

Singita

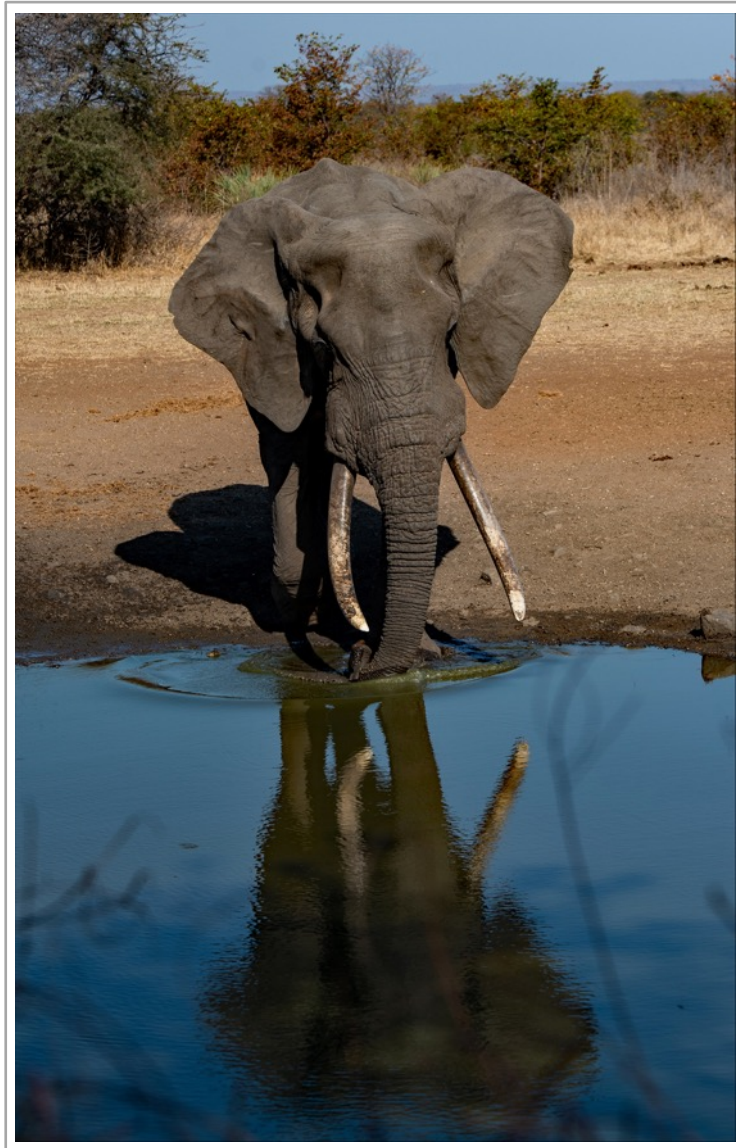


Photo by Jenny Hishin

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

SINGITA PAMUSHANA, ZIMBABWE

For the month of August, Two Thousand and Twenty One

Temperature

Average minimum: 14.3°C (57.7°F)
Minimum recorded: 10.9°C (51.6°F)
Average maximum: 29.5°C (85.1°F)
Maximum recorded: 38.8°C (101.8°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the month: 5.5 mm
Season to date: 813.8 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise: 06:02
Sunset: 17:44

It's heating up, it's drying out and there's been an agitated little wind trying to vie for attention some days. That said we've also had some really cold days and a splash of rain which is unusual for August. The bush is looking a "healthy dry" and it's a great time for game viewing. Here's August's overview:

Lions

- The Southern Pride have hunted well and their kills have included two buffalos and a zebra. They are spending time in the Mahande area and eight of them have been seen together.
- The River Pride have spent most of the time on the Hippo Valley side of the Chiredzi River. They tend to rest and cool off in the swamp area which is difficult to access – no doubt this is part of the appeal it holds as they can chill out undisturbed by man or beast!
- Two territorial males have been seen regularly, as well as a couple of loners – one that is skittish and another that is so calm he can barely raise his head to check you out when you arrive to check him out!
- There has been excellent viewing of a mating pair of lions, just below the Sosigi Dam wall.

Leopards

- Along our West Valley Road there is a rock with a "window" in it. We all always look at it, in the hope it is framing a leopard. Guide Alex Kadziyanike and his guests came close when they spotted a male leopard lying on top of the rock, eyeing out some waterbuck below.
- A relaxed female leopard has been seen on various occasions in the area south and west of the lodge.

