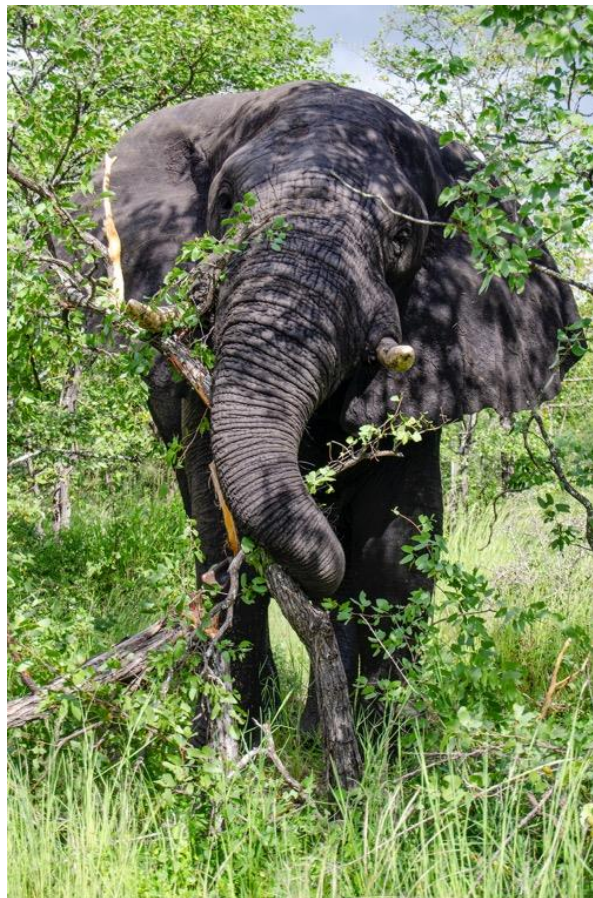


Photo by Jenny Hishin

**Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as the March Gallery of images.**



There are many things in this world that we as a species can change but one thing we cannot is time! Time has one motion and that is onward. Whilst we cannot stop this onward motion, we can travel back into it. No, I have not devised a time machine! The means of going back in time in this article, is to talk about the past. 2020 is a year that the human race will find hard to erase from our history. I think, I would be correct to say that not a single minute of the past year went by without mention of the coronavirus (by us humans that is), but the world kept on turning and will continue to do so. For the wildlife, not just here on Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, but across our planet, life kept on moving as usual and it's these memories from 2020 that I would like to share with you all.

Our rainy season this year has been well above average. The Malilangwe Dam that Singita Pamushana overlooks, filled up to capacity. Over the Christmas period, the dam spilt over the wall. All of our rivers flowed longer and faster than usual.

With all this rain, there is an incredible amount of surface water still available all over the reserve. However, probably the most noticeable thing this year is the lush, beautiful vegetation. There are flowers and fruits in abundance, much to the joy of the herbivorous animals. As guides on the property, it has given us a fantastic opportunity to learn more about some of these plants and their many different properties.



An impala ram, in peak condition, territorially marks a bush with his forehead secretions.

Currently the impalas are getting more and more serious about the rutting season, as per their usual routine as governed by the natural environment. The impala lambs that were born as COVID-19 started to take hold of our lives, have now had many months to grow but they still stay closely packed as a herd, relying on their collective senses to keep themselves safe.

Very recently we came across two male lions on Banyini. The only reason we knew they were around was because the vultures gave away their presence. They killed two buffaloes, but were ultimately outnumbered by a clan of hyenas. This rivalry has continued to fester throughout the pandemic with some battles being won and lost by both species.

Our main pack of painted hunting dogs has been successful in rearing pups that were born in June 2020. The last time I saw them I counted 17 dogs, all looking healthy.

