

# Singita



Photo by Sarah Ball

**WILDLIFE JOURNAL**  
**SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE**  
**For the month of October, Two Thousand and Twenty**

**Temperature**

Average minimum:	19,4°C (66,9°F)
Minimum recorded:	15,2°C (59,3°F)
Average maximum:	32,9°C (91,2°F)
Maximum recorded:	41,4°C (106,5°F)

**Rainfall Recorded**

For the month:	18,3 mm
For the year to date:	493.3 mm

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Sunrise:	05:09
Sunset:	18:04

October is often the hottest month of the year for us, in the south-eastern lowveld of Zimbabwe. However, October 2020 has not really lived up to its usual reputation. Early showers in September and October set the course for a rather pleasant month. Even with all this early moisture the vegetation is still quite dry but species like Lebombo potato-bush (*Phyllanthus pinnatus*), bead-bean (*Maerua angolensis*), gummy gardenia (*Gardenia resiniflua*) have flowered, which has added some vibrancy to the bush. Migratory birds have started to return, with species like red-chested cuckoo (*Cuculus solitarius*), thrush nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*) and European bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) being very vocal and saturating the bush with their distinctive calls.

## **Here is a snapshot of October sightings:**

### **Lions:**

- We have had reports of lions feeding on eland, along the Chiredzi River.
- One River Pride male was seen at Sosigi Dam, and he seemed to be on a mission to find the rest of his pride.
- Both River Pride males were seen at Simbiri Dam, dealing out some discipline to hyenas.

### **Wild dogs:**

- The wild dogs have been very active in the north, hunting around Bravo 1 and down towards Sosigi.
- We hosted the grade 7 class from Razawi School for five days, and they had fantastic sightings of the dogs hunting.
- We are delighted to report that the pack now consists of 17 dogs altogether, comprising 10 pups and 7 adults.

### **Leopards:**

- There have been a number of leopards seen during the month.
- The youngster that is seen mostly around West Valley Road has graced us with its presence on a regular basis, mostly in the hours of darkness.
- Mark Friend and Alex Kadzanyike had beautiful moments with a leopard at Simbiri Dam – Mark describes this in his story that follows.

### **Buffalo:**

- There is a small breeding herd of buffalo living around Manyuchi Pan, about 15 in number.
- The large herd is still moving between Banyini and the east.

### **Rhino:**

- Incredible sightings of both species of rhinos, especially as the bush gets drier by the day.
- The rhino ear notching operations by the conservation team went off very successfully with 14 black rhinos notched.

### **Elephants:**

- There has been a magnificent elephant bull in the West Valley Road area, and he's been doing some landscape re-designing with a few trees being pushed down...
- A breeding herd of elephants has been seen regularly around Malilangwe Dam, then feeding through the hills and heading east towards Lojaan and Nduna Dams.

### **Other news:**

- The pair of black-backed jackals we see regularly on the Banyini have pups. They were born this month and are only just poking their noses out of the den now. We've seen three pups, and can confirm they are absolutely adorable!
- Cicadas have started making a racket and there are a number of butterflies fluttering around. Most exciting is that every day is a day closer to the rains.
- The annual game count by the conservation team also took place this month. Analysis of the figures will provide valuable data for our wildlife conservation work.

**A few bush stories and an October Gallery of photos follow.**

October is traditionally a very hot and dry month here in Zimbabwe. The thought of this heat deters some guests from coming to Zimbabwe during this period, however there are some really big plus points to this season, so much so that this is one of my absolute favourite months for safari. I'll tell you why...

Here at Singita Pamushana Lodge, located on top of a hill with stunning vistas, guests enjoy the refreshing breezes and escape the heat of the day with cool air-conditioned villas, swimming pools and shaded gardens. But that's all for us to enjoy after we've had our sightings-filled safaris! Because the air is dry and the days are hot the plant life has, for the most part, dropped its leaves and thinned out as a way of retaining moisture content. This allows for much better viewing as we can see further while on game drives, and the openness offers awesome walking opportunities too.

