

Singita



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

Temperature

Average minimum: 13.7°C (56.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.7°C (51.2°F)
Average maximum: 26.7°C (80.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 33.1°C (91.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 0 mm
Season to date: 714.5 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:31
Sunset: 17:24

The winter chill creeps in during the night and some mornings have been dressed in thick mist, but by mid-morning we have clear, warm, winter lowveld days. As the sun sets it gives rise to a riot of colours filtering through the clouds. The sightings this month have been excellent. One outing even racked up the “Big Five” on morning drive. This was pretty easy considering that at Croc Creek, which is in the valley below the lodge, there was one leopard, four hyenas, one bull elephant and two lions. The leopard had killed an impala which attracted the hyenas and lions. Adding buffalos and rhinos to a start like that was a piece of cake!

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

Lions

There has been significant lion activity, and they’ve made a variety of kills including buffalo, giraffe, zebra and warthog.

- Nduna Pride: Six members were seen at Nduna Dam, including a mating pair. Later in the month eight members were seen in the same area: two males, five lionesses and one year-old cub. Then

six lionesses killed a big female buffalo. One of the lionesses displayed her formidable strength by dragging the buffalo carcass by herself. Four members of the pride killed a young giraffe in Banyini. Twenty hyenas were kept waiting for the leftovers, as were six black-backed jackals.

- Hippo Pride: This pride was seen east of the swamps, in the same area as a breeding herd of elephants. Eight members of this pride as well as four cubs were seen sleeping in the riverbed below Chikwete Cliffs.
- Coalition of three males: This coalition killed a buffalo near Kwali. They alternated between feeding and resting with steadfast intention. Hyenas wisely waited their turn.

Leopards

- The majority of sightings have been of the female leopard in the Ultimate Drive area. We hope her cubs are safely hidden and well fed. She was lying on a rock when two impalas came bolting past. She jumped up and was wanting to hunt, but a wild dog dashed into the scene chasing the impalas. On another occasion she was seen feeding on a buffalo calf carcass. That's an impressive kill for a female leopard. She was also seen snacking on a dassie, in addition to the impala carcass she had at Croc Creek, so she is a formidable hunter and provider.
- On the Hippo Valley side a leopard was seen crossing the road, and making its way through a group of three white rhinos. The rhinos fled in all directions.

Wild dogs

- Its denning season! The pack of eight on the Hippo Valley side seem to be denning in the same area as last year.
- An incredible sighting was watching wild dogs running on the road and then hunting and chasing impalas. They killed an impala but hyenas came to steal it. There was a big fight and that attracted some lions that were in the area, and they barged in to steal the impala carcass.
- Another standout moment was watching wild dogs running through a breeding herd of elephants, which upset the elephants greatly. The wild dogs caught an impala close by and we saw them and the elephants altogether, as well as an opportunistic hyena that didn't get its way.

Rhinos

- White rhinos: There are daily sightings of white rhinos, always. Often the sightings are of multiple crashes resulting in high numbers of white rhinos seen on a drive. Highlights for the month include seeing two rhino mothers with tiny calves at a waterhole. Another far more dramatic scene was of five white rhinos fighting over a drinking space. One male was very aggressive and challenged the others. He had realised that a nearby female was in breeding condition, so he didn't want other males to be near her.
- Black rhinos: You never quite know what mood black rhinos will be in. One gave a charge twice before running away, another stood on the side of the road and made few steps towards the vehicle. Then there was the jackpot of seeing six black rhinos along Pamushana Access Road. But the ultimate was probably the four black rhinos that waded towards the cruising boat on the Malilangwe Dam and gave the guests the sighting of a lifetime!

Elephants

- Breeding herds have been seen with young calves, cows and young bulls. The mature bulls have been keeping to themselves, and then gathering to drink at the permanent water sources. Some of the breeding herds are so vast it is not uncommon to see other animals dotted about in their midst, such as when three black rhinos were seen among them, at sunset in the Hippo Valley swamps.

Hyenas

- A delightful scene was seeing a hyena mother suckling her young one. Three hyenas were on the side of the road, huddled together to keep warm. The baby made a laughing sound, begging for milk, and then happily suckled.
- A pack of hyenas was seen feeding on a wildebeest carcass, on Pamushana Access Road.