Our Zimbabwean lockdown took effect in April 2020 and, within that month, the migratory birds started their journey back to where they had come from; some only having a short African migration, whilst others returned to Europe, leaving behind our resident birds to keep us company and fill our lives with colour and melodious songs to get us through the winter/dry season. By October 2020 some of the migrant birds started to return and by December, the bush was as vibrant as always, as it should be for that time of the year.

As I write this article the birds are getting ready to leave and the clouds that blessed our lands with the all-important rains have changed and now we look into the blue skies and feel the slight chill in the air slowly creeping in. The bush is changing colour and as our herds of elephants and buffalo move from one place to another, we are starting to see things open up again. The cycles of nature that reign over the bush and all of its inhabitants continue to happen with regularity and the animals go about their day as they have done for generations.



A white rhino bull makes the most of the muddy pans and a perfect rubbing post for horn maintenance.

I wish I could make this time traveling safari longer and more detailed, but that would keep you in the past for way too long. We must return to today, for there is so much to look forward to!

Singita Pamushana has opened once more and we cannot wait to share our piece of wilderness with you. We want you to once more close your eyes, listen to the morning chorus, feel the chill in the air, smell the aromatic fragrances of the many different herbs and forbes and, as you open your eyes, behold the beauty of Africa for yourself.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. We, the team at Singita Pamushana, cannot wait to greet you in person.



## Black rhino sisters

By Sarah Clegg & Jennifer Conaghan, photo by Alex Naert

We'd like to introduce you to two black rhino sisters, six year old 'Gongani' (left) and her younger three-and-a-half-year-old sister 'Mababies' (right).



In 1998, their grandmother 'Sosigi' was one of the first black rhinos to be introduced to the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, and she went on to produce seven calves.

It's common for black rhino sub-adults to leave their mothers and join up with older siblings when their mother gives birth and cares for a new calf. Often, after a few months they will reunite with their mother and the new addition, but the relationship will be far less dependent.

Whilst black rhinos aren't as gregarious as white rhinos, they are a lot more social and 'complex' than traditionally believed; with overlapping territories, socialising at waterholes and the younger individuals hanging out and learning from older siblings / aunty figures.

On a daily basis, the Malilangwe scouts and Wildlife Management Department protect, monitor and interpret the data collected on every individual. Two decades of meticulous records contribute to furthering the global knowledge bank for this incredible species whilst forming the foundation of our science-based rhino management strategy. Ensuring a safe future for Zimbabwe's rhino legacy.

What a period in time this has been for the entire world! March 2020 to March 2021 has certainly not been 12 months that any of us expected. I, for one, started the year with high hopes for great things and despite living in such a remote wild space, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt very quickly.

All of a sudden, life around me felt threatened, restricted and the future, scarily uncertain. These are not conditions that humans enjoy, however it is how life is in the natural world.

As time went on and the pace of life slowed right down to almost a standstill, I found I had more time on my hands than I ever had. I realized how busy life had been, how much of the things I really love doing and spending time on had been so often brushed aside in the past. I started to find I was able to simply watch the wildlife around me. I observed the birds, the animals, the reptiles and the seasonal changes, I watched how each species interacted at a deeper level than I had seen before because I now had time and nowhere else to be, no other distractions to pull me away. I saw how the wildlife spent their unpredictable days finding food, water and avoiding danger... these are just normal day-to-day matters for them. I watched them spend time socializing, spending quality time with family members, interacting with other species and enjoying just being alive and connected to this earth that they know only as home. There were no signs of them stressing about tomorrow and what tomorrow will bring.

At the end of the day, life is unpredictable and we need to adapt to this, embrace change (it's not comfortable) but it's also not the end, it's just the now. I've come to see even more that we need to keep looking forward, to embrace life itself and spend our time wisely. By spending time wisely I mean spending it with people like family, friends and even those you don't know. You can add value to someone's life or they may add value to yours.



