Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT
SINGITA GRUMETI & LAMAI, TANZANIA
For the month of July, Two Thousand and Twenty Four

Temperature			**Rainfall Recorded**		**Sunrise & Sunset**	
Average minimum:	16°C	(60.8°F)	Faru Faru	11mm	Sunrise	06:49
Average maximum:	30°C	(86.0°F)	Sabora	48mm	Sunset	18:48
Minimum recorded:	15°C	(59.0°F)	Sasakwa	53mm		
Maximum recorded:	32°C	(89.6°F)				

July has been a relatively dry month with only one large 40mm soaking at the very end of the month. The Grumeti River still flows, however, her water levels continue to drop steadily. The migratory herds of wildebeest remained with us through the majority of the month, in fact and we only started to see the last of the herds begin to head off to the north-east towards the end of the month.

Huge numbers of wildebeest arrived at the Mara River during the middle of July and they continue to push north to the grazing lands of the Lamai and further.

With the wildebeest passing through we have seen fantastic plains game in general across the reserve. Many thousands of zebra continue to roam the Grumeti Reserve, lovely gazelle numbers, giraffe and eland.

The scorched ground from fires have created some wonderful photographic opportunities this month with vivid colour contrasts. A magic month with truly excellent wildlife sightings!

Here's a sightings snapshot for July:

Lions

- Lion sightings this month have been nothing short of awesome! We have had some very interesting interactions with the prides around Sasakwa Hill on the plains to the south.
- The once shy Mkomure Pride are relaxing a little and establishing themselves with confidence a short distance away from the north-eastern side of the hill, on the drainage. This pride have been there the entire month without much movement at all.
- The Ridge Pride have been ruling the southern slopes of Sasakwa Hill and the plains towards Sasakwa Dam.
- The Butamtam Pride have been observed this month in the Koroya Hill region, further south towards Nyati plains and the Pundamilia acacia woodlands.
- The lions have fed well this month, with an abundance of prey on the reserve the buffalo can at last relax a little!
- Nyasirori Pride continue to roam the Sabora plains offering some nice sightings close to Sabora Camp.
- Ridge Pride lionesses have been based close to Sasakwa Dam this month ambushing wildebeest as they arrive to drink.

Leopards

- Leopard sightings this month have been great.
- Some lovely interactions with mother and two cubs around the Mbogo drainage. Mama and two shifted downstream after the Mkuyu Pride lions moved in on the northern region of Mbogo drainage. The mother ultimately led the two cubs away from danger and recently they have been spending time a little closer to Faru Faru lodge.
- We have had some lovely sightings of the Mazingira female and single male cub on Sasakwa Hill.
- An interesting occurrence of two similarly aged male leopards on the Mkomure drainage, just east of Sasakwa airstrip. The two males have been seen together and sharing kills. We believe them to be brothers, offspring of the Mazingira female from approximately two and a half years ago.
- The Serengeti Hill male leopard was seen with a wildebeest calf kill on the Manangai drainage.
- The Grumeti North male was seen on a number of occasions on the Sand Road/Grumeti West Road junction.
- A shy female was seen on the Grumeti North drainage.

Cheetahs

- Some great cheetah sightings this month, as expected with conditions changing.
- A single female seen hunting in the Sabora Camp area.
- A mother with a single sub-adult cub seen on a number of occasions west of Sabora Camp, on the edge of the rain tree woodlands.
- A male cheetah seen on the Manangai drainage, central Sasakwa plains.
- The cheetah on the reserve this month are just beginning to establish once again, after good numbers of wildebeest have opened up the environment for the cheetahs to settle. It is not long before we see the return of their favoured prey species, Thompson's and Robert's gazelle.

Elephants

- Some lovely elephant numbers this month.
- We have seen some huge herds rolling in to Sasakwa Dam to drink and bathe.
- As the Grumeti River continues to drop elephant activity in and around the banks has been incredible. The river water flowing shallow and clear entices the herds in during the heat of the day.
- Beautiful big bull elephants often revisit the river in the quiet of dusk, drinking and walking excitedly through the shallows.
- Aggregations of breeding herds have been seen up to 200 strong both in the central regions and in the western rain tree woodlands.

- Good breeding herds seen on the Raho drainage.

Buffalo

- Fantastic buffalo numbers seen all over the reserve.
- A lovely sighting of a herd of 400 crossing the Grumeti River in the Ikorongo.
- Again, catching the buffalo herds coming to drink at the river during the heat of the day provides some exciting viewing. Throw a herd of wildebeest in the mix too with lions ambushing and you've got your work cut out!
- Large breeding herds have been seen all over the property.
- Some fantastic bull buffalo also observed with varied horn sizes, shapes and breadth.
- Good buffalo bull numbers grazing up on Sasakwa Hill.
- Many young calves seen within the herds, testament to their successes over the years.
- Buffalo numbers, like lions, continue do boom. Ultimately a very interesting correlation.