Wild dogs

- We are delighted to report that the pack of eight wild dogs has been seen with ten adorable little puppies. Guide Tyme Mutema took the honours in seeing them first this year, much to his and his guests' delight!
- The pack was seen several times in the month, drinking at Sosigi Dam and hunting from that area. They must have had their den in the hills around there. Now that the pups are out of the den and running with the pack it's a real puzzle trying to work out where they might show up to drink or rest, as they are capable of covering immense distances.

Hyenas

- The hyenas have the monopoly at the moment! They are seen on most drives ambling along the roads. Some have cubs stashed in the big concrete drainage pipes underneath the main road.
- One clan was seen near 07 camp on the Orphan Road having a feast on a dead female giraffe.

Rhinos

- White rhino sightings have been off the charts! On one occasion guests enjoyed sundowners at Hwata Pan with no less than 16 white rhinos, including two baby calves, having their evening drink and socialising at the pan too.
- The black rhino viewing has been at its best! Groups of two and three have been seen regularly, often coming right up to the vehicle before turning and running off. Black rhinos have been seen drinking from the dam, while guests have been able to safely enjoy the sighting from the boat.
- Apart from the relocation that culminated this month (the report follows), The Malilangwe Trust undertook some rhino notching procedures. Guests who were visiting at the time had the tremendous opportunity of watching these take place.

Elephants

- We have had terrific sightings of some big tuskers lately. One magnificent bull elephant has tusks estimated to be over 80lbs in weight, and observing this giant is extremely special.

- Because it is dry now some of the elephants are feeding from trees and pushing them over to get to the bark, leaves and roots.
- The breeding herds are far more shy as the mothers keep their youngsters concealed in the thick bush or riverine vegetation. One herd drinks regularly at Sosigi Dam and they are so relaxed around the game viewing vehicles.

Buffalo

- The grumpy old dagga boys are seen here and there, and breeding herds of about 400 are seen daily as they pour in for water at a pan, kicking up clouds of dust which glows in golden sunlight.

Plains game

- The plains game is abundant as always, and there have been good sightings of eland, sable and Lichtenstein's hartebeest now that it is dry and the vegetation has thinned out.

Unusual sightings

- Elephant shrews! They are one of the "little five" and have been spotted a couple of times this month, scurrying about with their elongated noses sniffing here, there and everywhere.
- A very interesting and unusual sighting was of a vervet monkey eating a chameleon.

Rock art

- It is a great time to do bush walks, and to visit the rock art sites. Guests thoroughly enjoyed walks to the Chidumu and Mabakweni rock art sites, and were astounded by the art and what the sites reveal about ancient cultures.

Water safaris and fishing

- The water safaris are magical, and excellent sightings of hippo and birds are guaranteed. Added bonuses this month included seeing buffalos, a black rhino, and a leopard on top of a rock.
- The fishing is not good when it is cold, but as the weather has warmed up the bites have been coming in hard and fast.

Birds

- One of the special encounters was when a greater honeyguide followed the vehicle for over 20 minutes, chirping profusely all the way. Another was drifting on the boat to within centimetres of a malachite kingfisher.
- Other memorable sightings were of a giant eagle owl, a spotted eagle owl, lilac-breasted rollers, black-shouldered kites, tawny eagles, bateluers, white-backed vultures, square-tailed nightjars, African fish eagles, African darters, green-backed herons and yellow-billed storks, to name but a few.

Some bush reflections and articles follow, as well as the August Gallery of images.

Reintroduction of black rhinos to Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park

Singita's commitment to preserve and protect large areas of African wilderness and wildlife for future generations has seen us form strategic partnerships with specific non-profit funds and trusts in Africa. These conservation partners work tirelessly to safeguard the wildlife in their respective regions, and their ongoing coordinated initiatives aim to ensure that everything possible is done to protect species that need special attention. Singita Pamushana has been The Malilangwe Trust's ecotourism partner since 2008.

The critically endangered black rhino requires targeted conservation efforts to support its survival. The Malilangwe Trust began their black and white rhino conservation programme over 20 years ago. Thanks to their science-based management, dedicated protection and ideal habitat, the population densities of both species currently are such that they are able to supply and restock rhinos to other suitable protected areas in Africa.