Our world is an amazing place, our wildlife needs to be free in order to live, and so do we. Many of us have experienced lockdowns and the restrictions imposed on our lives as a result of this pandemic, and it's terrible - no one and no creature should have to live life locked up and restricted. As we move forward and as we see hope for our future, let's not forget the lessons learnt during this time. The importance of the simple freedoms we missed like seeing family and friends, enjoying sharing a braai/barbeque with others and being able to get out into wilderness areas to enjoy connecting with our world and its inhabitants.

Despite the uncertainties of these past 12 months, for me it has been a time of deep self-learning, reflection and recharging. Now that tourism is permitted again I cannot wait for you all to come and join us here at Singita Pamushana where you can recharge, reconnect with the earth, the wildlife and its people, and feel inspired to embrace life again with a renewed outlook.

So don't waste any more time - just come as you are! The fire has been lit, we have plenty of food and drink, and the best of the world's natural wilderness awaits you to discover its wild treasures.

See you soon!



## The feud rages on

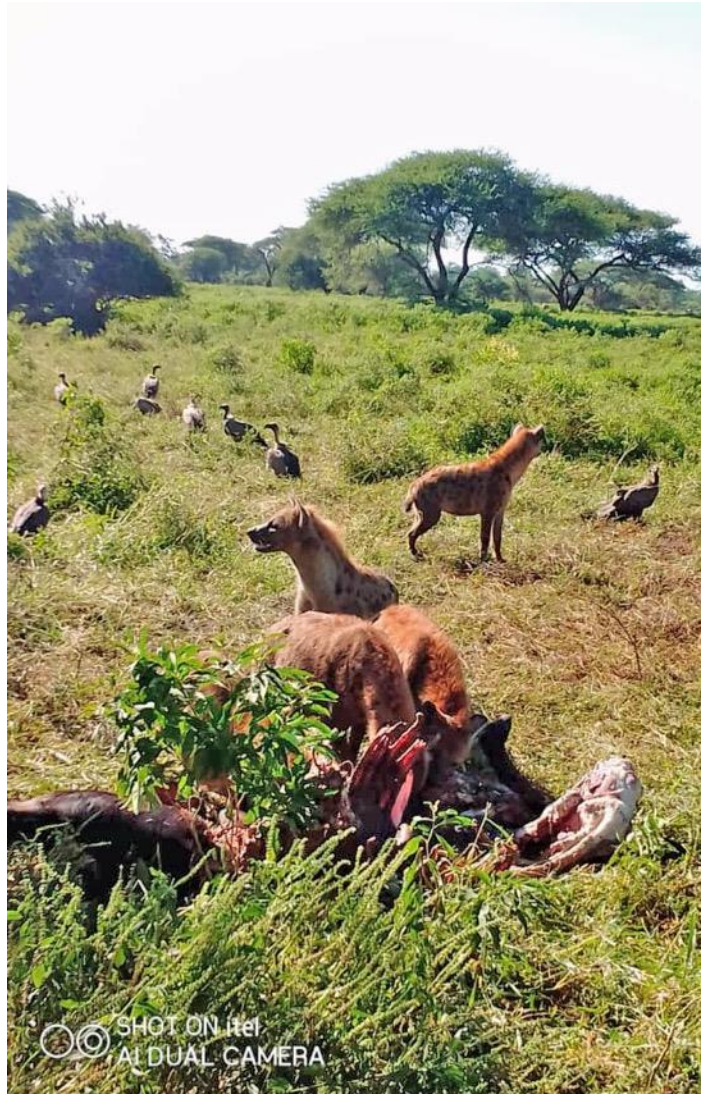
Story and photos by Tyme Matuma

What a pleasure to be back again in the bush after a year of being absent due to the COVID-19 pandemic!

During March I was privileged to be in the company of mentor Alan Yeowart, Brad Fouché and my guiding colleagues for some training and team building before we welcomed our first guests back.