Rhinos

- Rhino sighting in the IPZ have been lovely this month.
- We have noticed Eric spending quite some time close to Laikipia, shadowing her movements through the thickets on the hillside. We certainly hope that this proximity between the two may lead to something special once again.
- Zaituni, the orphaned youngster, continues to do very well. She is fully grown now and we hope to see her, in the not too distant future, return to the wilds.
- Other rhino individuals on the reserve are fit and well. All young calves are accounted for, fit and strong.
- The rhino teams continue to keep a close eye on these individuals as they disperse over considerable distances.

Other interesting sightings

- This month has been rather a special month in terms of rare bird sightings.
- Two very rare bird species were seen this month which, we believe, have not been recorded here on the Grumeti reserve before. The Madagascar squacco heron and the blue swallow both spotted this July! The Madagascar squacco heron was seen on the Manchira River, north-west Ikorongo, and the blue swallow has been seen close to Sasakwa Dam.
- A caracal was seen close to Serengeti House this month.
- Some fantastic wildebeest and zebra numbers surging through the reserve this month.
- We had a few great serval sightings on the plains of the central region.
- Huge herds of Topi seen out on the Kawanga plains.

Some short bush stories follow as well as the July Gallery of images.

Rare and endangered bird species **Story and photos by George Tolchard**

An incredibly exciting month for bird species records here on the Grumeti Reserve with two very rare and endangered birds being spotted.

The first was the Madagascar squacco heron in the middle of the month. This bird came to our attention whilst on the Manchira River in the Ikorongo region, during guide training. Exploring the quiet rapids and pools of the river, the beautiful thick riparian, the Manchira always has special things waiting to be uncovered! The Manchira is not explored by many and its secret charms are only uncovered for those that dare to search off the beaten trail.

As we approached a hidden pool of clear water, laden with lily pads, the heron leapt into the air and dashed for cover in the overhanging branches of the closest trees. As it came to rest for a few minutes in the safety of cover, it allowed me just enough time to capture this beautiful bird.

This particular heron is a non-breeding visitor to the African mainland, coming all the way from Madagascar and the Comoros Islands and hiding away on quiet waterways here in Tanzania. There are perhaps as few as a couple of thousand of these birds left on our planet and to put this in perspective, it is more rare than black rhinos or African wild dogs!

Like many other species around the world, habitat loss is a major factor in its decline in numbers. The clearing, draining and destruction of their wetland habitats for the implementation of rice farms is having disastrous effects on the species.

The birds usually arrive with us in April and will only return to the breeding grounds once again around October.

Here is the photo that I managed to capture… You will notice the beautiful markings this species has. Far more prominent than the common squacco heron. Look at the deep chocolate browns and yellows!



I think you will agree, it sits within its environment very well, remaining relatively neutral with its wonderful camouflage.

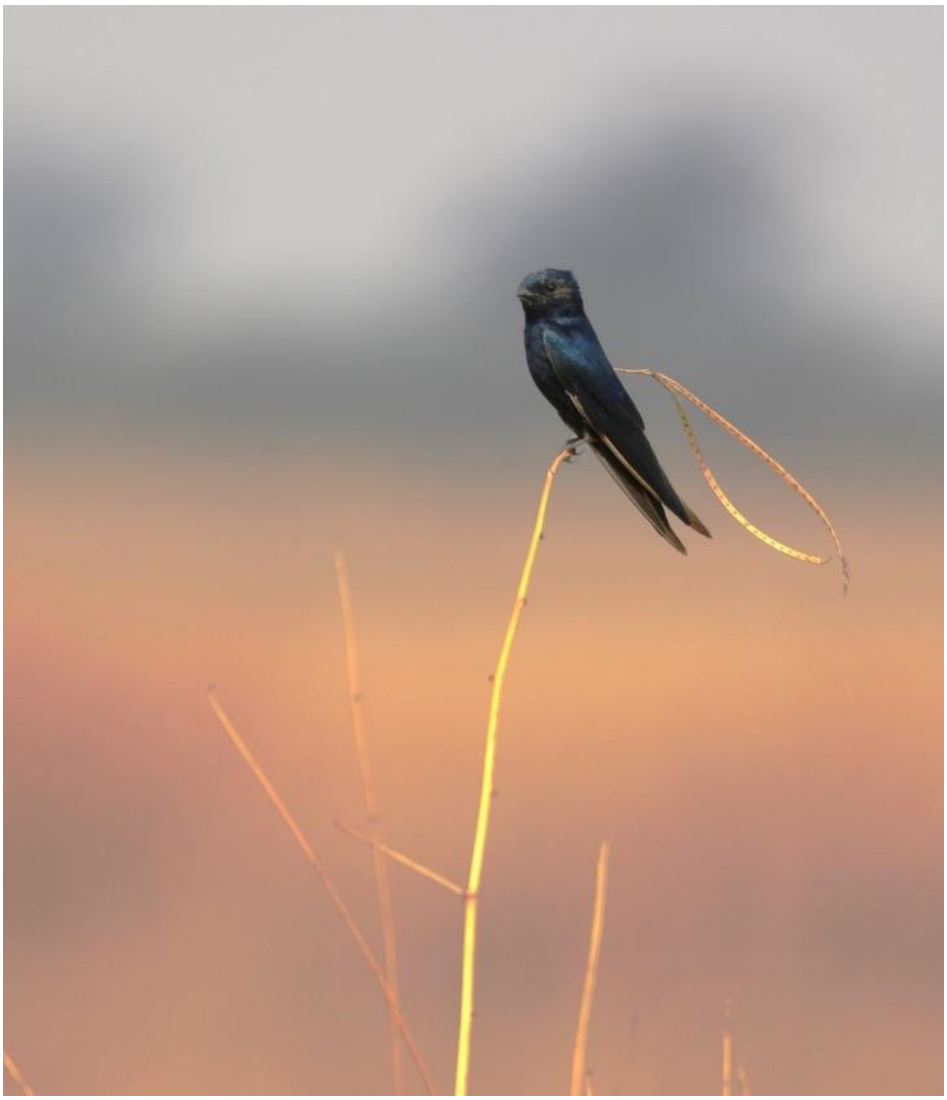
Our second special little feathered visitor this July was the blue swallow.

