

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT

SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE

For the month of January, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five

Temperature

Average minimum: 22.4°C (72.3°F)
Minimum recorded: 19.2°C (66.5°F)
Average maximum: 26.9°C (80.4°F)
Maximum recorded: 39.2°C (102.5°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 187 mm
Season to date: 391 mm
*Season = Sep to Aug

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 05:37
Sunset: 18:37

Our rain dances continue to be rewarded, and the fauna and flora are flourishing. The dramatic weather makes for equally dramatic sunsets and there's nothing better than to watch the stars and planets appear, refreshing drink in hand, and discuss the day's sightings under a crescent moon. The magic of Malilangwe has kept our guests spellbound, and we've particularly enjoyed spending time with keen birders and botanists this month.

A sightings snapshot for January follows:

Lions

- The month's sightings have been dominated by the Nduna Pride, and they seem to have gained a lioness as we are now seeing eight members; three males and five females. It's possible that the Nduna Split / Northern Pride are in flux, possibly with one of the lionesses returning to her natal pride. There has also been a mating pair in the Nduna Pride.
- We've seen lions feeding on different prey, being a giraffe and a young kudu bull, as their hunting strategy changes in the green season.

Leopards

- We've enjoyed watching a leopard stalking some impalas north of Ray's Drift, and seeing two leopards – a mother and her cub on the rocks on Ultimate Drive.
- The highlight undoubtedly was witnessing a zebra stallion chasing a female leopard up a tree! When she tried to escape the zebra chased after her up the hill!

Wild dogs

- The pack of 17 are doing well, and we've seen them hunting impalas with and without success. On a successful hunt two hyenas tried to rob them of their kill, but were chased off in a group effort.

Rhinos

- Sightings of white rhinos are excellent – something we can guarantee during any stay. A very special moment this month was watching three white rhinos drinking at Nduna Dam, while a short distance away the Nduna Pride of lions lay sleeping in the shade.
- The black rhino sightings have been very good, mostly of them browsing, or crossing a road, or coming to inspect a vehicle. The best was spying two black rhinos having a soothing mudbath and rolling in the mud, blissfully unaware of our presence.

Elephants

- A large old elephant bull died this month, after incurring an injury from fighting with another bull. This sad but natural cause provided a boon for so many scavengers and predators. Seen feeding on the carcass over several days were droves of white-backed vultures, some hooded vultures, a couple of lappet-faced vultures, jackals, ten hyenas, and two lions – as well as thousands of insects and other decomposers.
- Happier sightings were of vast breeding herds of elephants drinking, swimming and mudbathing at the river and dams, and the most delightful was seeing a day-old calf with its family, north of Chivi.

Hyenas

- The hyenas are always up to high jinks – such intelligent creatures and fascinating to watch.

Buffalos

- The large herds of buffalos are still drawn to the dams and the river where they like to drink en-masse. They make use of the seasonal pans for quick sips during the day or exuberant mud-wallowing. Some of the breeding herds we see number over 200 animals.

Plains game

- The plains game still think it is Christmas with all the food around! Huge herds of zebras have been a highlight, as well as the shyer species like Lichtenstein's hartebeest, eland, and sable.

Birding

- The birds are busy-busy-busy – it's the season for feeding and raising chicks. At the request of guests some of our drives have specifically been for birding and it makes for a great adventure.

Unusual sightings

There have been quite a few unusual sightings this January. Three that stand out are:

- A black mamba being mobbed by birds.
- An African wild cat out on the prowl.
- A large crocodile, far from the water, tucked inside the roots of a large rock fig tree.

Boat cruises

- The sundowner boat cruises are the most idyllic way to spend an afternoon, and one of the many highlights was seeing a hippo cow with a tiny newborn calf come out of the water, to go grazing for the evening.

Fishing

- The fishing excursions were thoroughly enjoyed and guests managed to catch quite a few tilapias. Not to be outdone were a pair of fish eagles rejoicing with a big tilapia that the one had caught.

Walking and Photographic Hide

- We don't offer walks in the rainy season when the bush is very thick and concealing, but look forward to offering these during the dry season when conditions are favourable. (Of course there is a gym with treadmills and all the equipment you need should you wish to exercise.)
- The sunken photographic hide is not used during the wettest months either as the water table is too high, and the animals are not drawn to the pan as much as they are in the dry months.

