Singita *Lamai*
Mara River Tented Camp
Tanzania

Wildlife Report

For the month of November, Two Thousand and Fourteen

The migration was far gone in November, but good general game remained on the plains. When the migration moves through an area the wildebeests chop the grass short with their teeth and hooves, leaving freshly cut, short grass that most grazing species find very tasty. Zebra, topi, Thomson's gazelle and a few wildebeest stragglers dotted the savannahs of the Lamai Triangle, feasting on all the goodness.

The 'tommies' of east Africa

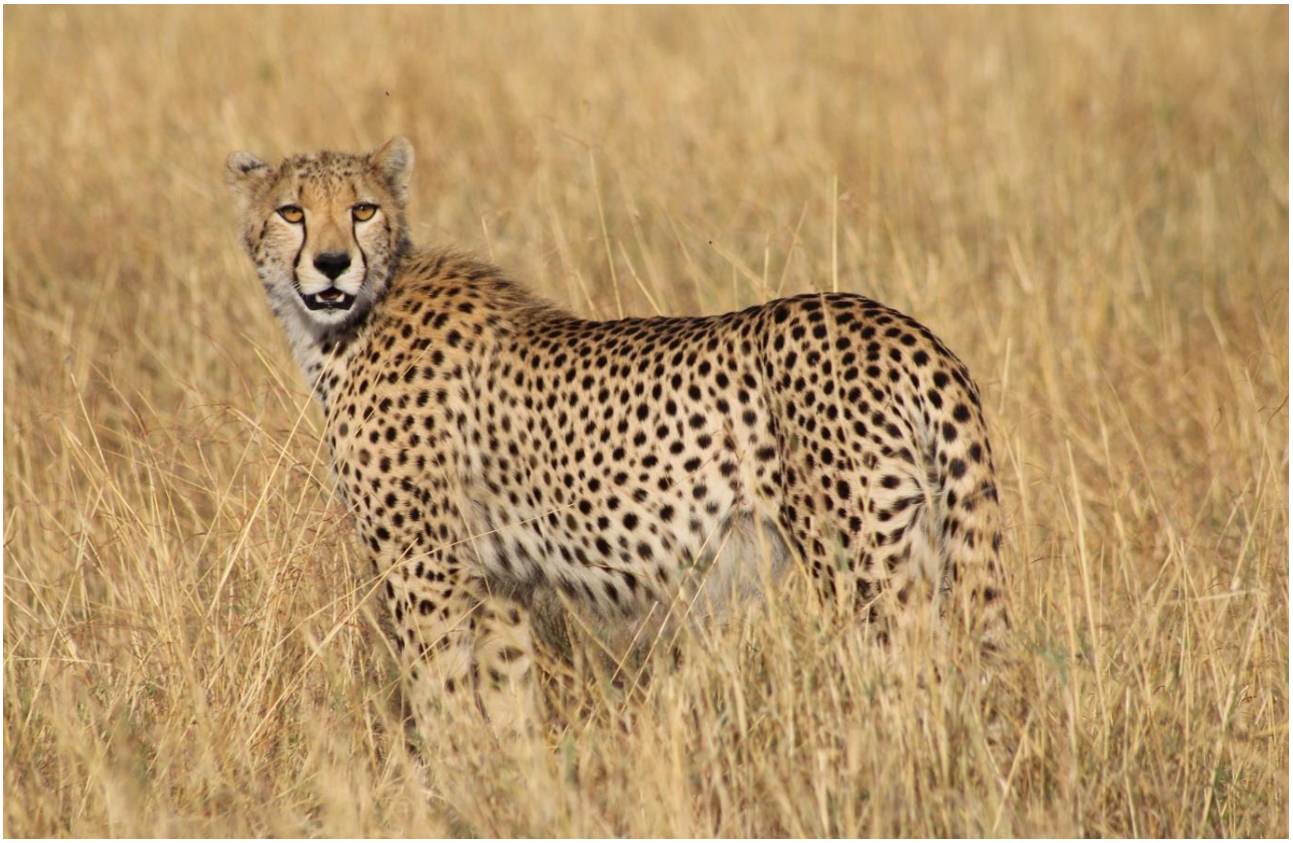
Thomson's gazelles *(Eudorcas thomsonii)* or tommies as they are referred to, are one of the few antelope that are exclusively east-African and are recognised as the most common of the gazelle 'tribe' in the region.