This is another rare non-breeding visitor that moves up the continent from the south to Tanzania's north-west. This species of swallow prefers moist highland grasslands and they have in fact been observed in the Lamai Triangle in recent years. To see them here in the central Grumeti Reserve is really something special and a first for our records!

The birds were spotted flying around the western side of Sasakwa Dam. They seemed to remain flying over the dampest area of grasses, on a seepage line. It seemed as if the birds were feeding on small insects just above the taller grasses. There must have been about eight individuals or so. We watched the birds steadily working up the wind feeding and then dart around with the wind once again and begin working back up steadily. Every once in a while the birds would find a favoured perch on a dried stalk or taller stem of grass and rest a while.

Once we had watched them for a while it was clear where their favoured perches were and so slowly we approached and patiently waited…

Eventually we were able to get some reasonable shots of the bird resting. Such a treat! Very pleasing to finally catch up to this elusive and rare species of swallow.



Incidentally, with the addition of these two special bird species, this in fact takes our Grumeti Bird List up to a total of 395 species recorded. We do hope to break the 400 mark as we consolidate lists over the next few months.

The Lamai Triangle **Story by Mishi Mtili**

The game viewing has been amazing this month in the Lamai. Great wildebeest numbers on the plains, cheetah, leopard, and elephants.

The first wildebeest crossing of the mighty Mara River started at the beginning of the month from the southern side and up into the Lamai Triangle. There are still huge herds grazing to the south of the Mara River and have yet to cross. I believe a lot more action lies ahead on this river in the weeks to come.



The beautiful male leopard of Chaka La Kigelia. Picture captured by Paulo Kivuyo.

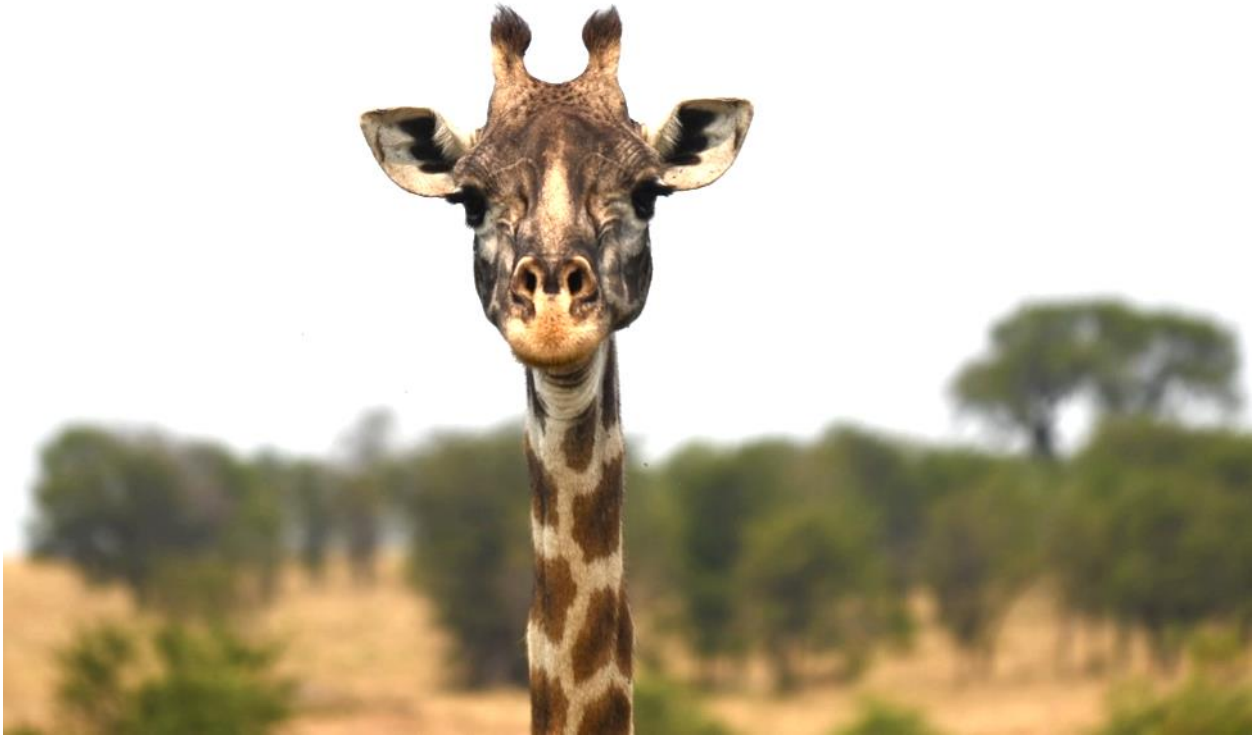
We have witnessed some magical crossings during my time here in camp. Some very special moments indeed. The general plains game is always good in the Lamai with lovely topi, gazelle, giraffe, zebra, eland and warthog numbers dotted over the plains. We had some fantastic predator interactions with the three cheetah brothers continuing to do well. The elephant sightings have been lovely this month with many elephants, often close to camp which I always enjoy. We have been lucky enough to experience some large bull elephants also passing through the region.