- Most of the other hyena sightings have been of them in the company of lions and wild dogs as they wait for a turn to scavenge from the other predators' kills.

Buffalos

- Herds in their hundreds have gathered to drink at Chikwete, Hwata, and Banyini.
- A beautiful sight was of a herd drinking at the river. They all descended a steep bank to the water, then lined up along the water's edge. It was just as incredible to hear the sound of gallons of water being drunk.

Plains game

- The plains game of giraffe, zebra, wildebeest and impala are abundant. There were a few sightings of hartebeest, eland and sable too.
- It was surprising to see two kudu cows running towards the water of Sosigi Dam, jumping in and swimming across. Within minutes we saw a big crocodile following behind the kudu. Luckily the kudu managed to cross to the other side of the dam. We suspect wild dogs must have chased them into the water, but we didn't see them and they didn't pursue their quarry.

Photographic hide

Hwata Hide is the place to be! The sheer number and diversity of animals that come to this pan to drink is incredible, and being inside the sunken photographic hide gives you unprecedented wildlife viewing.

- This month our guests were treated to sightings of bull elephants, rhinos, buffalo herds, hyenas, lions, hartebeest, wildebeest, warthog, giraffes, zebras and impalas.
- It was interesting to see two zebra stallions put up a fight - they reared up on their hind legs and pawed and bit at each other.
- Some of the elephants forgot their manners when they squirted mud from their trunks on our guests inside the hide!
- Some animals waited patiently to take their turn to drink. Others did not. One elephant bull kept on chasing the zebras and wildebeest that wanted to drink. One zebra chased a warthog from the water. Three swollen-bellied male lions got charged by a white rhino, but then a male elephant challenged both the rhino and lions, making sure he dominated the waterhole.

Other sightings/observations

- A brown hyena was seen from the West Valley Road.
- Pangolin tracks were seen heading north on Pipeline Road.

Boat cruises

- These are just the best! So zen, so relaxing, and the most beautiful way to appreciate the scenery, sunset and sundowners. On the wildlife front birds, hippos and crocodiles are guaranteed. Bird enthusiasts counted 28 different species on one outing. A highlight was seeing a pied kingfisher that had caught a small bream and was tenderising it by beating it on a tree. There were so many wildlife bonuses this month that included seeing elephants, black rhinos, lions, buffalo, waterbuck and impala on the shoreline.

Fishing

- It's not the greatest time for fishing, as the water is too cold for the fish to be actively feeding.

Gonarezhou National Park

- Lots of elephants were seen on the day trips to Gonarezhou National Park which is to be expected. A lucky sightings was seeing a pride of lions too. But the most satisfying sight for us was seeing tracks of both black and white rhinos in the park, thanks to the successful translocation of rhinos there, many of which have come from Malilangwe.