Their range includes northern Tanzania, extends through Kenya in the west and just across the border into southern Sudan. One of the best places to view Thomson's gazelles is within the Mara/Serengeti ecosystem, where they are one of the species that form part of the annual great migration. There are in the vicinity of half a million tommies within this area.

They are typically found in large numbers on short grass areas during the rains where they feed on new grass shoots. Unfortunately, this puts them in the same place as their main predator - the speeding cheetah! Tommies don't make themselves an easy meal though, they are one of the (if not the) fastest of the antelopes in Africa. They are capable of speeds between 82-89 km/h (50-55 mph). They also make sharp, sudden zigzagging movements when being chased in an attempt to get their pursuer to overshoot and thereby creating a larger distance between the pursued and the pursuer.

During the drier months they will move in to taller grasslands and woodlands where they will concentrate on browsing shrubs when green grasses aren't available.

Thomson's gazelles are named in honour of Joseph Thompson, a Scottish explorer. Thompson was tasked with collecting specimens and recording observations for the Royal Geographical Society in an expedition undertaken in Tanganyika (as Tanzania was known at the time) in 1878. He also has a number of other African species named in his honour, including a tropical freshwater snail found in Lake Tanganyika.



The Mara River

The Mara River runs through Kenya and Tanzania, and Singita Mara River Tented Camp has the prime location of being set on its banks. It is mainly famous for its role in the great migration, but the Mara River has many other interesting roles beyond being the place where wildebeest cross and get eaten by crocs.

Singita Mara River Tented Camp is located in a remote, 98 000 acre area on the northern-most tip of the Serengeti, called the Lamai Triangle. When the Mara River enters Tanzania from Kenya, it flows through the northern Serengeti and then west of the national park. The section of the Serengeti that the river cuts through is referred to as the Lamai Triangle. Triangle is included in the name because of the area's shape: the Kenya border forms its north-western boundary, the Serengeti National Park line forms its eastern boundary, and the Mara River, which crosses the two aforementioned lines, forms its southern boundary - hence the area's triangular shape.

The Mara River flows from its source in the Kenyan Highlands and empties into Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria is also the source of the mighty Nile River, the longest river in the world. It's therefore safe to say that the waters of the Nile contain water from the Mara River.

The migration may have left in October, but the crocodiles of the Mara River, some of the largest on the continent, will remain well-fed for some time still.

The Nile crocodile *(Crocodylus niloticus)* is the largest crocodilian in Africa, and historically the largest of them are to be been found in east Africa. The largest and most accurately measured specimen was an individual that was shot on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria some time ago, It measured 6.45 m (21.1ft) in length and weighed in at a colossal 1 090 kg (2 400 lbs).

One of the biggest populations of these prehistoric reptile behemoths occurs along the Mara River system in Tanzania and Kenya. A major reason for this is the fact that the annual great migration spends up to four months of the year in this area, sometimes longer. This provides the crocs with an incredible source of food. Once the wildebeest (and zebra) arrive, the crocodile will feast on the animals that ford back and forth across the river in search of the best grazing. Wildebeest and zebra carcasses litter the length of the river from animals drowning in the mayhem of trying to cross the water, as well as from crocodile kills that have dislodged after being stashed underwater.

Crocodilians have an ectothermic (cold blooded) metabolism, which means that they can survive for extraordinarily long periods between meals. It is said that the crocs only feed during this time of the year while the migration is present and don't find it necessary to eat again until the wildebeests arrive eight or nine months later. However, in the quieter months it is possible that they may supplement their diet with fish and other small animals.

Sightings report

A decline in guests numbers in November resulted in a decline in game drives, which accounts for the low sightings numbers for the month.

Lion:	18
Leopard:	1
Cheetah:	4
Elephant:	14
Rhino:	1

Special Sightings:

- A raft of 60 hippo downstream from the camp.
- A clan of 20 hyena feeding on a zebra on the Kampi Kampi Plains.

By Lizzie Hamrick and Ryan Schmitt
Singita Grumeti
Serengeti
Tanzania
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