A mighty Ruppell's Griffon Vulture descends. Picture by Paul Kivuyo.



A very well-known elephant cow with incredible tusk formation, captured here by Paulo Kivuyo.

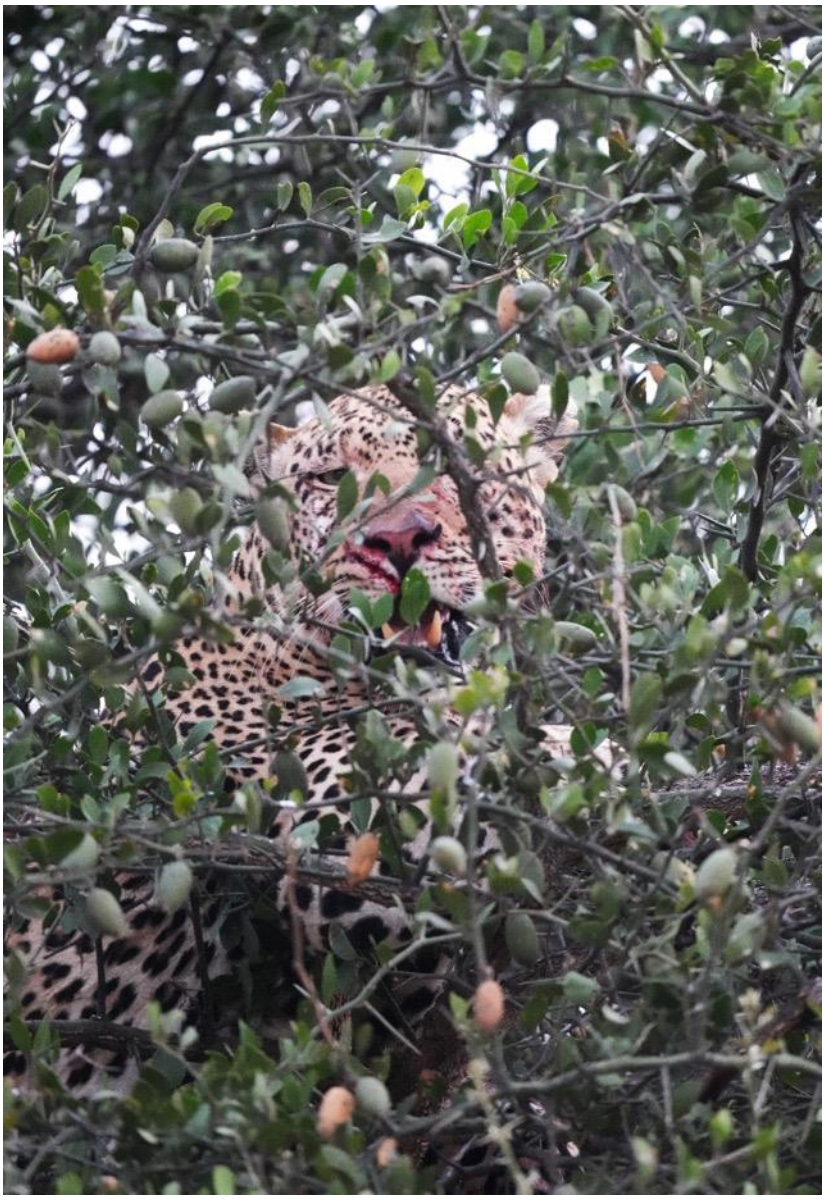


An inquisitive giraffe looks on. Picture by Mishi Mtili.

