

Singita Grumeti Reserves

Wildlife Journal

For the month of January 2011

Rainfall Records

- Sasakwa – Month 107,5 mm, Year to date 107,5 mm
- Sabora – Month 81,4 mm, Year to date 81,4 mm
- Faru – Month 170 mm, Year to date 170 mm
- Samaki – Month 103,5 mm, Year to date 103,5 mm
- Risiriba – Month 170,5 mm, Year to date 170,5 mm
- Samisami – Month 123,5 mm, Year to date 123,5 mm

Temperature and Wind Recordings

- Average Mean High Temperature – 32 °C
- Average Mean Low Temperature – 18 °C
- Average Mean Temperature – 22 °C
- Average Wind Speed – 4,8 km/h
- Average High Wind Speed – 32,1 km/h
- Predominant Wind direction – NE



The first half of January saw wonderful rains over the western corridor of the Serengeti National Park and Singita Grumeti Reserves. Afternoon showers were almost a daily occurrence, clearing the air and creating spectacular morning light.



The later part of the month saw a strong easterly wind disperse cloud buildup, and the start of a two week dry spell. It will be interesting when the long rains begin.



Topi and Zebra congregated in the tens of thousands on the sweet, short grasses of Nyati plains



Mishi was out on a staff game drive one afternoon when she took this shot of a herd of very relaxed Buffalo off the Punda Milia plains. Very soon thereafter all on board her vehicle watched in awe as a young adult male Lion hauled a Warthog out of his lair, a scene that played out well into dusk.



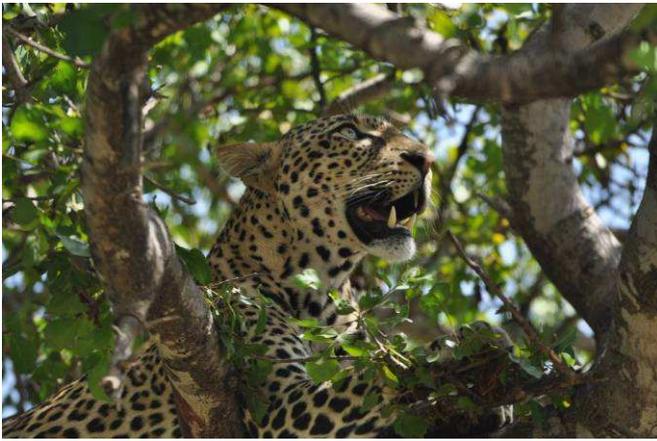
The young male bravely used his claws to grip the Warthog and then his sheer brute strength to pull the animal from its tunnel. Warthogs have two sets of tusks to protect themselves from this very type of attack, so the Lion would have had to use all his skill to prevent injury to himself.

Warthogs do not give up easily so this must have been a major challenge for the young male.

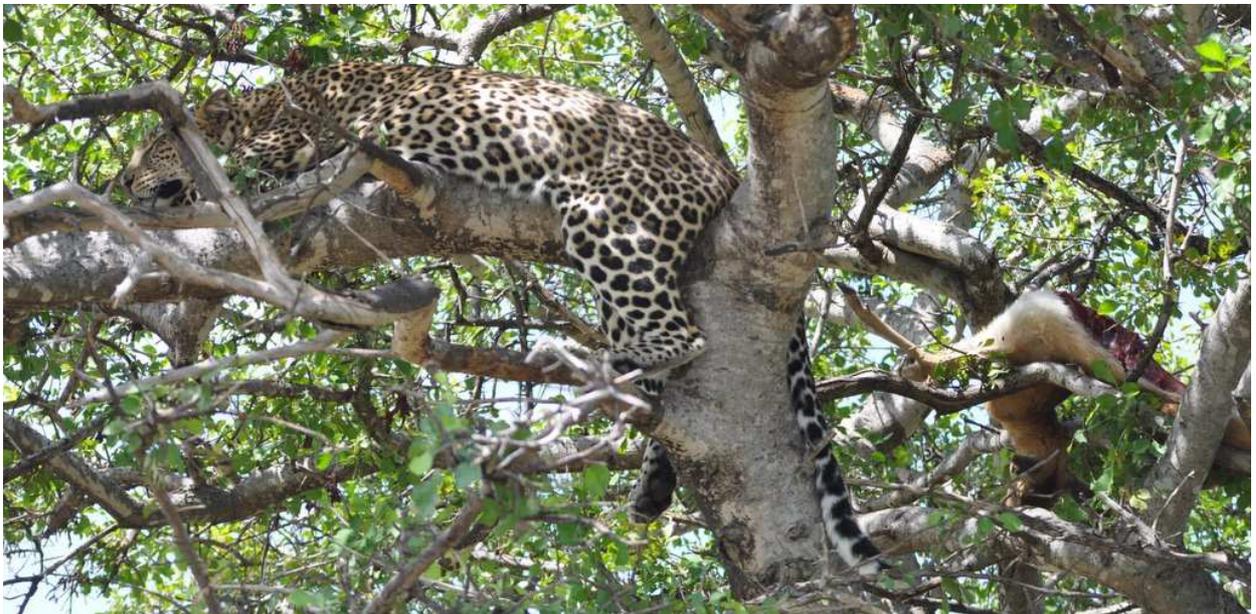


Finally out of the burrow, the young male dug his jaws deeply into the wind pipe of the Warthog and stopped all air flow. Interestingly enough, the other two young male Lions did not get involved at all in the kill watching the action from a few meters away. He also did not allow his brothers to feed on the kill with him, well at least not

while Mishi was still there.