We went for a morning drive through the open plains of Banyini and the vultures gave us the first signal of a possible sighting as they landed in the *Vachellia tortilis* trees. We all became very inquisitive and made our way south of the main pan towards the area where the vultures were landing. From the corner of my eye I saw two adult male lions running and looking very nervous, heading towards the tree line. In front of us were a clan of eight spotted hyenas feasting on not one, but two Cape buffalo – a cow and a calf.

From experience and observation it appeared that a herd of buffalo came through the plains towards the pan and, due to good rains and thick cover, the lions took advantage and killed two buffalo but were later overpowered by the hyenas. Hyenas and lions are age-old enemies, and it takes a formidable force to scare off two male lions, but this particular clan of hyenas has been dominating this central area for a couple of years now.





Twitter



A lilac-breasted roller stands out starkly against the red soil (above), while a pair of double-banded sandgrouse blend in perfectly (below)! Photos by Sarah Ball







A green-backed heron catches possibly a little more than it can chew!

Photo by Josh Saunders



Here's looking at you!  
A Verreaux's eagle-owl peers down  
from a tree canopy, giving you that  
prickly sensation that you're being  
watched.

Photo by Sarah Ball





## Rock art sites

By Jenny Hishin

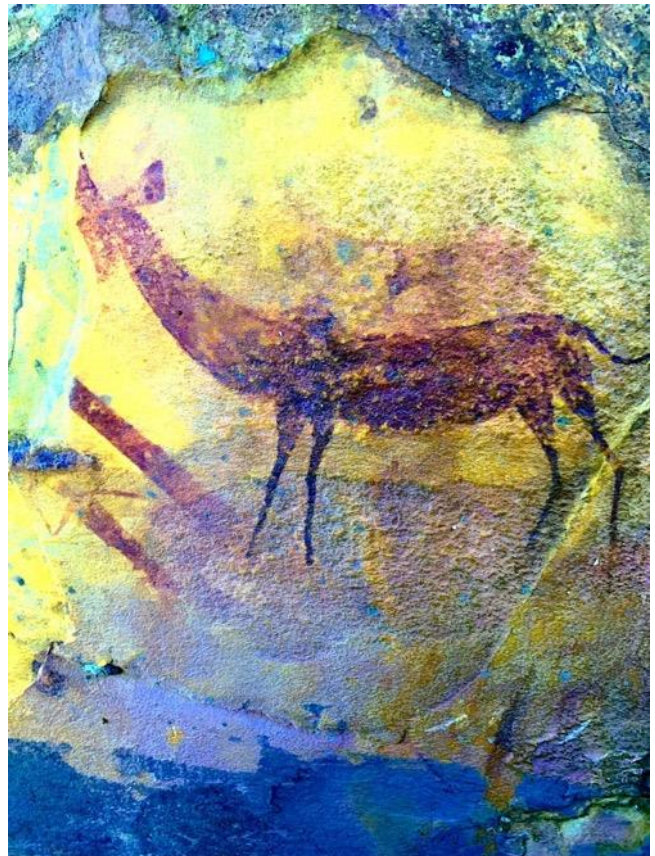
One of the positives, so to speak, of lockdown on the reserve, was that members of the guiding team were able to do extensive, thorough, systematic searches to discover unrecorded rock art sites.

To date 123 sites have been recorded.

These photographs are enhanced using an app called D Stretch (Decorrelation Stretch). It defines the original artwork and also helps in changing the hues of colour in the spectrum to give more detail. In these photos we can now clearly make out the figure of a hunter, a giraffe and a kudu.

There are few things as truly awesome as seeing centuries old rock art painted by our ancestors, so be sure to have enough time on your visit to explore some of these artworks, on foot, with your knowledgeable guide.

Photos by Brad Fouché





March Gallery



Photo by Josh Saunders







The leopard above is blind in his left eye, but still able to look after itself and hunt effectively.



Photos by Alex Naert





Zebra youngsters pull funny faces, and a hyena walks along a game trail, with intent.







An implausibility of wildebeest consider the year that was...

Photos by Sarah Ball

Compiled by Jenny Hishin