A riveting encounter: leopards in peril **By James Ikamba**

Musa guided expertly through the rugged paths of the Grumeti Reserves, the late afternoon sun casting golden hues over the savanna. His eyes, trained from years of experience, scanned the landscape for any signs of wildlife. As the game drive progressed, the usual sightings of impalas, zebras, and elephants delighted our guests. Little did they know, a rare spectacle awaited them. Approaching a particular area where lions were seen on the morning drive, Musa noticed something unusual. The distinctive rosettes of a leopard were visible high up in one of the trees. As he slowed the vehicle, the binoculars came out, and everyone strained to see more clearly. What they saw left them in awe…

Two leopards, locked in a tense standoff, clung to the branches of the same balanites tree. It was an unprecedented sight - these were known rivals, both male, and notoriously territorial. Their eyes burned with mutual animosity, each wary of the other's next move. But this was only the beginning of the extraordinary scene.



A nasty cut sustained from a claw swipe clearly visible on this male. Picture by James Ikamba.

Directly beneath the tree, a pride of three lions lay sprawled in the shade. Two females lounged lazily, their sleek forms stretching out as they enjoyed the diminishing heat of the day. Beside them, a massive male lion, his mane a dark, imposing halo, kept a vigilant watch. The presence of these apex predators presented a dire predicament for the leopards above.

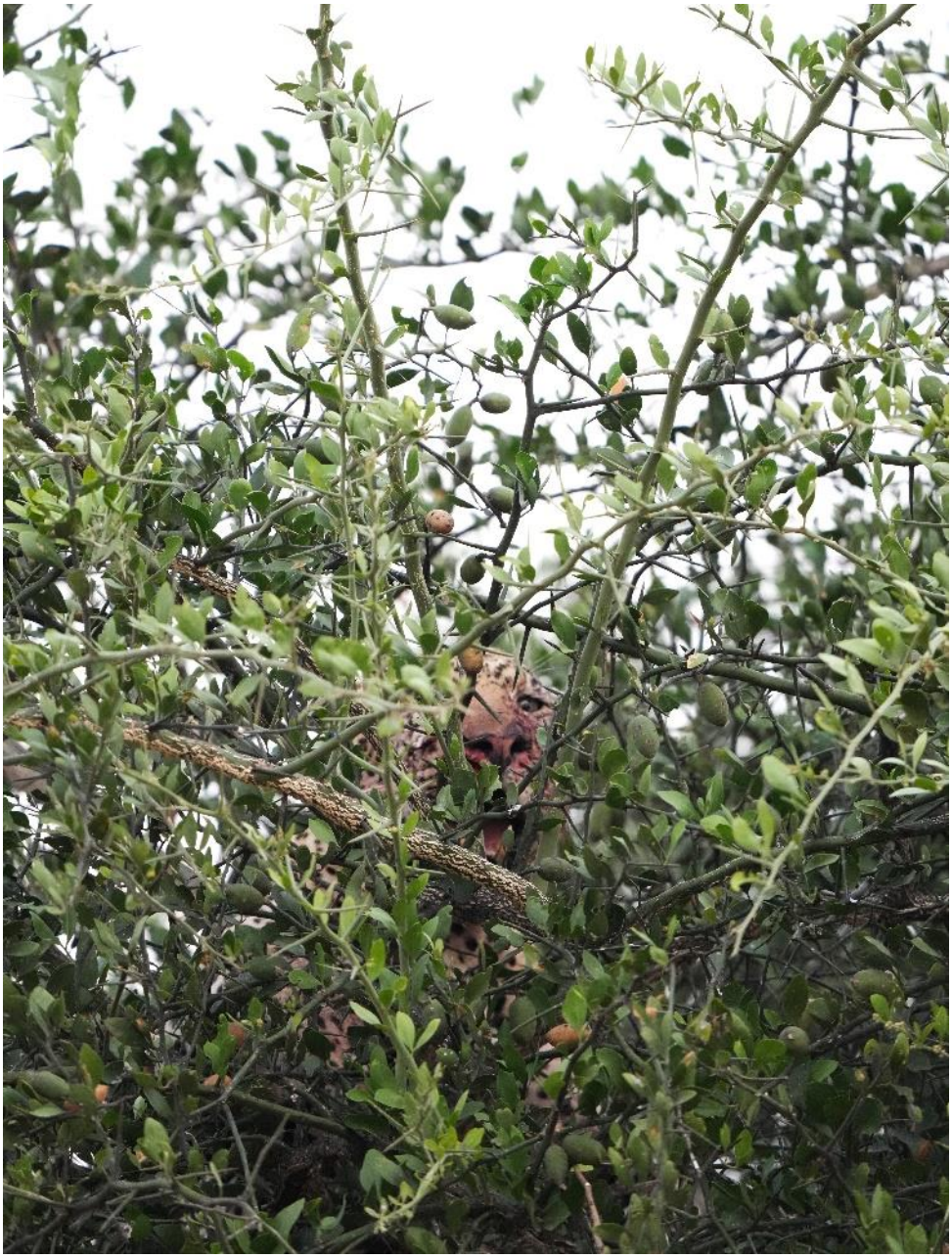
Musa quietly explained to his guests the unique dynamics they were witnessing. Leopards, though incredibly agile and adept climbers, are no match for the raw power of lions on the ground. Descending the tree with the pride so close would be suicidal. The leopards seemed to acutely sense this danger. They clung to their perches, muscles tense, eyes darting between each other and the lions below. The tension was palpable, a standoff that no one in Musa's vehicle could tear their eyes away from. It was a vivid demonstration of the delicate balance of power in the animal kingdom.