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

Hunting for wild dogs

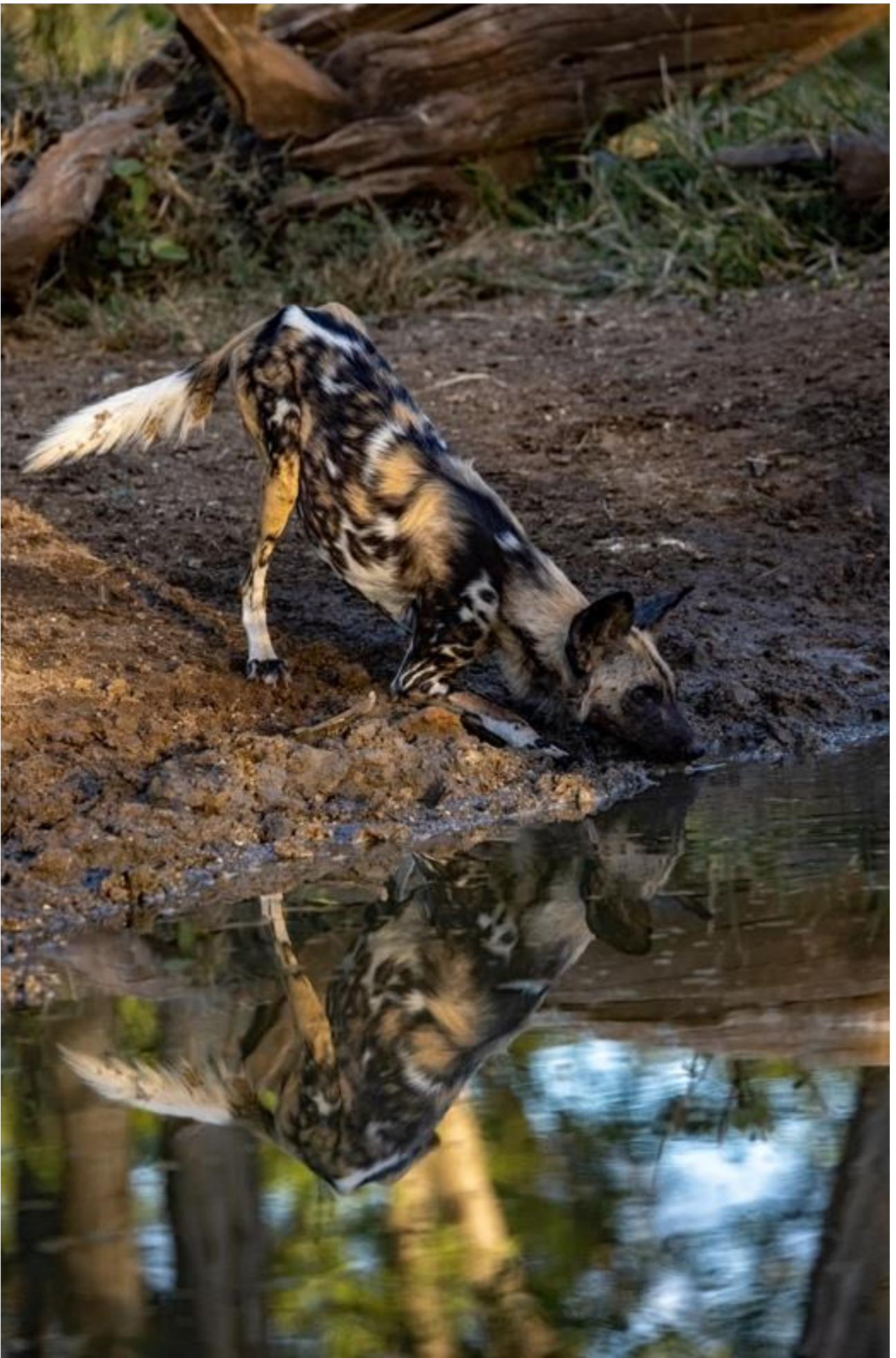
We'd been searching high and low for the pack of African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*). These patchwork predators range across vast territories - sometimes covering more than 50 kilometres in a day, so tracking them down is tricky. Finally, we found them resting near a pan, their white-tipped tails flicking in the afternoon light. A large herd of buffalo had claimed the water, milling and sloshing as they drank. Buffalo are formidable adversaries - adults weigh up to 900 kilograms, and I have seen them kill young lions. The dogs had wisely retreated into the thickets to avoid any confrontation. The afternoon stretched on, and every so often the dogs would raise their big, radar-shaped ears to check on the buffalo or any other sound.





As the sun dipped low the buffalo trailed away into the mopane woodland, and the dogs began to stir. They yawned, stretched, sneezed, and pestered each other – all signals to rouse the pack, and shook their lean bodies, built perfectly for endurance hunting.