Some of the plants such as caper bushes, gardenias, pod mahoganies, wild coffee and many more are flowering with just the most amazing scents that enchant you as they tickle your sense of smell. The main and most exciting plus of this month is the wildlife opportunities. Water is scarce at this time and, as a result, whatever little water is around is a huge drawcard for the animals, so waterholes become one of the primary focus areas for us guides. Animals such as kudu, impala, nyala, buffalo, rhinos, warthogs and baboons visit the waterholes to come and enjoy a drink or just to wallow as a way of cooling off. The hotter the days, the busier it tends to get. In turn all these animals draw attention to themselves from predators such as lions, hyenas, leopards, wild dogs and even crocodiles. As the heat continues day by day, the water evaporates and the water reduces, putting more and more pressure on the living. Fish become trapped and exposed in the shallows and this results in large varieties of fish-eating birds descending to take advantage. Storks, herons, egrets, kingfishers start spending time at the buffet that the shrinking waterbody is providing. With all these birds and animals chasing this precious resource, it's only a matter of time before something happens...

Recently I've been spending a bit of time at one of the permanent water bodies located here at the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, while we await to reopen after the Covid pandemic, and what a sightings spectacle it's been. One morning I decided to sit quietly and patiently at Simbiri Dam and wait to see what may happen, binos in one hand, a cup of freshly ground coffee in the other. It wasn't long before the peace was broken with a massive splash on the one side of the dam, and Egyptian geese flapping backwards and heckling away at the water. I counted the members of the goose family...1... 2...3...4, 5, 6 and 7. Phew! They were all there. I followed the flow of ripples and spotted a huge crocodile powering away with a large water monitor lizard in its jaws, the lizard still thrashing about.

Things went quiet for a bit, however it wasn't long before I saw a beautiful saddle-billed stork approach the Egyptian goose family in a challenging manner, clearly trying to move them off. Alas, his moves were thwarted by the father goose who, without hesitation, charged and attacked the stork's leg. The stork took off in panic, screeching. This havoc caused a grey heron that was trying to fish, to take its eyes off the water just for a moment in a bid to see what was going on... Bang! A massive explosion of water, a final shriek from the heron, and the crocodile swam back to deeper water with a jaw full of feathers.

Later that same day I returned in the afternoon to watch and wait again. It didn't take long before I heard the goose family shouting. I paid close attention to see what they were upset about. I could hardly believe my eyes as an adult female leopard walked out of the bush and down to the water, while snarling and hissing at the noisy geese. Presumably the cat was annoyed by the disturbance the geese were making as they clearly were trying to draw attention to this secretive cat. In true cat style the leopard flicked her tail and sauntered down to the water's edge, then took a bit of time to look around before enjoying a long drink. Then she sat up, and looked around. Something caught her attention in the water. Carefully she moved up and down trying to get a better look, found a spot that worked for her, balanced, and reached into the water. She flicked her paw

on the water surface as if she were clearing floating debris. Finally she pulled her paw back to the bank and picked something up in her jaws. With my binoculars I could now see, she had a fish. I could see that the fish was not caught alive, presumably it was dead and floating when she spotted it. The leopard, now very proud of herself, took her catch, climbed up on a nearby rock and enjoyed eating the tilapia. After she had repeated this behaviour and eaten two such portions of sushi, as well as getting hackled continuously by the goose family, she decided she needed some peace and quiet from the riff-raff, so effortlessly melted away into the bushes.

On another morning eight hyenas came down to the water. They began to drink and wallow. Two curious young hippos came over to investigate the hyenas, and both parties stood staring at each other. Suddenly the young hippos charged out of the water at the hyenas, and the hyenas scarpered. The young hippos stopped to sniff the ground where the hyenas had been, and the hyenas used this as an opportunity to try and surround the young hippos. Before the hyenas could get fully into position, the young hippos realized the hyenas had different ideas and, without any further delay, ran full tilt to take refuge in the water, with the excited hyenas chasing right behind, only to be stopped by the water. The young hippos decided to stay with the adults and celebrate with some hippo laughter while the hyenas stood around trying to figure out how to swim...

