

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE For the month of July, Two Thousand and Seventeen

Temperature

Average minimum: 12,2°C (53,9°F)
Minimum recorded: 08,8°C (47,8°F)
Average maximum: 25,7°C (78,2°F)
Maximum recorded: 30,4°C (86,7°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 12,5 mm
For the year to date: 632,5 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:24
Sunset: 17:35

A good pair of gloves is essential for the wintery morning game drives we've been on this month – and it is essential to keep your hands warm and functioning for all the photographic opportunities that present themselves during these blue and gold dawns.

Here's our wildlife overview for July:

Lions

There was an incredible afternoon where we watched lions hunting an eland. We didn't witness the actual kill but did find the lions eating the eland some time later. In between the hunt we saw buffalo, white rhinos, an



elephant bull and a giraffe all within 1km of the action. Later, whilst the lions were still feeding on the kill, hyenas gathered in force and pressurised the lions into giving up the near-finished bones.

On one occasion we came across two lionesses walking down the road, one wearing a cloak of porcupine quills all over her body...

Another leonine highlight was of five lionesses below Pamushana hill hunting nyalas. They stalked and killed a young female nyala which they finished in less than five minutes.

Leopards

We've had a couple of leopard sightings such as on a short late afternoon drive where we saw a hyena, then a leopard and then two white rhinos.

On another occasion, while searching for wild dogs, we spotted a leopard that started to hunt impalas.

The ultimate sighting however goes to the staff members and their infant children who spotted a mother leopard and her two cubs on the road not far from Singita Pamushana lodge!

Cheetah

This sighting began being about wild dogs as we sped off in our bush ferrari, at the report of wild dogs on the central plains. We arrived in the nick of time as we found the wild dog pack on a kill. We enjoyed unbelievable viewing of the dogs ripping apart and eating a whole impala in minutes. While watching them two black-backed jackals crept closer to the action. Then we heard a call of a cheetah behind us! Sure enough we saw it, and followed slowly after it as it passed by two white rhinos. The rhinos caused the cat to run, and it did so right in front of the vehicle, in perfect golden early morning sunshine!



Rhinos

We've had superb sightings of white rhinos, and a couple of black rhino encounters too.

On one occasion we sat for about an hour at the main pan during which time 12 white rhinos came to drink at different intervals.

This white rhino was doing an excellent job of mowing the lawns... White rhinos – or wide-lipped rhinos are grass eaters and move along at a steady pace cropping the grass as they go.

Elephants

There has been great elephant interaction – one drive ended up being referred to as “Elephant Bull Safari” with a total of twenty bulls being counted during the drive, and most of them strolling up close to the vehicle to inspect the guests.

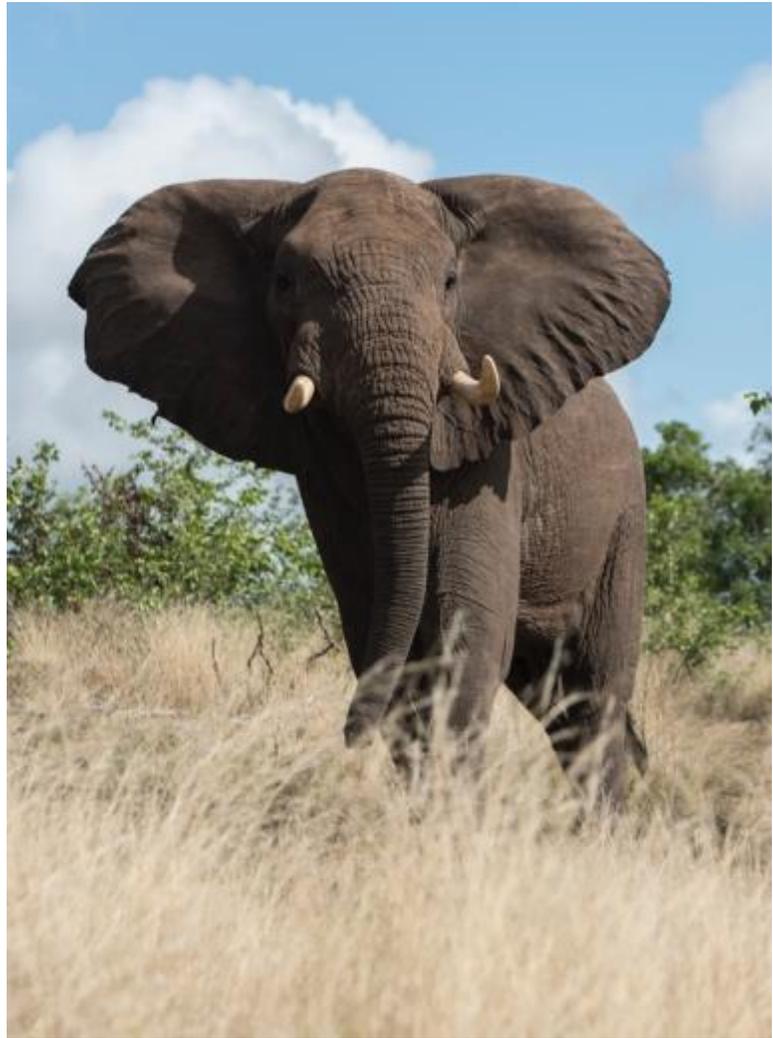
Our sunken photographic hide has been enjoyed by guests, especially when elephants come to drink there and the guests are in safe and very close proximity to the giants.