This last three months marked a significant time in the conservation calendar as it saw black rhinos being reintroduced to Gonarezhou National Park, south of the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve. This project was conducted by Gonarezhou Conservation Trust, with The Malilangwe Trust and two other conservancies providing the founder stock of black rhinos. Preparations for this momentous occasion several years ago, with productive cross collaboration from private and public reserves and government entities.

Long term vision

This translocation aims to re-establish a new viable population in a national park in Zimbabwe. Gonarezhou National Park is Zimbabwe's second-largest national park and has suitable habitat for black rhinos. A Key 1 population is a categorisation, given by the IUCN's African Rhino Specialist Group, to identify a population that is stable, increasing and has achieved continental importance. Currently all three Key 1 populations in Zimbabwe are under private care, so there is immense national pride tied up in creating new viable populations in national parks.

A complex journey

The logistics for translocating one-tonne-plus megaherbivores are multi-faceted - from the animal selection, to capture, transition and then release. Logistically, physically and sociologically, it requires careful planning and a great depth of understanding of the species. Although any group of rhinos may be captured to form a new population, a careful selection of individuals that meet specific physical and social requirements is likely to improve the project's success. "Knowing the age, sex, maternal bloodlines and histories greatly helps to ensure that genetic diversity is maintained in both populations, while understanding individual rhinos' social relationships ensures emotional stability in a species that forms strong, yet selective relational bonds, a fact that is generally poorly recognised," says Sarah Clegg, Ecologist at The Malilangwe Trust.

The strong team spirit between the private and public entities is also vital – and is key to this project's success, with the handover period facilitated over time by the senior Malilangwe Scouts, whose in-depth knowledge of the individual rhinos is invaluable to Gonarezhou's rangers.

Capture day at Malilangwe

When the time comes, a carefully coordinated process unfolds. On the day, the Malilangwe Scouts receive a list of the rhinos for translocation and head off in the early morning.



When a rhino is located, the veterinary team prepare darts and equipment and set off by helicopter. The helicopter pilot then steers the animals into terrain that's accessible to the ground team's vehicles, and once the rhino is darted the ground team comes in, checks the vitals and monitors them while a tracking device is inserted. The device is placed in the horn, which has no nerve endings or blood supply, so it is painless for the animal. Once this is complete, an injection to partially wake the rhino is administered and the animal is walked into the crate for transportation.





Readying for release

Once safely in Gonarezhou, the rhinos spend some time in purpose-built bomas to acclimatise to their new home. The idea behind the bomas is to bring a routine of consistency and calm, so that the days leading up to the release are low-stress. This time also allows the rhinos to recover fully from their journey and the residual effects of darting and to become accustomed to any new browse species in their new habitat. "An acclimatised rhino and a calm release increases the likelihood of the animals adjusting to their new environment and ensures they transition onto a positive nutritional plane as soon as possible," says Jennifer Conaghan, Boma Manager at The Malilangwe Trust. While the final release is of course triumphant, looking after rhinos involves great personal sacrifice and a lot of work, and is a complex and often emotional job – decades spent monitoring individual rhinos builds an affection and an understanding of these animals' ecology and complex social relationships. "At the same time, it is also a very proud moment for us – the fact that we have enough rhino to be able to pass them on and help start a new population somewhere else," says Mike Ball, Head of Security at The Malilangwe Trust.

Continuing conservation at The Malilangwe Trust

To make a genuine contribution to rhino conservation is a long-term commitment that requires enormous dedication. Mark Saunders, Executive Director of The Malilangwe Trust, commenting on the translocation says, "We want this to be a success for the long term, and that will take a huge amount of responsibility, but we're really excited to watch this process go through. We know we are part of something fantastic here,".

With our team of dedicated and experienced wildlife managers, it's The Malilangwe Trust's hope to contribute to more opportunities for endangered species like the black rhino in the future.



Photos by Jenny Hishin, Jennifer Conaghan, and Bad Rabbit Studio.

Where's the action?

By Tyme Mutema

I was allocated as the safari guide and host of guests that were coming to stay with us at Singita Pamushana for a week. Upon enquiring as to their safari expectations they told me that all they wanted to see was action...

We aim to deliver a unique safari experience that is not necessarily non-stop action and racing from sighting to sighting, but rather an authentic, immersive and unforgettable lifetime experience. However, I knew what they desired so I tried to tailor-make their time with us by concentrating on following the predators, especially the River Pride of lions. Seven days of excellent sightings passed, but little "action".