The other male, shattered from the encounter, rested his head and closed his eyes. Photo by Jimmy Ikamba

Realizing the uniqueness of the sighting, Musa reached for his radio. In a calm but excited voice, he called in the situation to his fellow guides. Almost immediately, a buzz of chatter filled the airwaves as guides across the reserve kept their ears open, experiencing the extraordinary scene through Musa's narration. Those who were close enough began making their way to the location, eager to witness the phenomenon first-hand. Vehicles arrived one by one, maintaining a respectful distance to avoid disturbing the animals. Guides respectfully switched spots, ensuring everyone had a chance to marvel at the remarkable tableau. The camaraderie among the guides was evident as they coordinated their movements, allowing each group to experience the sight while preserving the integrity of the scene.

Minutes stretched into an hour, and the scenario remained unchanged. The leopards occasionally shifted their positions, careful not to provoke an attack from below or above. The lions, seemingly indifferent for the moment, occasionally glanced up, acknowledging the leopards' presence but not perceiving an immediate threat.



Only a watchful eye can be seen through the foliage as this male leopard sinks away into cover, sore from his wounds.

Musa knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime sighting, a true testament to the miraculous nature of Singita and the Grumeti Reserves. Here, nature's drama played out in its rawest form, revealing the intricate and often brutal dance of survival.

As the sun began to set, casting a warm glow over the landscape, Musa and other guides together with their guests knew they had witnessed something extraordinary. The delicate balance of rivalry and survival, predator and prey, encapsulated in a single, unforgettable moment.

Leaving the scene, we all felt a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to be part of such a powerful encounter.

July Gallery



Elephant bull dust bathing on the Sabora plain. Picture by Calson Luka.



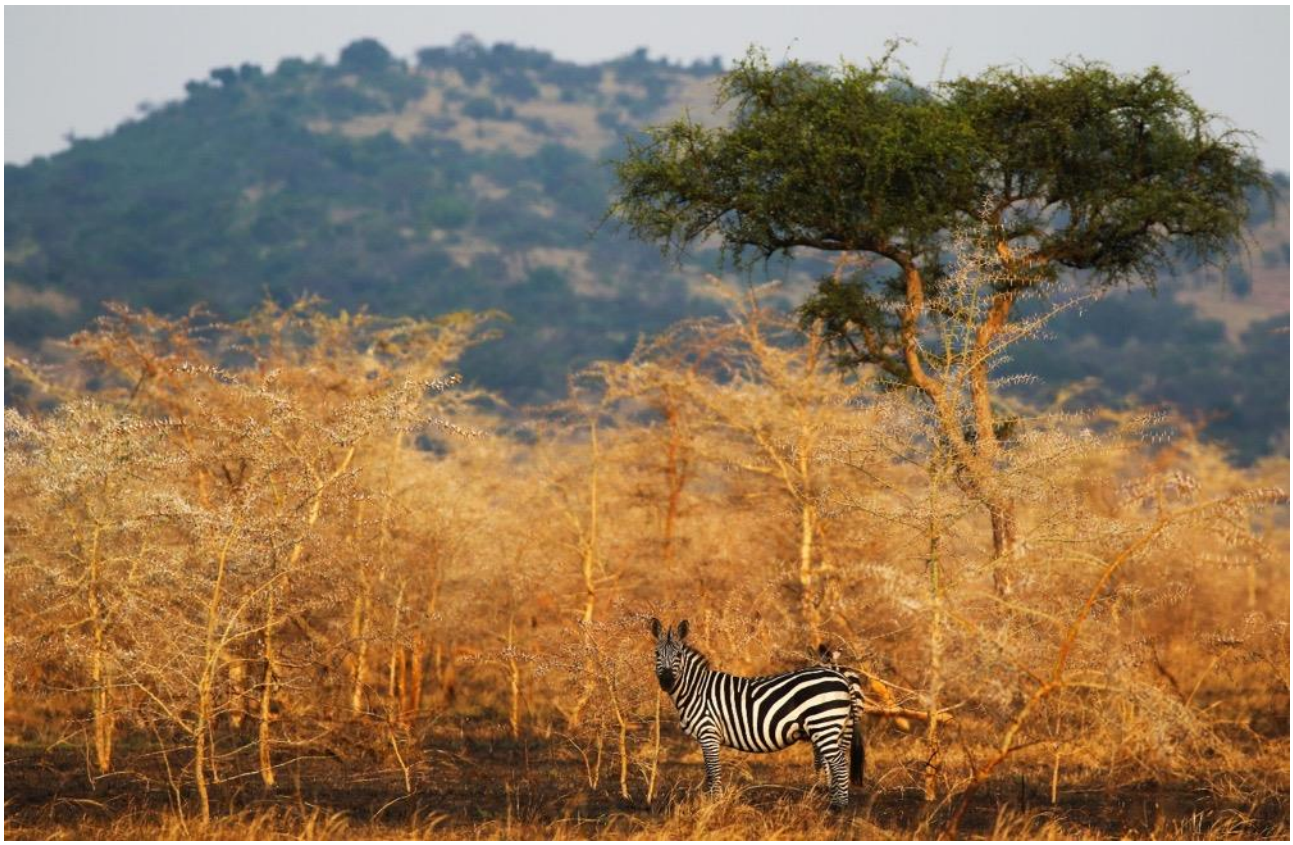
Elephants inbound to Sasakwa Dam. Picture by Calson Luka.



