

Singita

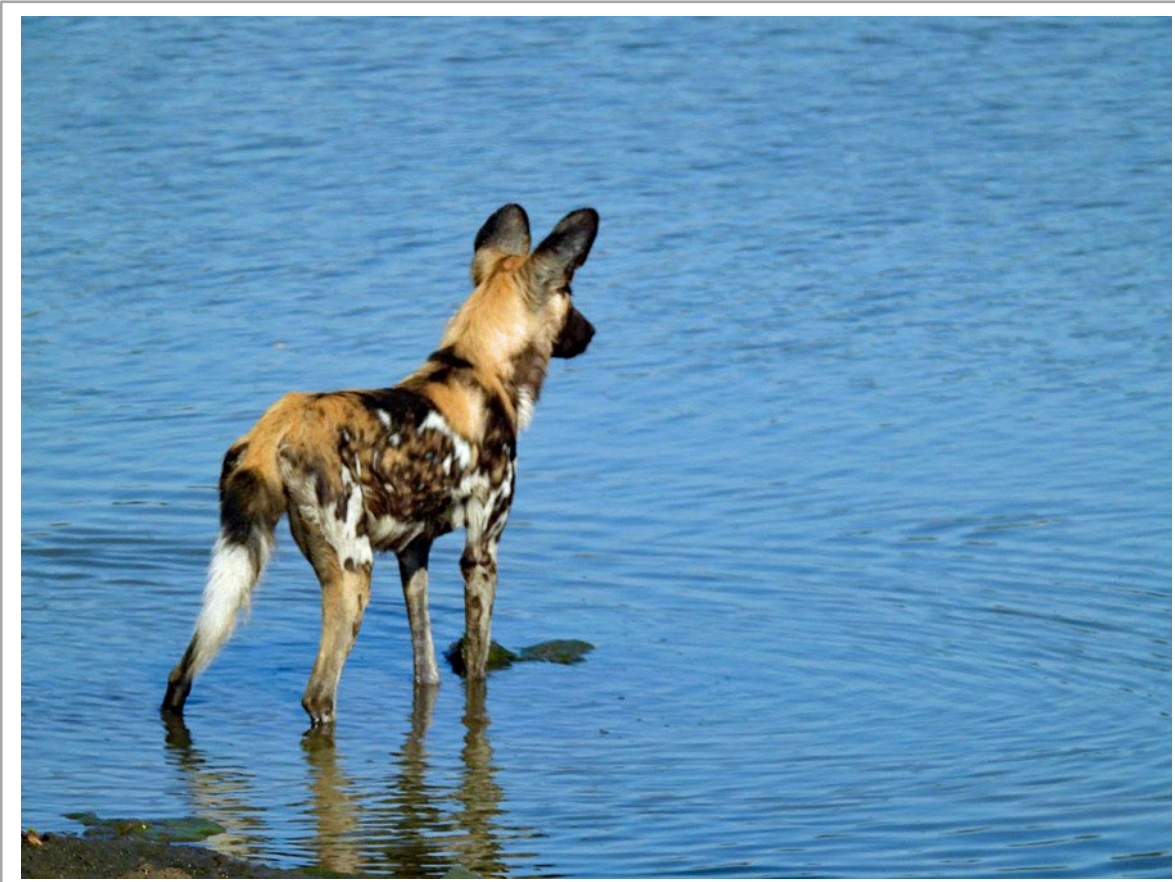


Photo by Brad Fouché

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

Temperature

Average minimum: 12.9°C (55.2°F)
Minimum recorded: 09.1°C (48.3°F)
Average maximum: 25.2°C (77.3°F)
Maximum recorded: 31.3°C (88.3°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 16 mm
*For the year to date: 548 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 17:23

We've experienced a cold snap (by our high standards) and some rain which is unusual for this time of year. The weather has given rise to some stunning blood red sunsets, which are further enhanced when you have two rival rhino bulls jousting and kicking up red dust. The lodge has been full of guests which we are so thankful for, but so vast is the reserve that you hardly see another game viewer out on drive. The game viewing has been excellent, but without doubt this month has gone to the dogs!