However, all this commotion had drawn attention and the hyenas were about to learn that they were not the dominant predator here. While the hyenas mooched around I saw one suddenly run towards my position whilst squealing, and I mean run like its life depended on it! The other hyenas were instantly alert but, like me, were perplexed for a moment. Then the bushes near the hyenas erupted with a violent roar and a blur of tan. Hyenas shotgunned everywhere! The cause of their sudden Olympic skill set was due to two dominant male lions. Lions and hyenas do not like each other as they compete for resource and these two males, who are from the River Pride, have had their fair share of conflicts with hyenas and saw this moment as an opportunity to deal out some discipline. In split seconds it was a case of, "What hyenas?" Every hyena had cleared out of the area. The one male lion, that I call Scar Face (as he has a huge scar from a previous wound under his right eye), came right up to my seated position. He stood there for a moment, looked around, looked at me sitting quietly and by now forgetting I was holding a hot cup of coffee, then started to give his victory roar. When it is being broadcast from a mere 20 yards away, and aimed in your direction, the sound travels right through your body, your coffee leaps out its mug, and your mind instantly knows who The King of The Jungle really is.

So, please remember, with every con, there is always some pros to be had - we just have to know how to track them down. I invite you to visit us in the HOT months!



Simbiri Dam – the scene of all the action, on a much quieter day!

Photo by Jenny Hishin

## A tall order

Story by Jenny Hishin, photos by Mark Saunders

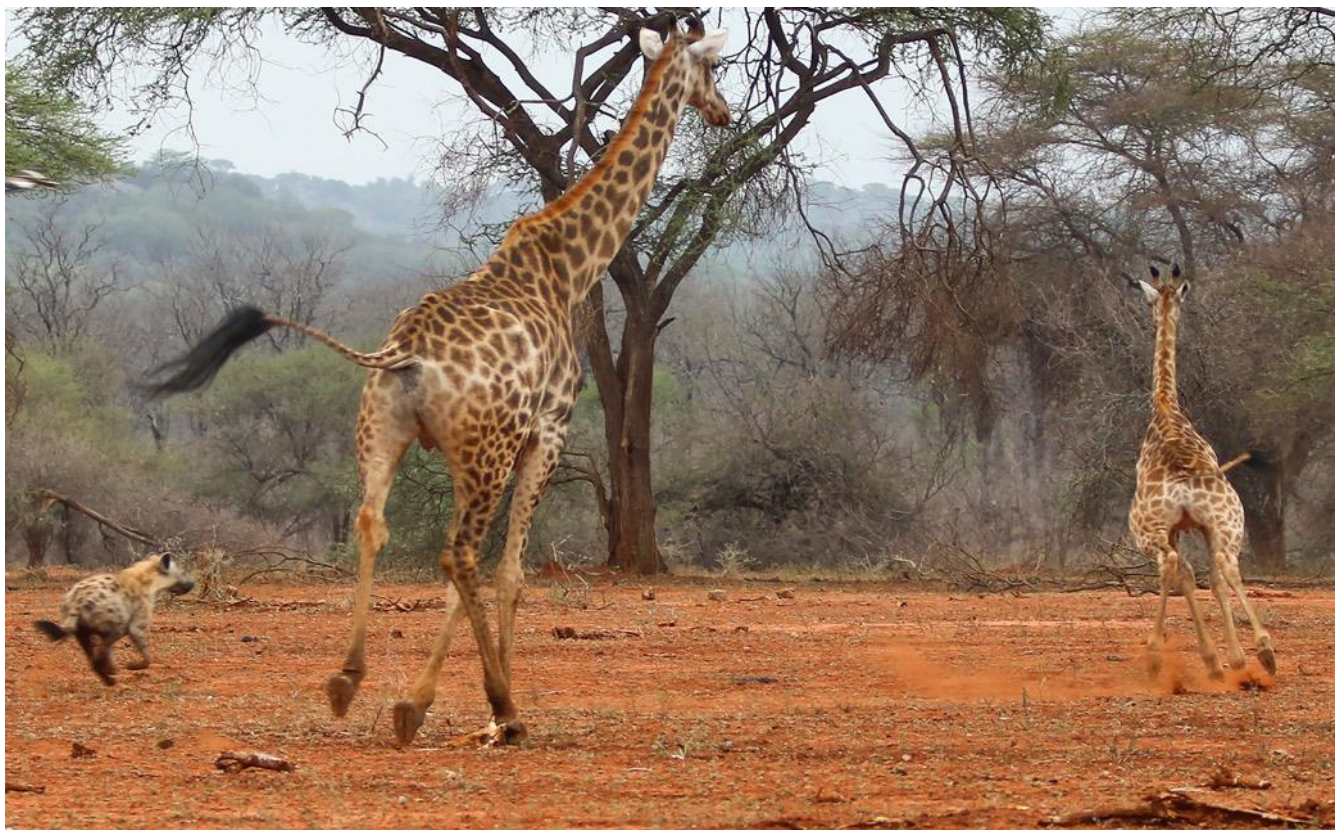
We regularly watch reruns of this episode out on the Banyini open areas – it's the one where a clan of hyenas ever so nonchalantly happen to surround a family of giraffe. Then one of the hyenas breaks from the outskirts and directly charges the family in an effort to scatter them. If a calf jinxes away from its parent it's a case of deadly game on and the hyenas try to chase it down. If the calf trips or if they latch on to a leg and it falls then they might be able to kill it.