A Lioness slowly rises from slumber as the sun sinks away to the west
Picture captured by Calson Luka



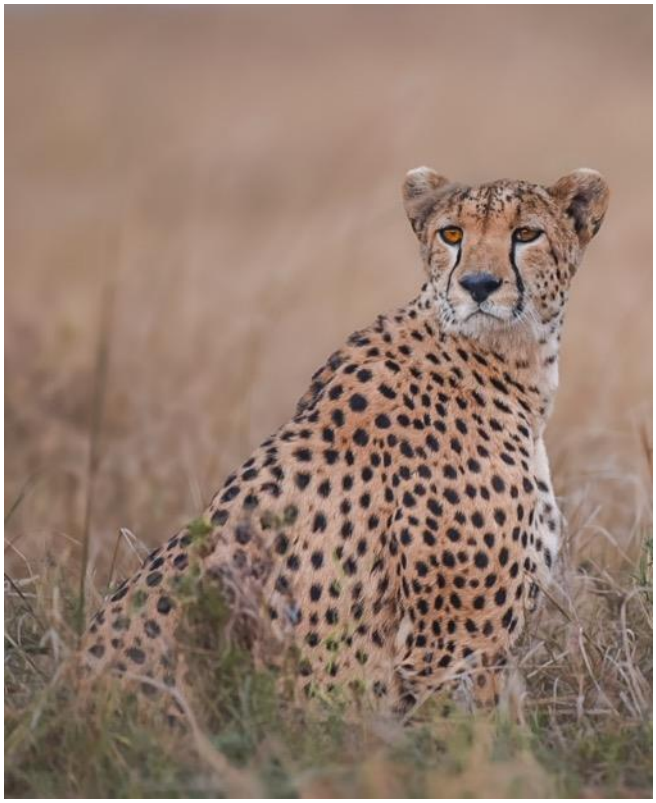
Giraffe wander the plains at dusk. Picture by Calson Luka.



The beautiful contrasts of zebras and charred earth. Pictures by George Tolchard.









A mother and her subadult youngster scour the Nyasirori high ground for prey. Photos by Paulo Kivuyo.