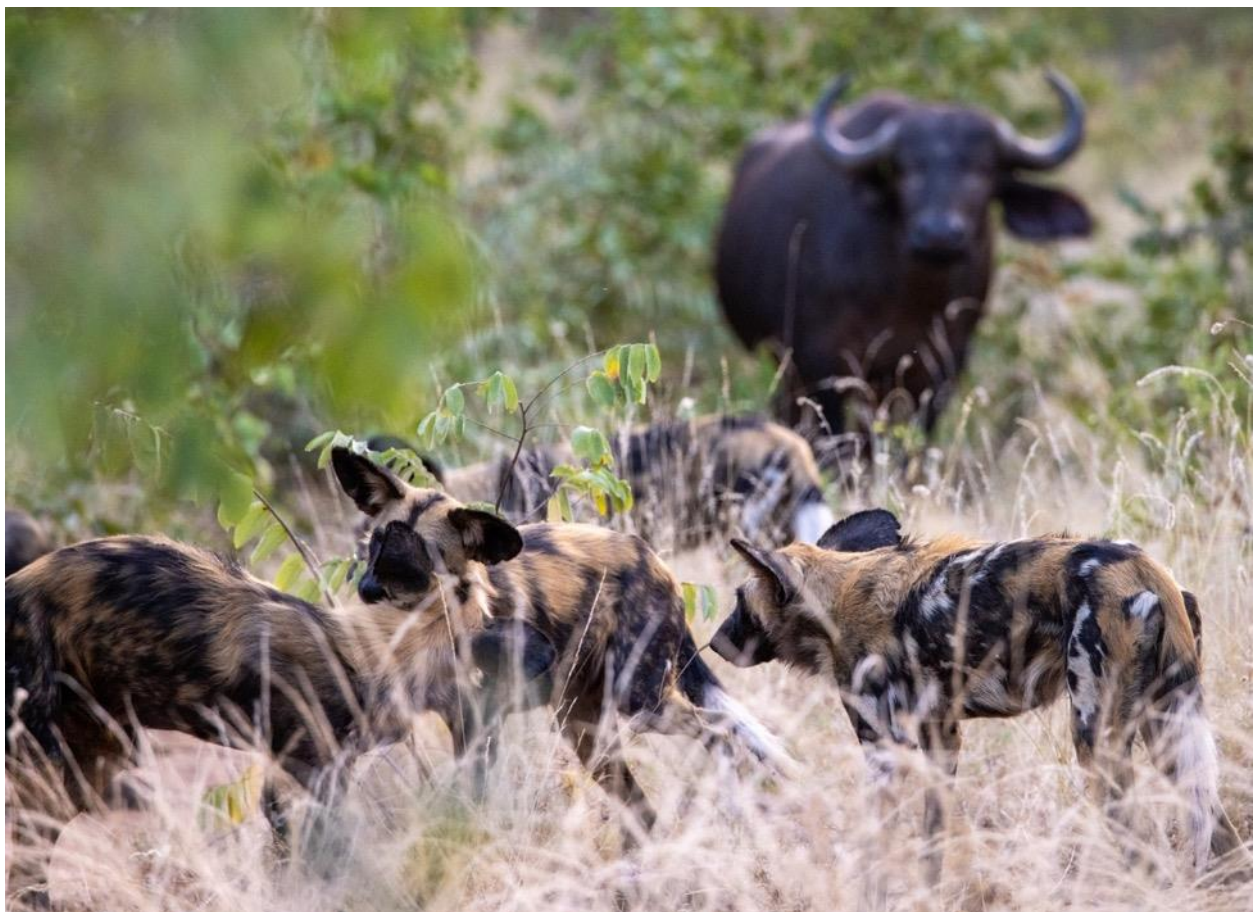


They trotted to the edge of the pan, casting beautiful rippling reflections in the fading light. One stopped to drink, lapping quickly - wild dogs rarely linger at the water's edge because they're wary of crocodiles. Then, in a well-rehearsed performance slipped into formation and set off in the direction of the buffalos.

To a casual observer, they might have seemed merely curious, ambling innocently behind the herd. But African wild dogs are masters of strategy and patience. They often follow larger animals, watching for opportunities - a calf lagging behind, a limping adult, any momentary weakness.

They rely on their phenomenal stamina and teamwork rather than stealth alone, sometimes chasing prey for kilometres until it collapses. As the last light faded, the dogs disappeared into the thickets, playfully jumping up and nipping one another.

The hunt was about to begin...



Going into Nature

Why do I return to this spot? What draws me here? What makes me get out of the vehicle and immerse myself in this landscape? Why am I obsessed with trying to catch a hint of its perfection in a photo? The answers are hard to put into words – this landscape creates a feeling of recalibrating your soul.