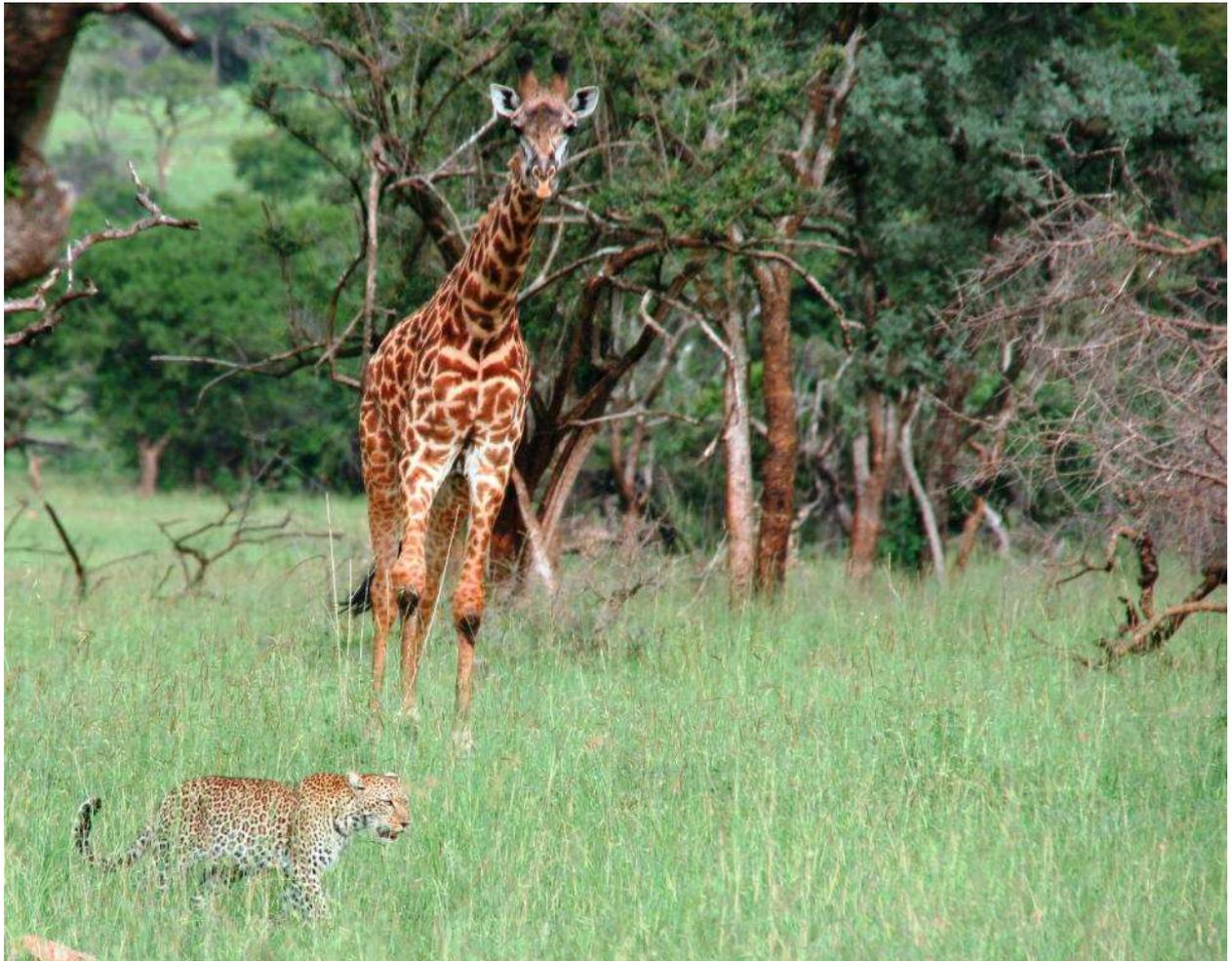
It has been a fantastic month for Leopard viewing at SGR; this young male was seen sharing a Reedbuck kill with a female off Butamtam Drainage Line. The kill was hoisted in a False Marula and he allowed us the privilege of viewing him at close range. She was unfortunately a little shy and whenever game viewers approached she would slip off into the nearby drainage line.