A relaxing afternoon was spent on a sundowner cruise watching hippos, a buffalo bull and an elephant on the banks of the lake. The elephant then waded in and swam around near the boat, giving all a real spectacle.

We also chuckled at a cranky elephant who chased twelve wild dogs about at the airstrip.

Wild dogs

It is such a privilege to have a pack of African wild dogs on the reserve at the moment. There’ve been the standard



skirmishes between hyenas and the wild dogs, with hyenas trying to steal the dogs’ kills. On one afternoon a pack of twelve wild dogs killed three impalas east of the river, and three hyenas managed to steal one of the carcasses for themselves.

Hyenas

Most of the hyena sightings have been in tandem with the wild dogs, but one evening, when all the guides and guests were enjoying a bush dinner, nine hyenas patrolled the outskirts and seemed keen to investigate what the chefs had prepared!

Plains game

Apart from the common plains game such as giraffe and zebras seen on every drive we’ve also seen hartebeest and sable antelope.

Buffalo

There are huge herds of Cape buffalo to be seen at present. One of the most incredible sights was when we were at the main pan and watched a stream of buffalo pour in for water. What made this sighting phenomenal was the fact that the number of buffalo amounted to around 1 000 strong. Five separate herds arrived at the same time, all in single file allowing for simple counting.

Unusual sightings

The highlight of a morning for guests was the discovery of a two metre python in the bush, where they got a great look at it. Later in the month we enjoyed a tense but exciting view of a relaxed black mamba being harassed by birds.

Birds

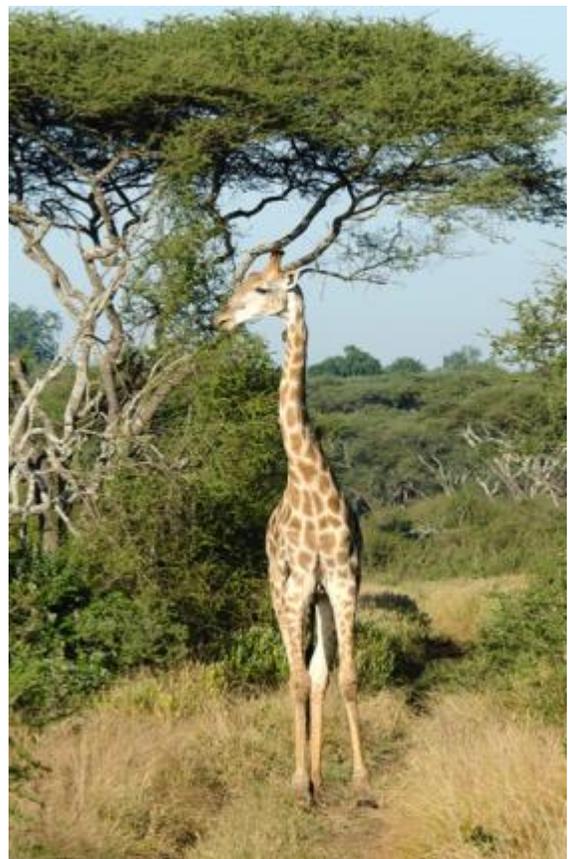
Any serious birder would have given their eye teeth to be here this month, to see not only a Pel's fishing owl but two Narina trogons as well! Other highlights included a double-banded courser nest with eggs, tawny eagles and white-backed vultures sitting on nests, a Marshall eagle hunting doves, Meyer's and brown-headed parrots and several species of owls.

Fishing and boat cruises

Guests have enjoyed memorable safaris out on the water, with tigerfish being caught and an array of wildlife and birdlife seen.

Walks and rock art

Now is the best time to go on a bush walk, and our guests have been making the most of this opportunity that we offer. There is always so much to see that goes unnoticed when in a vehicle, and often the walks incorporate a visit to one of our ancient rock art sites.



Mud! Mud! Glorious mud!

Buffalo are renowned for being the most dangerous of the Big 5 and have a highly unpredictable aggressive nature – but in this series of photographs some buffalo bulls enjoy a good roll in the mud and seem playful, clownish and frolicsome! The mud is a cooling soothing balm that protects against the sun and biting insects.