In wondering what to write about these photos I thought of a favourite quote by American writer Henry David Thoreau, in 1854, from his book, 'Walden'. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

I'm currently reading a book published in 2021, 'Black Lion – Alive in the Wilderness' by South African Sicelo Mbatha and co-written by Bridget Pitt. It is Mbatha's account of life as a wilderness spiritual guide. On his umkhiwanesacredpathways.com website he states, "The elements of nature have birthed me, and I am one with them. I breathe the same air as the lion roaring for the moonrise, I breathe the same air as the dung beetle foraging underfoot... My mission is to go beyond a superficial tourist safari experience of wildlife; to draw on my indigenous wisdom and knowledge of the bush to enable people to have a deep, transformative experience in nature; to walk with reverence, attention and humility on the sacred pathways of the wilderness... Every encounter with wild creatures has brought symbolic messages to me; has brought me teachings that I could never find in a textbook. It has been my life's path to rekindle the wildness in all of us; to bring people into the presence of wildness, and help open their souls to its beauty, wisdom, and infinite power to heal. I believe awakening our souls to the healing power and wisdom of nature will help us reknit our broken relationship with the natural world and with each other, and help us repair the devastating consequences of climate change, pollution, environmental destruction, and social injustice."



These authors speak my language, regardless of the century, with resonating phrases, observations and insights. And, like a hand that fits a glove, the essence is part of the Singita philosophy too. It is what we as guides try to mediate for our guests. Simply put it is not our aim at Singita to, "Go on game drive" - but rather to, "Go into Nature." Together we can recalibrate our souls in this wilderness landscape.



Mammoths magnified

We had high hopes for a late afternoon session in the sunken photographic hide at Hwata Pan, and weren't disappointed. This hide really comes into its own now during the dryer months when natural pans have all but dried up. As we opened the sturdy steel door and settled ourselves inside, the world beyond our periphery vision melted away, replaced by a thrill of, "What's going to arrive?" The six front windows that open up onto the waterhole, with no glass – only the open air between you – give you front row seats to whatever might wander in.

Soon enough four large elephant bulls emerged, almost silently, from the mopane woodlands. The late afternoon light was beautiful, and you could sense the elephants were in no hurry and would be with us for a long while.



It was amazing to watch them, only metres away, as each tested the water, sucked up an initial amount and then blew that out, before sucking up larger volumes and pouring it into their mouths. There was some jostling for position, but the first 20 minutes or so was all about serious drinking. After that they sprayed water on themselves to cool down, had mudbaths, and engaged in some friendly sparring and displays of what could be interpreted as brotherly affection.

Another advantage of being in the hide is that you witness all this 'big picture' behaviour, but are also able to zoom in with your camera lens and photograph details impossible to see from a vehicle or on foot: You notice the mapwork of skin wrinkles, their bristly hairs, the soupy droplets of water dripping off them, the large veins in their ears, and stains on their skin.

Sometimes the elephants stand directly in front of the hide's window openings and are only centimetres away! Then their details are further amplified, at eye level, and you might feel their breath, notice the flecks of dry mud on their eyelashes, or how their two nostrils end in fingertips. You might even get splashed with mud!

Protected by the hide's sturdy walls, it is both a humbling and electrifying and addictive experience. The elephants spent over two hours with us – precious moments never to be forgotten.





Above: Curtains of water droplets. Below: stains of green from feeding, and red from dust bathing.





Above: Brotherhood companionship. Below: a green mopane leaf stuck to a stained ivory tusk.





Above: Notice the divide between the two nostrils, and the hairs on the trunk.
Below: Marvel at the shine on wet toenails and the patterns beneath their feet.



Twitter



A white-backed vulture (*Gyps africanus*) ruffles its feathers while picturesquely perched.



An African openbill (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) in the fire opal shallows.



This was an interesting sighting – for once the hoopoe (*Upupa africana*) didn't fly off. Then it became clear why not, as it was pecking/drilling furiously into the ground with unflappable determination. Then it fished out the prize – a nutritious solifuge.