However, it's extremely rare that this strategy works for the hyenas and it often seems to be an exercise in staying fit, honing skills and alleviating boredom. A giraffe calf's parents or family members will gallop around to the calf and recruit it back into the safety of the herd. Giraffes will defend themselves or their young with their sharp hooves. By kicking with the back legs and chopping down with the forelegs the power of the kick and the force of the hoof striking a predator, even one as big as a full grown male lion, could easily break its back or kill it with a blow to the head.

Giraffe prefer to be on open level plains rather than bushy, rocky, donga-ridden areas as their long legs make them more prone to tripping, and tripping them up is the most effective way for predators to hunt them.

In these photos it's apparent how clever the camouflage of both species is. Because giraffes are so tall their predators will invariably be looking up at them, so their colour pattern looks more like light filtering through the crown of a tree. In contrast a hyena's prey will most likely be looking down at it, and their colour pattern looks more like rocks and pebbles and dappled light on the dry earth. Both predators and prey have evolved to blend in to the surroundings from the perspective of the other.





## Traffic congestion at the intersection

Story by Jenny Hishin, photos by Sarah Ball

Patience is a virtue, especially when beggars can't be choosers! By mid-morning the desire for the plains game to quench their thirst overcomes any of their nervousness. They've gathered their courage, emerged from the bushveld and take their turn at the water's edge.

This sequence was taken at Hwata Pan which is one of our few permanent supplied water sources in the south-eastern area. It is a fine line in wildlife conservation as to where you supply water, if any at all. Doing so changes the dynamic of what animals can then survive in the greater area, how predation on them increases at the waterpoints, what animals thrive and multiply as a result of the water and surrounding vegetation and how they may dominate and suppress animals that used to survive in that water-scarce area, and many more factors. Let's just say it's complicated!

On this morning two species we don't often see out in the open arrived to drink - eland and Lichtenstein hartebeest. Both are normally shy, skittish and only momentarily glimpsed in more remote areas. Eland obtain most of their water from their diet and can go for long periods without drinking. Lichtenstein hartebeest, zebras and impalas need to drink regularly but the hartebeest will travel further to find water and then return to their preferred habitat.

It is fascinating to watch which animals drink when. The eland and hartebeest seemed bolder than the abundant zebras and impalas. The zebras especially seem to spend ages gathering up the courage and behaving in a very alert manner. All eventually got their turn, including a few guinea fowl.

As Mark Friend said in his story, now really is the time to see abundant wildlife if you have the patience to sit at a waterhole for a couple of hours.







Last week a crash of rhinos approached a waterhole and one big bull, with his poor eyesight, decided to investigate our vehicle. The colossal beast was within arm's reach before he decided we were of no further interest! One of the bigger cows wasn't very happy with the bulls presence, and flattened her ears while snorting and grumbling at him.