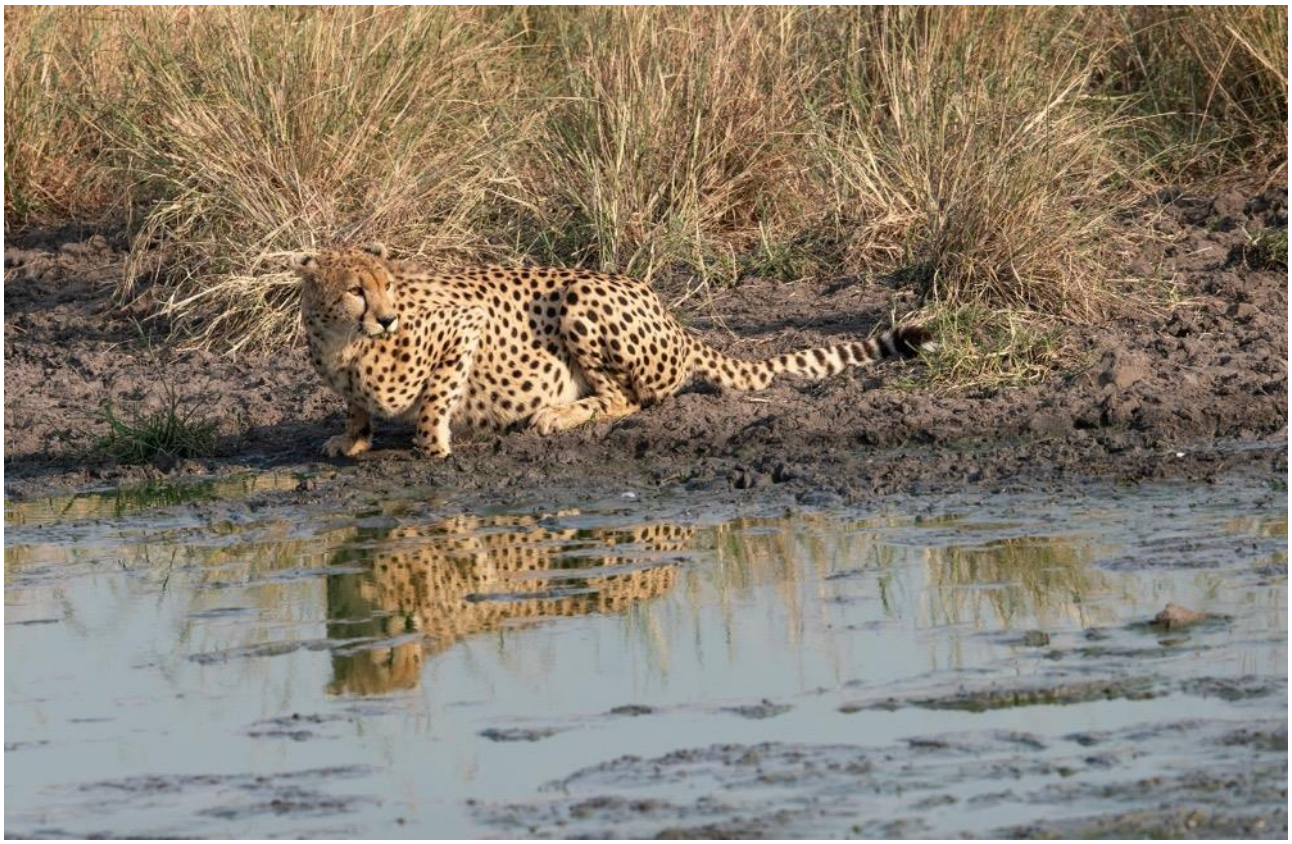
The beautiful Sabora female Cheetah captured here by Sabora camp manager Barbara Coccia



A dwarf bittern poses neatly next to Pelican Pan on the Grumeti River. Photo by Paulo Kivuyo.



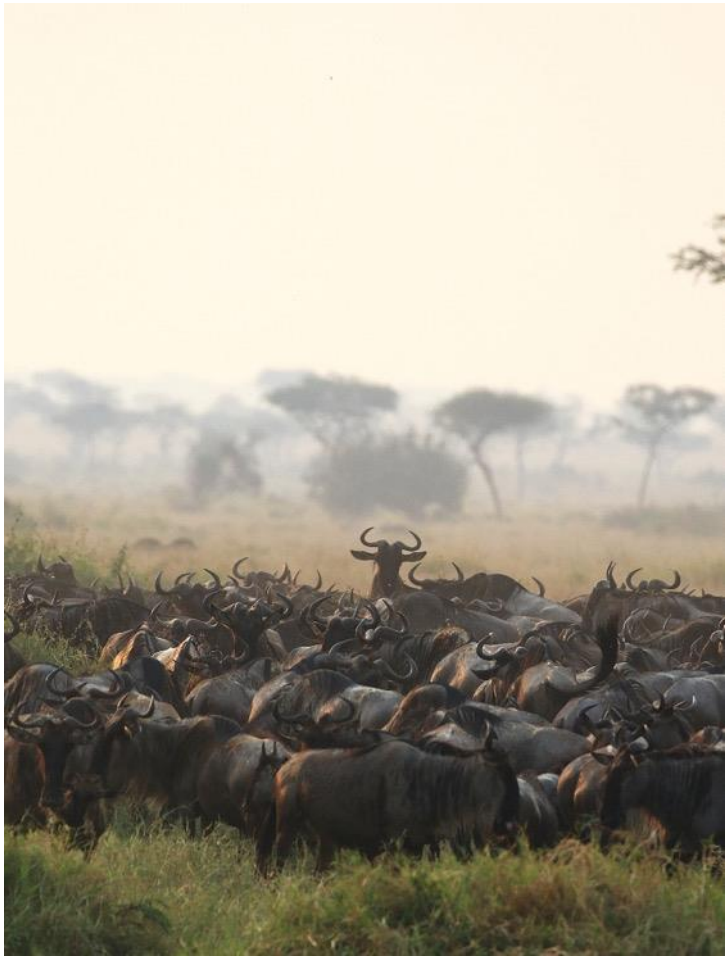
The lovely red-necked francolin shows off to another morning. Photo by Paulo Kivuyo.



The Sabora female cheetah drinks from the waterhole close to Sabora Camp. Photo by Calson Luka.



A Ridge Pride lioness responds to her other pride members. Photo by Calson Luka.



Wildebeest gather at Pelican Pan to drink. Photo by George Tolchard.



A Ridge Pride lion drops in for a drink, casting a perfect reflection. Photo by Calson Luka.

Report compiled by George Tolchard.