Rhinos nap nearby

These five white rhinos were such a sight to behold. After finishing a drink at a pan they strolled over to this shady spot. We had parked close by and to see them so relaxed was wonderful. Then a rather big calf lay down and started suckling from its mother. With that the other three rhinos gathered in a nest and lay down too. They proceeded to have a siesta – right in front of us. That’s a rather awesome safari story to tell your friends back home!





Not so plain

As a photographer and nature lover there is nothing better to be up and about before sunrise and capturing the moments as the first rays of light shine on your subject. Be sure to expose for the brightest area of the photograph, so as to avoid blown out highlights.

This herd of impalas was grouped together, as they do, to decrease their chance of attack. They leap and scatter in all directions when being attacked to confuse the predator.

On the following page, the kudu male with the spiralling horns, slowly left the dense area of bush where it had concealed itself during the night, and a female followed.

When a kudu senses danger, it becomes motionless. Its body colour blends with the environment and its lateral stripes break up the form of its body – both of these evolutionary adaptations results in predators not being able to spot them too easily.





Bullish behaviour

The tree in the photo on the right has taken some abuse in its time – it grows next to a shallow pan and with its rough bark it provides the perfect scratching post after a mudbath. Just like buffalo, elephants like nothing better than a good wallow to soothe the skin, smother ticks and other biting insects, and then scratch off the mud and trapped insects.



This elephant bull had been in a scrap with another – he had a tusk puncture wound on his rump, and a small cut on his trunk. A closer inspection of his tusks reveal blood stains which indicates that he was certainly giving as much, if not more, than he received. Elephant bulls fight one another to establish dominance.



Kingfishers

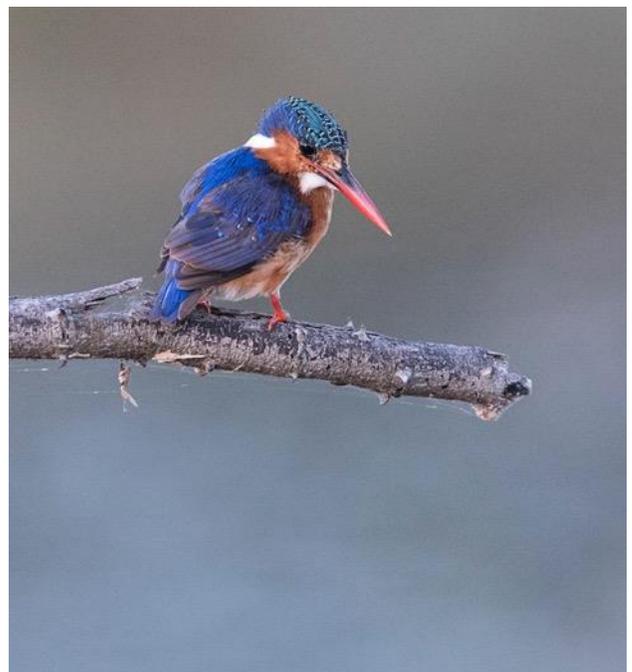
One sunset cruise on Malilangwe lake heralded all these kingfishers. The brown-hooded kingfisher is not normally seen around water as it feeds on insects, but the other three are specialist fish catchers.

Here are some kingfisher facts:

- Kingfishers fly at only one pace: fast and straight, but they can hover when fishing.
- Their median life expectancy is 6 to 14 years, depending on species.
- The dagger-shaped bill is well designed for capturing food.
- Kingfishers are territorial and most are solitary, only pairing up with a mate during breeding season.
- All kingfishers have excellent vision and can see into the water – even adjusting for refraction, which can make a fish look closer to the surface than it really is.



Brown-hooded kingfisher (*Halcyon albiventris*)



Malachite kingfisher (*Alcedo cristata*)



Giant kingfisher (*Megaceryle maximus*)



Pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)

All a twitter

In addition to all the kingfishers out on the water we spotted these feathered friends too:

The water thick-knees (*Burhinus vermiculatus*) were so well camouflaged we almost cruised straight past them. These birds are mainly active at night. They eat insects, other invertebrates, frogs and tadpoles, doing most of their foraging by repeatedly running forward a bit before pausing and jabbing at prey.



These little cut-throat finches (*Amadina fasciata*) were big 'ticks' for our twitchers. As you can see the adult male has a bright red band across its throat, thus the name 'cut throat'. Cut-throat finches lay 4 to 6 white eggs, which hatch after a quick incubation period of 12 days.



Green-backed herons (*Butorides striatus*) catch fish and other aquatic prey, doing most of their foraging by lurking in a crouched posture at the water's edge, and grabbing anything unfortunate enough to come within range. However, they have another clever strategy: they may use an insect or spider as a bait to lure prey closer and within striking distance before snapping up the tricked victim. Perch-hunting has also been recorded, as they can use their strong eyesight to spot prey in the water, before diving in feet-first and sometimes completely submerging themselves.



Written and photographed by Jenny Hishin, unless otherwise indicated

Singita Pamushana

Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve

Zimbabwe

Thirty-first of July 2017