Here's a Sightings Snapshot for June:

Lions

- **Nduna Pride:** This pride received an enormous free meal in the way of a bull elephant that died of natural causes, near Nduna Dam. They feasted on the carcass for days, struggling to tear into it at first, and helped towards the end by a throng of vultures.
- **River Pride:** They have expanded their family significantly with the addition of seven cubs in recent months! Three lionesses, seven cubs and one male were seen sunning themselves on the soft sand of the Chiredzi riverbed.
- **Southern Pride:** These lions have been spending the month in the far north of their pridelands. We've seen them near Hwata Pan resting, drinking, stalking Lichtenstein's hartebeest, and have also seen some of them come onto the central Banyini open areas.
- **Territorial males:** Two male lions killed and fed on a young buffalo, right near Malilangwe's HQ area. Two male lions were seen fighting with a maneless male lion (possibly from the River Pride). Later on three male lions were seen feeding on a buffalo, close to Chinzwinini. One male lion killed a giraffe fairly close to the lodge on West Valley Road.

Leopards

- These secretive masters of camouflage have been in hiding for the most part, but we had a good sighting of a male from the boat; then while watching a breeding herd of elephant on the Sosiji turn-off we spotted a leopard a few metres from the elephants; and we saw a leopard carrying her meal of a scrub hare as we drove through Croc Creek.

Hyenas

- One clan denning in the Nyari area has two cubs. Members of this clan were seen trying to hunt a baby giraffe.
- One hyena was seen feeding on a young buffalo calf at Sosiji Dam.
- Mostly the hyenas have been seen trailing the wild dogs, and fighting with them as they try to steal kills.

Elephants

- There have been beautiful sightings of breeding herds this month, mostly concentrated along the banks of the Chiredzi River, and drinking at Ray's Drift.
- There have been daily sightings of bull elephants, either drinking, mud-bathing, feeding or scratching themselves on trees.
- At one rock art site an elephant bull was sniffing and moving around - upon closer inspection we found old elephant bones there, so the bull could have been "paying respect" to the dead elephant.
- This month conjured up a red elephant, which is better than a white one! It was covered in a red coating after mud-bathing and dusting in iron-rich red sand.

Rhinos

Some of our guests arrive on safari having never seen a rhino, and most having never seen wild rhinos with their splendid horns intact.

- **White:** Huge crashes of white rhino were seen gathered at their favourite pan this month, and on a couple of occasions there were one or two black rhinos among them too. One notable sighting was of six white rhinos - one cow and five bulls. There was lots of unrest indicating that the female may have been coming into season. The cutest little newborn calf was also seen with its mother at the pan, before they trotted off with the calf leading the way and the mother steering from behind.

- Black: There have been several sightings of black rhinos, a few of them included the rhinos putting on a display by charging at the vehicles. Black rhinos have been tracked on foot too which is an exhilarating experience.

Buffalos

- One of our new guides described seeing the biggest herd of buffalos he's ever seen, arriving to drink at the central pan. What they noticed from a long way out was a cloud of red dust drifting towards the water.
- Guests on boat cruise saw a buffalo on the banks one evening, and on the next afternoon's boat cruise they saw him again, only to find that he had been in a battle with a lion. He had bite marks and scratches all over his lower back, as well as canine puncture marks on his left shoulder. He should recover from the wounds.
- Sometimes different species take turns to drink but, such was the thirst of all one hot June day, it resulted in a breeding herd of buffaloes, three white rhinos and seven elephant bulls sharing the water at the central pan.

Wild dogs

- We know the area of the den, and we know they have pups as we have heard little puppy yelps and chattering, but we haven't seen them. Yet..!
- Guests witnessed a kill which was mercifully swift. As they got to Banyini open space they saw two hyenas running towards the water. At the pan were ten wild dogs that had chased a male impala into the shallow water. Some dogs went in after it, quickly tore it to pieces, got the carcass onto land and fed quickly whilst two hyenas were watching.
- It was fascinating to see the dogs trying to chase zebra and giraffe, but the zebra stood their ground and intimidated the dogs into backing off.
- The pack had a notable fight with six hyenas at Nhang Pan, and on this occasion the dogs won, sending two of the hyenas packing with bloodied hind quarters.
- The sighting of the month is detailed in the story that follows, of four hours of adrenalin and drama!

Plains game

- There seem to be quite a few newborn giraffes around which are simply enchanting. One of them still has its umbilical cord visible.
- There have been good numbers of all the usual plains game, as well as small herds of Lichtenstein hartebeest and eland.