I have a saying that goes, "It's not over until it's over." On the last morning I learned that wild dog tracks had been seen on the eastern boundary of the reserve, so, at the crack of dawn, we headed straight there to be able to have ample time to do a thorough search, as wild dogs are predominantly active at dawn and dusk. We knew a pack had been denning recently but no one had seen puppies yet.

On the eastern boundary we found the tracks but they were a day or two old, and it was not tracks of the whole pack. They headed in a westerly direction towards Nduna, so without wasting any time we headed to Nduna Dam.

At the top end of the dam there was no evidence at all but what caught my attention was the lack of any plains game at this precious watering hole. It is paradise for impala but on this morning not a single one was in sight – it was suspiciously quiet. Then my tracker David and I heard a sound that was music to our ears - the perfect hooping sound coming from the Nduna Lodge area. We raced over there and instantly saw two adult dogs standing a metre apart, with a dead female nyala between them. As I tried to calm the noise of the voices, excitement and cameras in the car an adult dog appeared from the hills followed by ten adorable little puppies!

The pups were at first hesitant and a little nervous to approach something they had never seen since their arrival, so I reversed a bit to give them space. I parked our game viewer about 50 metres away and five more adult dogs appeared from different directions, making a total of eight adults and ten puppies. The adults would feed and the little ones would then beg regurgitation from the adults. This kept on happening until they finished feeding on the carcass and later headed to the dam for a drink, then found a nice shady spot to relax and digest in the shade of the miombo woodland on the edge of the sandstone kopjes.

Safari with a difference

By Alex Kadziyanike

After having our afternoon tea and snacks we set off for our safari experience, as planned with my guests. It was their first activity as they had arrived mid-morning so I gave them the briefing and asked what their expectations were. I was expecting to hear, "We would love to see the Big Five," but to my surprise they wanted us to look for signs and tracks, and to learn about trees and herbs and their medicinal uses as it reminded them of growing up in the village. My guests were local Zimbabweans and knew most of the common plants. I was so impressed - it was really a safari with a difference! We proceeded and, just like any bird watchers, we were stopping at almost every plant that would catch their eyes to find out whether it was of any medicinal value. At one stage I thought they were sangomas, (traditional healer) because they really valued their culture and had excellent knowledge of the plants. We covered a lot of trees and plants which included the magic guarri bush or local toothbrush tree (*Euclea divinorum*). They both had an amazing experience of chewing and fraying the twigs to form the brush. The tree has been used for many years by locals not because it forms a good brush but also because it has some chemical components that makes the teeth white and also treats the gums.

I also learnt a lot from what they knew. Yes, we saw good game as we were driving but the focus was different! They were also fascinated by the elephant dung which they believed can treat nose bleeding after burning it and inhaling the smoke. At the end of the safari I gave them each new twigs fashioned into toothbrushes from the toothbrush tree.

Baobab trees, the giants of Singita Pamushana

By Tengwe Siabwanda

These iconic trees of Africa are dotted all over the Malilangwe Reserve. They are known as the “upside down trees” because their branches look like roots. They are the biggest succulent trees in Africa. During the rain they absorb and store water in their wide trunks. These trees bloom at night with beautiful white flowers which are pollinated by fruit-eating bats. They are very important trees in Africa - their leaves are edible and can be cooked like spinach, the white powder from the seeds is cream of tartar that is used as a cooking ingredient, the seeds can be roasted and used as coffee, and bark fibre is used to make ropes, baskets and floor mats. There are eight species of baobab tree, six in Madagascar and one each in mainland Africa and Australia. They store large amounts of water in their trunks which is why elephants chew the bark to get water, and the trees sometimes end up dying from the damage. They are also damaged by lightning, fires, flooding and black fungus. Some tribes believe if you pick up the flowers you will be eaten by lions! It is also believed kings and elders would hold meetings under the baobab trees with the belief that the tree’s spirits would guide them in decision making.



Photo by Jennifer Conaghan

The little things in life...

In between looking after the formidable black rhinos during the translocation, Jennifer Conaghan, Boma Manager at The Malilangwe Trust, captured these photos of some of the smaller creatures and flowers that are out and about on the reserve at the moment.



A plum slug (*Latoia latistriga*)
If the colours are not enough to warn you know that the spines are toxic and can induce an extreme burning sensation.