Rock art

- Fortunately some of the rock art is situated close to the roads, so guests can still enjoy seeing these ancient pigment paintings made by the hunter-gatherers that survived here hundreds of years ago.

Daytrips to Gonarezhou National Park

- The park closed mid- January to public visitors, as they do each year in order to maintain roads and camps, and will reopen at the end of February, but Singita Pamushana guests are still allowed access, and daytrips are still offered. dependent on the weather.

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

Powder bomb

We were driving along the river road in the late morning, with plans to head back to the lodge, but as we turned east we were rendered immobile by the most glorious roadblock: A breeding herd of elephants were having a dust bath in the woodland area, where the soil is the softest.

It was divine to see them scuff up the sand with their front feet, then Hoover it up with their trunks, then flick their trunks over their bodies sending extravagant curlicues of powdery sand into the air that rained down upon them.

When elephants throw dust over their bodies, it helps to protect their skin from the harsh sun and biting insects. The morning was just revving up to be a scorching day, so their timing in “the powder room” was perfect.

The layer of dust acts as a natural sunscreen, reducing the risk of sunburn, especially on areas of their skin that are more exposed, like their ears and backs. It also helps to create a barrier against parasites, including





ticks and other pests that might irritate their skin. By covering themselves in dust, elephants also regulate their body temperature, as the layer absorbs moisture from the environment, keeping them cooler in hot weather.

As we were there for quite some time we were able to observe how accurate and precise they are with their trunks. They suck in a specific quantity of sand, then spray it exactly where they want it to land – be it their left or right flanks, their backs, and even their bellies. Fortunately we were upwind of them otherwise we would have been drenched in sand too.

In woodland areas where trees provide partial shade, dust bathing is often a communal activity, with groups of elephants gathering together to indulge in the ritual, enjoying both the social interaction and the benefits of the bath.

How clever and adaptable they are. And what effective roadblocks!

Hippo Valley swamps



On the western side of the Chiredzi River is a vast area known as Hippo Valley. When the river is crossable, the area makes for a diverse safari experience because of the landscape.

Riverine forests line parts of the river creating a contrast with the more open grasslands. The savannah grasslands are flat stretches with great visibility, excellent for game viewing. The wooded areas dominated by miombo trees (which are a type of dry woodland) are particularly beautiful when they're vibrant green and full of life.

However, the focus for many of our drives are the seasonal wetlands. We'll say we're going to "the swamps". It's an area on Hippo Valley that's excellent for birding, elephant herds and so much else. These are some of the sightings offered up at the swamps on one morning drive:

A white rhino on the left, and in the same spot, by looking over your right shoulder, was a black rhino.





A large bull elephant, with a tide mark on his body from wading through the river, heads off into the forest as a herd of wildebeest graze, and white cattle egrets follow.

Enjoying the foliage that the swamps support were two white rhinos with zebras in the foreground.



It's such a great location for photography too as the open areas offer that "abundant plains of old Africa" feel, and the umbrella tree (*Vachellia tortilis*) forests are the best there can be. The trees are enormous, their dark inky trunks fountain to the sky and the most delicate lacework of foliage drapes over them.

Leaving the swamp area we circled around to the edge of an umbrella tree forest and found a herd of waterbuck grazing and enjoying the shade there.



You could easily fill up a whole journal on the birdlife to be seen on Hippo Valley, and the flowers, and the smaller creatures. This leopard tortoise was about to cross the track. Tortoises are one of the highlights of the rainy summer season. They are most active when food is optimal, so that they can build up their food reserves for the long, dry winter.



Cub creation

The lioness lies where she wants to with the attentive but wary male a few metres away. Then she yawns, gets up, stretches and saunters over to him, arching her back, flicking her tail and moving in a low, slinky, curvaceous way – a behaviour known as 'lordosis'. She rubs her head under his chin. The male gets up, nimbly navigates around her, she lies down, mating takes place, and towards the end of it he bites/holds the back of her neck. Then he jumps away trying to avoid a clawed-paw swipe as the lioness rolls on her back, before settling down and napping again for another 20 minutes or so. This is the act of mating among lions and it's quite something to watch!