Unusual sightings

- We were able to get fairly close to 20 hippos and watch them undisturbed, lying on a sand bank and soaking up the winter sunshine.
- Returning to the lodge one evening we saw a little family group of small-spotted genets. One genet came right up to inspect the vehicle.
- One big crocodile had a go at a whole group of little crocs. Maybe he was being territorial or maybe he wanted to eat one? He then started to go after another big croc that was slightly smaller than himself. The chase was on but we didn't see what finally happened because they submerged.
- An African wild cat made an appearance during a night drive.

Birds

- The best way to go birding on this property is via boat! On one safari cruise we saw: giant kingfisher, brown-hooded kingfisher, pied kingfisher, wattled lapwing, Kurrichane thrush, Meves's starling, reed cormorant, African darter, African fish eagle, African jacana, water thick-knee, African spoonbill, sacred

ibis, Kittlitz's plover, three-banded plover, green-backed heron, grey heron, great white egret, painted snipe, fork-tailed drongo, red-eyed dove, pied wagtail, black winged stilts, and African black crane - to name but a few!

Fishing

- The fishing has been fairly quiet this month, and will improve when the water warms up.

Water safari

- These are always a highlight. One guest brought along his guitar and played it for us after sunset on the way back to the jetty!

Bush walks

It's the best time to do bush walks! As our Head Guide, Brad Fouché says, "I think it's really good for guests to walk as it evens the playing field and gives them a real connection with the wilderness.

- One expedition to track black rhino on foot didn't get far because on finding tracks the guide and tracker walked a couple of paces only to look up and see a black rhino cow with a tiny calf, less than 50m away!
- A lovely walk up a valley to Chekwalani spring included some rock art viewing. At the spring were tracks of both species of rhino, buffalo, leopard, elephant and even a giraffe. On the way back a little family of dwarf mongooses were watched as they went about their business.
- A walk to the rock art sites at Chidumo also included a walk to the biggest baobab tree on the property. With a tape measure brought along for the occasion the group measured the girth of the baobab to be over 28m. Before walking back to the vehicle they enjoyed a treat of the baobab's sherbetty fruit.

Rock art

It's also the best time to discover the reserve's rock art.

- Guests have really loved this aspect of our wilderness, so much so that a couple visiting this month have said they would like to return specifically to search for more priceless art in these natural sandstone galleries.

Photographic hide

It's also a great time to slot in a visit to the sunken photographic hide, because it's our dry season and animals are drawn to the permanent water sources. Here's an account of an epic June hide experience:

- "Hwata was booming with plains game. As we got into the hide five elephant bulls came to the pan, followed by six white rhinos, one black rhino, then more elephants appeared, then more rhinos. We counted about 25 white rhinos! As if that wasn't enough, the Southern Pride started roaring from the south of the pan and then appeared in the open. It was like binge watching a wildlife series!"

Kambako Living Museum of Bushcraft

Even the drive to Kambako is an experience – guests saw nyalas, kudus, zebras, and yellow-billed hornbills along the way. Julius, as the head of bushcraft museum, takes over once guests arrive, and here's a guide's report on the activity:

- "Julius took everyone through the introduction of village life now, and in the past, referring to the Hunter Gatherer way of life. He demonstrated making fire by friction and let our guests have a go. Then he took us to where the women were doing beadwork and basketry and pottery. Water divining was also demonstrated which was beyond astonishing! Then smelting and forging were demonstrated, followed by bow and arrow shooting. The guests enjoyed it so much, their only complaint was that the afternoon was too short!"

Some exciting and informative Bush Stories follow, as well as a June Gallery of images.

Life, death, murder, robbery, drowning, hunger, feasting – and so much more. It began with a late start to the morning, my guests preferring to have breakfast first before going on game drive. We left the lodge at 7:45 and I knew the African wild dog pack had been seen, so I was eager to get going in the hope of being able to give my guests a sighting of these highly endangered, co-operative, camouflaged predators. If a pack is the bow, then each individual is an arrow, and it is an incredible privilege to watch them hunt.

We saw them briefly on Ultimate Drive Road, off Pamushana Access, and then they drifted off into the bushveld north of Access. Guide Jephath Diza and I worked on re-establishing the sighting by veering off on nearby roads, in a pincer formation, and heading towards Sosigi Dam. Jephath arrived there first but didn't find them at the dam and wondered if they were doubling back and returning to their den where a hungry litter of pups would be waiting. I continued on and as we emerged at the bridge at Sosigi we saw two dogs dart out of the bush next to us, and a herd of impala took off running with the dogs chasing after them. They headed in the direction we had just come from, so we went back, but lost them, and couldn't find any more clues.