Their poor eyesight, curious nature and somewhat irritable behaviour reminded me of the wonderful fable by Rudyard Kipling of "How The Rhinoceros Got His Skin". Here it is for your reading pleasure, and interspersed with photos of the white rhinos approaching the waterhole:

### How The Rhinoceros Got His Skin

Once upon a time, on an uninhabited island on the shores of the Red Sea, there lived a Parsee from whose hat the rays of the sun were reflected in more-than-oriental splendour. And the Parsee lived by the Red Sea with nothing but his hat and his knife and a cooking-stove of the kind that you must particularly never touch. And one day he took flour and water and currants and plums and sugar and things, and made himself one cake which was two feet across and three feet thick. It was indeed a Superior Comestible (that's magic), and he put it on the stove because he was allowed to cook on the stove, and he baked it and he baked it till it was all done brown and smelt most sentimental. But just as he was going to eat it there came down to the beach from the Altogether Uninhabited Interior one Rhinoceros with a horn on his nose, two piggy eyes, and few manners.



In those days the Rhinoceros's skin fitted him quite tight. There were no wrinkles in it anywhere. He looked exactly like a Noah's Ark Rhinoceros, but of course much bigger. All the same, he had no manners then, and he has no manners now, and he never will have any manners. He said, 'How!' and the Parsee left that cake and

climbed to the top of a palm tree with nothing on but his hat, from which the rays of the sun were always reflected in more-than-oriental splendour.



And the Rhinoceros upset the oil-stove with his nose, and the cake rolled on the sand, and he spiked that cake on the horn of his nose, and he ate it, and he went away, waving his tail, to the desolate and Exclusively Uninhabited Interior which abuts on the islands of Mazanderan, Socotra, and Promontories of the Larger Equinox. Then the Parsee came down from his palm-tree and put the stove on its legs and recited the following Sloka, which, as you have not heard, I will now proceed to relate:—

'Them that takes cakes  
Which the Parsee-man bakes  
Makes dreadful mistakes.'

And there was a great deal more in that than you would think.



Because, five weeks later, there was a heat wave in the Red Sea, and everybody took off all the clothes they had. The Parsee took off his hat; but the Rhinoceros took off his skin and carried it over his shoulder as he came down to the beach to bathe. In those days it buttoned underneath with three buttons and looked like a waterproof. He said nothing whatever about the Parsee's cake, because he had eaten it all; and he never had any manners, then, since, or henceforward. He waddled straight into the water and blew bubbles through his nose, leaving his skin on the beach.

Presently the Parsee came by and found the skin, and he smiled one smile that ran all round his face two times. Then he danced three times round the skin and rubbed his hands. Then he went to his camp and filled his hat with cake-crumbs, for the Parsee never ate anything but cake, and never swept out his camp. He took that skin, and he shook that skin, and he scrubbed that skin, and he rubbed that skin just as full of old, dry, stale, tickly cake-crumbs and some burned currants as ever it could possibly hold. Then he climbed to the top of his palm-tree and waited for the Rhinoceros to come out of the water and put it on.



And the Rhinoceros did. He buttoned it up with the three buttons, and it tickled like cake crumbs in bed. Then he wanted to scratch, but that made it worse; and then he lay down on the sands and rolled and rolled and rolled, and every time he rolled the cake crumbs tickled him worse and worse and worse. Then he ran to the palm-tree and rubbed and rubbed and rubbed himself against it. He rubbed so much and so hard that he rubbed his skin into a great fold over his shoulders, and another fold underneath, where the buttons used to be (but he rubbed the buttons off), and he rubbed some more folds over his legs. And it spoiled his temper, but it didn't make the least difference to the cake-crumbs. They were inside his skin and they tickled. So he went home, very angry indeed and horribly scratchy; and from that day to this every rhinoceros has great folds in his skin and a very bad temper, all on account of the cake-crumbs inside.

But the Parsee came down from his palm-tree, wearing his hat, from which the rays of the sun were reflected in more-than-oriental splendour, packed up his cooking-stove, and went away in the direction of Orotavo, Amygdala, the Upland Meadows of Anantarivo, and the Marshes of Sonaput.

Kipling, Rudyard. "How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin". Just So Stories  
Retrieved from: [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rk\\_rhino.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rk_rhino.htm)



## All a twitter



There is such diversity in the avian world – colour, size, adaptations, song, diet and so on. Here a jet black Verreux's eagle (*Aquila verreauxii*) is such a contrast compared to this colourful lilac-breasted roller (*Coracias caudatus*).