The image directly below (by Dharmesh Daya) is of the larvae of the *Catamerus revoili* beetle. The slow moving beetle feeds on the lichen that grows on the rocks.



A selection of pink flowers that are currently showing...

Many of the plants in this region do not have common names, and are referred to by their scientific name or more generally by the Genus name.

Anisotes species
Hemizygia species
The fertility plant (*Cyathula orthacantha*)



Twitter

Photos by Josh Saunders

Going on one of Singita Pamushana's water safaris provides some of the best birding to be found anywhere in Africa. Year round we see and hear African fish eagles (*Haliaeetus vocifer*), and this month provided a glimpse of African darter (*Anhinga rufa*) chicks in their nest, which is built in a dead tree in the middle of Malilangwe Dam.



August Gallery



Photo by Josh Saunders

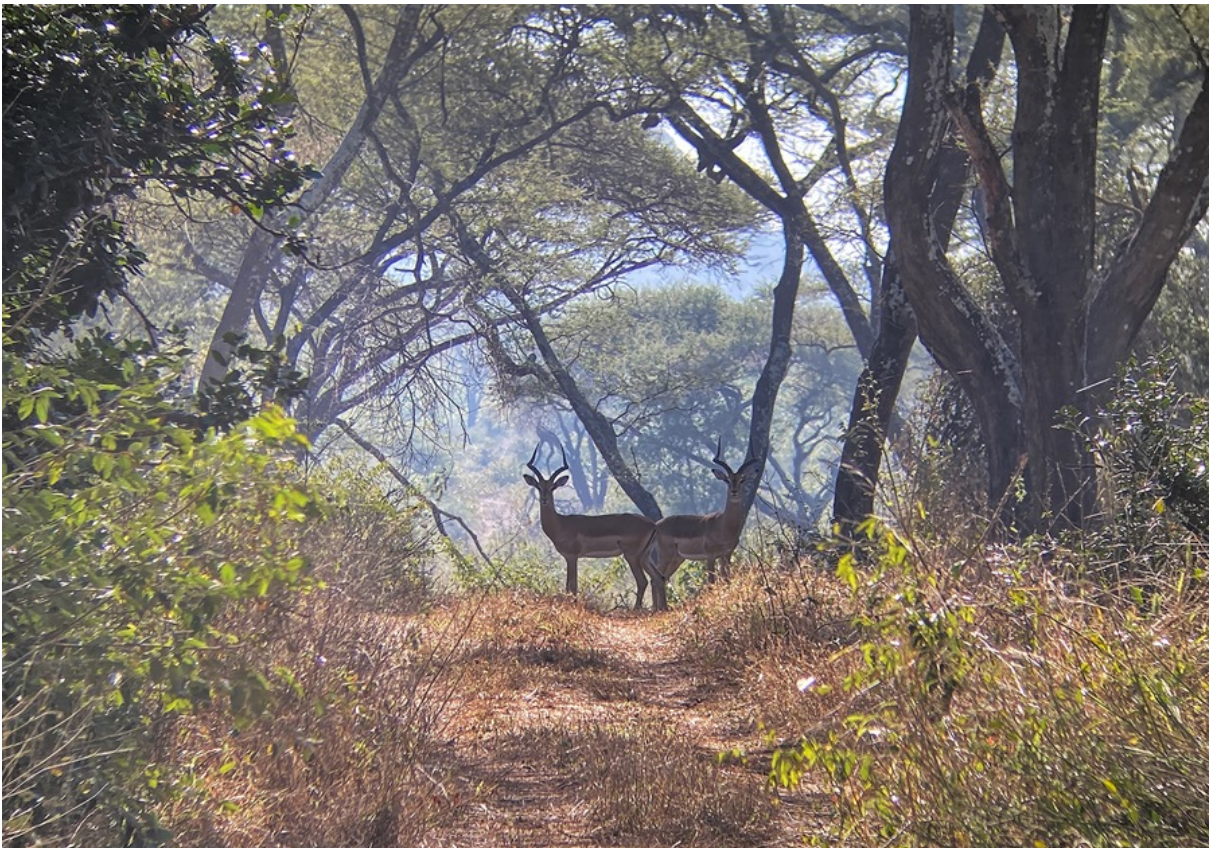


Photo by Jennifer Conaghan

Compiled by Jenny Hishin