Solifuges thrive in arid environments, where they hunt insects and other small creatures, often at night. They spend much of their time underground or sheltering in burrows, crevices, or under rocks to escape the heat of the day and avoid predators.



African hoopoes forage mainly on the ground, using their long, slender bills to probe into soil, leaf litter, and crevices in search of insects and larvae. They deftly open their bills underground to grasp hidden prey.

Such a rare event to see a hoopoe making a kill!



Below is the empty hole after the hoopoe flew off. You can see its tracks in the soil.

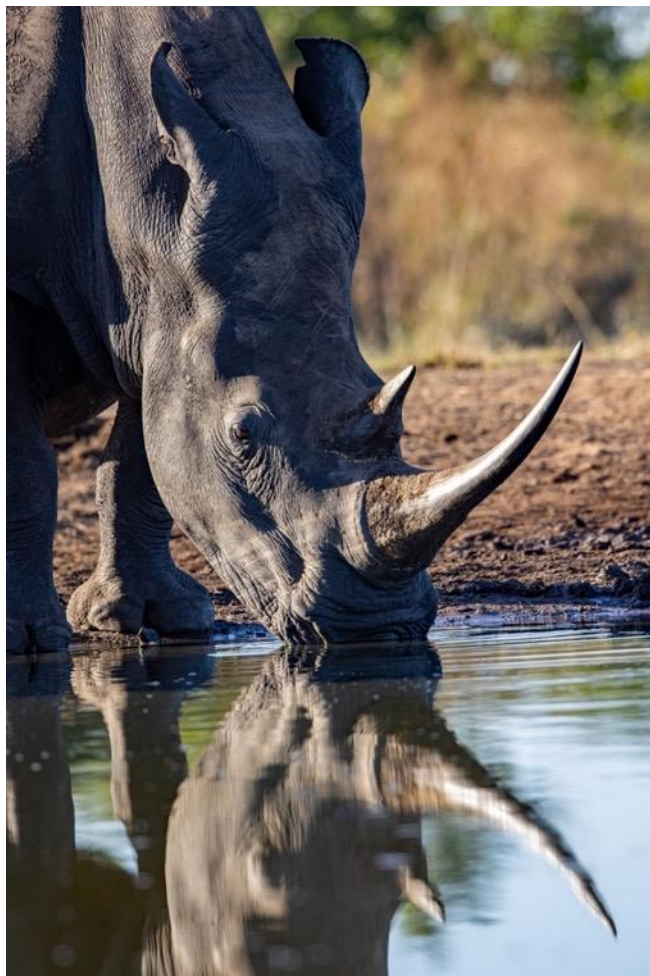




Yet another kill! This time an armoured cricket proves to be a crunchy snack for a yellow-billed hornbill (*Tockus leucomelas*).



June Gallery



The striking reflections of rhinos as they approach the water's edge and drink.





The doe-eyed expressions of a kudu female (left), nyala bull (right), and kudu bull (below).





Views from the platform at Nduna Dam – a favourite place to stop for sundowners, watch the kaleidoscope of light play across the water, and see what animals emerge to come and drink.





A lion cub from the Hippo Valley Pride.
Buffalo family portrait.





Impala inbound.

A young wildebeest kneels to drink next to another, while oxpeckers have a quick bath.





Adult dragonflies are such beauties! They go through an incomplete metamorphosis, meaning they have three stages in their life cycle: egg, nymph (or larva), and adult. The nymph lives in the water, while the adult lives in the air. Female dragonflies lay their eggs in or near water, often on submerged plants or trees. The eggs hatch into nymphs, which are aquatic larvae. They breathe through gills and spend most of their

lives in the water, moulting several times as they grow. When a nymph is fully grown, it climbs out of the water, often onto a plant/tree stem. It moults one last time, and the adult dragonfly emerges, its wings unfolding and hardening. The adult dragonfly then lives in the air, mating and laying eggs to continue the cycle.



Dragonfly nymph casings on the dead statuesque trees in the Malilangwe Dam.



One of the elfin butterflies sips nectar, as one of the blues butterflies flutters by.