Here he is looking for her. We are not certain of the relationship between the two or who was responsible for the kill, but he certainly benefited most from it.



A female was seen from a distance by Aloyce one morning with two very large cubs off Chui Link. She had just lost her kill to a Hyaena and her youngsters had fled the scene. Here she is searching for her cubs in front of a very interested spectator.



The two Cheetah siblings were once again a regular on the plains, interestingly now in pursuit of Reedbuck with two kills recorded this month. They are no doubt eagerly anticipating the arrival of this year's Great Migration since they're specialists at hunting amongst the large herds.





Impala are many people's favourite antelope, such majestic creatures that are so well adapted to surviving on the continent. They are an edge-of-the-ecotone species, showing a preference for light woodland with little undergrowth and grassland of medium to low height. They enjoy soils with good drainage, firm footing, moderate slopes or open flat land. Although they are rarely found far from water, with access to green vegetation in the form of grazing, browse, monocots and dicots, they can go without drinking for sustained periods.



Female groupings vary in size and composition and very rarely remain constant from day to day. Crèches containing a dozen or more fawns are characteristic of Impalas, especially where there is a sharp annual calving season, and may be guarded by a few females. Juveniles rest, move, play and groom together, joining their mothers to nurse, during herd movement or when predators are near.



Out with the trainees one morning we came across this very unfortunate situation. From a distance we watched how this stallion bravely tried to defend another herd member from a clan of Hyena.



Unbeknown to us at the time was that the Zebra on the ground had been snared and was on her last few breaths. We actually wished that he could have left her alone so that the Hyena could have ended things faster, but this brave stallion stayed as long as possible until finally pressure forced him to leave.





The annual guide training course started in early January. Here the trainees spend time with one of the smaller, but more fascinating creatures in the bush: a Dung beetle, and one that feeds partly or exclusively on faeces. They belong to the order Coleoptera and the Family Scarabaeidae. Africa is host to over 2 000 dung beetle species. There are three basic types of Dung Beetle, characterized by their methods of collecting food: Rollers (roll dung into balls and use as a food source or a brooding chamber); Tunnellers (bury the dung wherever they find it); and Dwellers (neither roll nor burrow, but simply live in the manure).

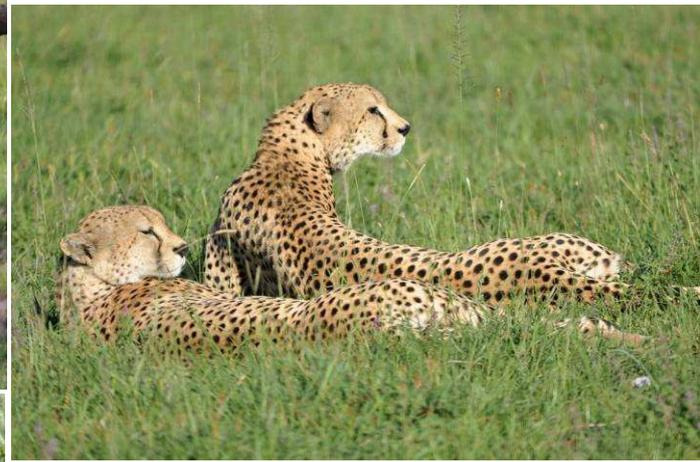
The life cycle is complete metamorphosis or egg to larva, pupa to adult. A Roller male will gather dung together and pat it into what is known as a "brood ball". He will then proceed to roll the ball along to what appears to be a pre-determined spot (irrespective of obstacles). He does this by walking backwards, on his fore-limbs, and using his hind legs to roll the dung ball along. Every so often he will clamber to the top of the ball to orientate himself. The sight of a fully prepared brood ball invites great interest from females, and they will pursue the rolling male and clamber onto the ball, in a sense "hitch-hiking" a ride.



Dung beetles have three body parts - head, thorax and abdomen. The body consists of a hard outside cuticle and folded wings that lie over the upper surface of the abdomen and are covered by elytra (wing covers). The wings are transparent or whitish in colour and are only visible if the beetle is in flight. Dung beetles have six legs that are specialized for shoveling dung and earth. They vary in size from 2 mm - 50 mm in body length and come in a variety of colours, generally black or brown in colour; some have a metallic sheen. Most have a flattened, but stout body. The males of some species have horns on the head or thorax. Some species have strong, often "toothed" legs specialised for collecting, patting, rolling dung and burrowing. They have soft mouthparts suited to their diet.

The dung beetles were seen on the fringe of the Boma enclosure and very soon thereafter we were fortunate enough to see a very healthy and relaxed "Limpopo" about to take his afternoon wallow.





Thanks to all the guides for their images for the month. It truly has been a memorable one for all of us; life as always is flourishing at Singita Grumeti Reserves.

Stuart Levine
Singita Grumeti Reserves
January 2011