At this point I suggested to my guests that we go back to Sosigi as the pack might return there to drink and relax. As luck would have it there they all were, all huddled around the bridge, but very nervous to cross it. They were all seriously concentrating on the water, watching it, but to us there was nothing to see and we wondered what on earth was going on. Two dogs then summed up the courage to cross the bridge and in time we crossed too and followed the dogs walking along the western side of the water's edge. One dog leapt through a shallow bay while the rest of the pack still concentrated on the water. Next second we see an impala's head pop up from the deeper water!

During the time when we lost them they chased those impala, double-backed with them, and managed to chase one ram into the water. From near the bridge and it had swum all the way north to where we were watching them on the western side. But, a crocodile of about 8 foot lives in that dam, and it had not missed the opportunity. It was latched onto the impala, albeit with a poor hold on its back. All eight dogs were running up and down and around the water's edge in a highly agitated state.



We even witnessed two dogs swim right across the top end of the dam which was very unusual. They know the hidden risks of what lies beneath the water's surface only too well.

The poor impala struggled with the crocodile for over an hour before the shock was just too much for it and it eventually drowned. Had the wild dogs caught it on land its life would have been over in a few seconds. We settled on the eastern side of Sosigi and watched as two dogs went into the water, climbed on a fallen tree, and tried to retrieve their meal, but were wisely too scared to commit to the depths. The dogs lost their precious meal to the crocodile, and could only lie on the bank and watch it disappear.







Even the hooded vultures that had followed the hunting pack, like a pair of drones, seemed confused as to where their potential scavenging meal had disappeared to.



The dogs rested in the shade and watched as their daily sustenance was devoured by the crocodile.

Impala rutting

The final battles of the rutting season are taking place – the air is filled with guttural war cries, horns clash, muscles strain and dust flies – all in the effort to win mating rights with the ewes and pass their genes on to the next generation. May the best man win, etc.



Photos by Sarah Ball

The Lichtenstein hartebeest

Last month I focused on the warthogs who don't get as much publicity as they deserve, and I think the Lichtenstein hartebeest suffers a similar fate. They are rather strange looking, and probably only rivalled in this department by wildebeest. However, Sarah Ball captured this beautiful image of a hartebeest, flanked by three doves, heading towards a waterhole, so let's learn to love this creature a little more:

1. The name "hartebeest" originates from the Dutch word "hertebeest" that translates into "deer beast". The Lichtenstein prefix comes from zoologist Martin Lichtenstein.
2. Lichtenstein hartebeest weigh about 150 kg (330 lb), and they eat grasses.
3. The horns, found on both sexes, appear from the side to be shaped like the letter 'S', and appear from the front to be shaped like the letter 'O' with its upper portion missing. Useful should they need to send out an SOS signal!
4. They gather in herds of five to 15 females and calves with a single male, who leads them, and likes to stand sentry duty (and pose) on termite mounds.
5. Lichtenstein hartebeest are very territorial. Males mark out their territories by digging up soil with their horns around the borders and forming dung piles in their respective territories.
6. They make bellow and sneeze-snort sounds.
7. They tend to band together when calves are born, possibly to provide greater protection for them against predators.
8. One of their conspicuous body movements is the 'head-to-flank' move, in which the head is rubbed against the shoulder. A secretion rubs from the preorbital glands on the face rubs off onto the flanks, and dust sticks to this forming a characteristic dark patch on the flanks.
9. The average lifespan of a wild Lichtenstein hartebeest is about 20 years.



Twitter



The dark-capped bulbul is one of the lesser-sung avian characters we see here. Actually, that's not true – they make an exceptional amount of noise, especially when they want to “help” you with your breakfast at the lodge!

This little one was all fluffed up from the cold and waiting to warm up before resorting to its chatty antics.

How cheeky are these two yellow-billed oxpeckers taking advantage of the “delicious treats” around this big buffalo bull’s eyes, while he’s holding his head still to drink?



Photos by Sarah Ball

June Gallery

A male lion, in excellent condition, made quick work of this approximately three-year-old giraffe.



Photos by Brad Fouché





Mother and calf Lichtenstein hartebeest, and white rhinos, replenishing their water intake.

Photos by Sarah Ball.

Compiled by Jenny Hishin