Photos by Mark Saunders

This male red-headed weaver (*Anaplectes rubriceps*) was hard at work building a nest, and it seemed that the female was helping out too, which is unusual for this species, so it is more likely she was inspecting his work and making a few tweaks... Red-headed weavers make a distinctive nest that is constructed of flexible twigs, leaf petioles and tendrils (rather than green grass as in many other weavers). Incubation of the blue eggs is by both sexes, mostly by the female.



October Gallery



A kudu female and young male ankle-deep in the water.

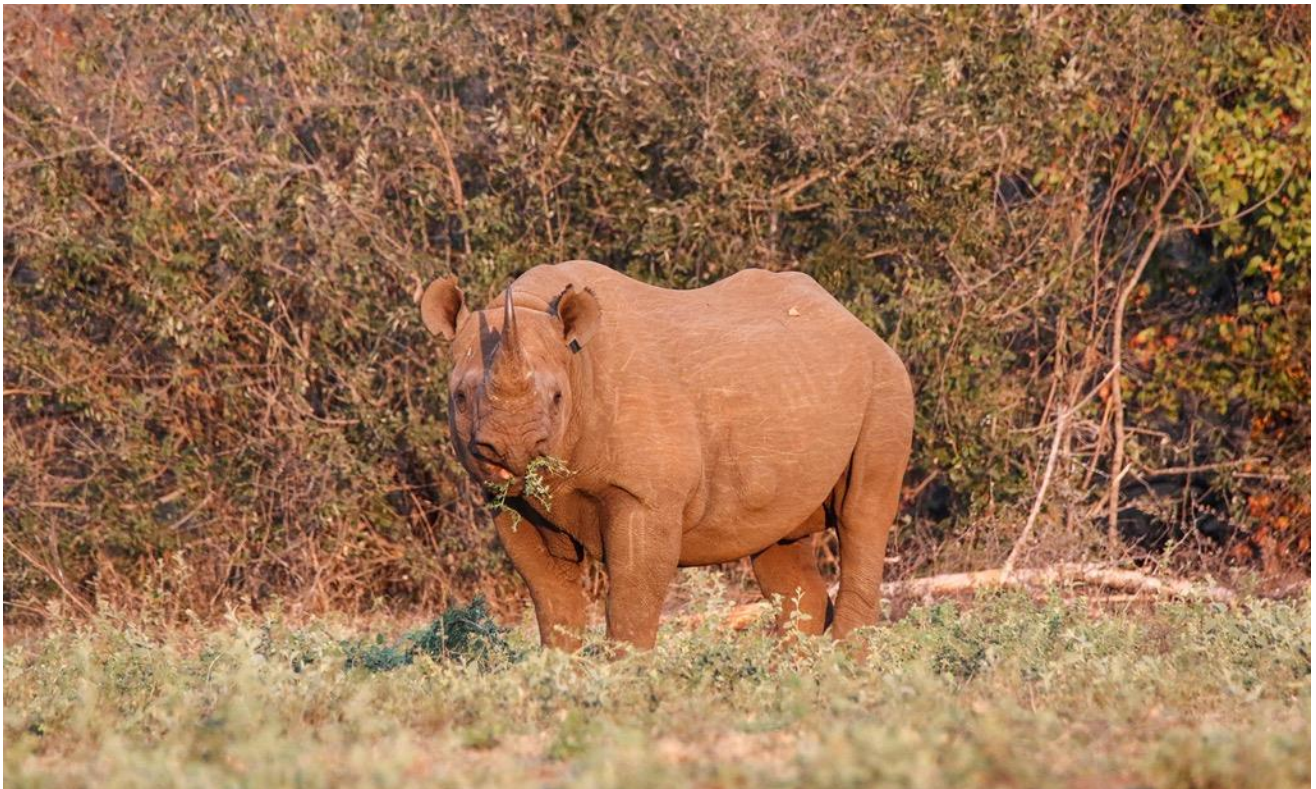
Photo by Mark Saunders



The one that got away. We can't be sure which large predator inflicted these wounds on this lucky impala.



The magnificent pair of eland and a black rhino emerge from the thickets onto the edge of the airstrip.







Another creature with an Olympic skill set – the agile gymnastic tree squirrel.

Photos by Sarah Ball

Compiled by Jenny Hishin.