So often lion sightings are of them lying down asleep beneath shady bushes or in long grass. But not these two lovers – they were out in an open meadow, in full sunlight, right next to the road that takes you to Nduna. Seeing their facial expressions and sinuous leonine behaviour is a rare treat. It's also incredible to see the size difference between a full-grown territorial male and a younger lioness.

There has been much mating activity in the Nduna Pride in the recent months, so we look forward to new cubs in the near future. The gestation period for lions is 110 days. Currently the Nduna Pride has eight members: three territorial males and five females. The males patrol around Banyini, Pamushana, Malevula, Hwata, the northern and eastern boundary, Lojaan, Manuchi, but they don't cross west of the Chiredzi River. The lioness stay around Nduna area.









It was somewhat alarming when the lioness got up and enticed the male to come over and do the deed right next to our vehicle, in the shade thrown by the game-viewer and its canopy – as you can see in the photo above. With their minds on one thing only they are not fazed by onlookers at all.



The best thing to do at this point is nothing at all. Starting the vehicle would disturb them and that's not acceptable. At arm's length away the lioness noticed her own movement in the reflection off the vehicle, flattened her ears and inspected the intruder, quickly realising that it was of no concern. On reviewing this photograph I can actually see the reflection of the game-viewer in her eyes. After another 20 minute nap in the shade of the vehicle she got up again, the male in tow, and walked off in the direction of Nduna Dam, and we took our leave after a very memorable encounter.

Twitter



Right: A red-headed weaver tirelessly attends to the complexities of weaving a nest for a female.

Below: A Dickinson's kestrel grips a pinnacle perch.

Below right: An osprey launches itself into the air.

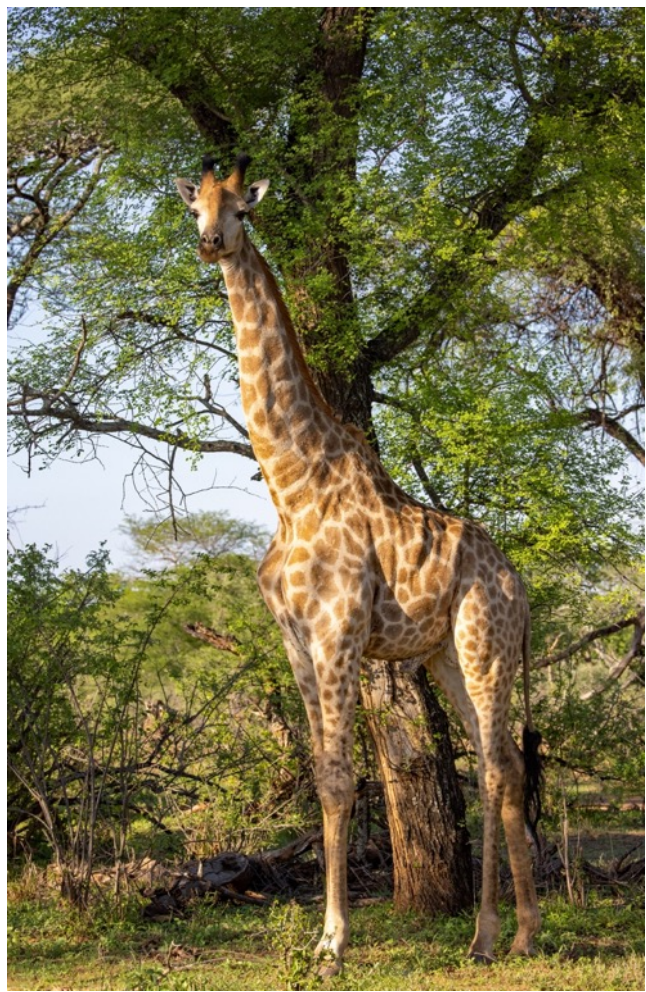


January Gallery



A mother white rhino and her calf, mowing the meadows.
A heavily pregnant hyena gnaws on a scrap for all the extra nutrients she can get.





On the lookout: klipspringer, giraffe, kudu





An unexpected encounter of three black rhinos on the airstrip at 05h00, proving that the early bird gets the worm. The bull wandered off, but the mother with her calf in tow trotted over to do vehicle inspection...





The original version of downward dog.
The entrance tunnel of a mopane bee hive. Detail of a leopard tortoise shell.





A breeding herd of elephants enjoying the new growth.
Heading out on a sunset cruise and discussing the days sightings.

