

Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA GRUMETI TANZANIA For the month of May, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four

Temperature

Average minimum: 19°C (66.2°F)
Average maximum: 30°C (86.0°F)
Minimum recorded: 17°C (62.6°F)
Maximum recorded: 32°C (89.6°F)

Rainfall Recorded

Faru Faru 57 mm
Sabora 55 mm
Sasakwa 110 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise 06:40
Sunset 18:40

May is always an interesting month as we look at the greater Serengeti ecosystem, the weather and the effects this will have on the migrating wildebeest and zebra. Conditions in the south are drying slowly but still green in essence. We have seen movements of large herds into the central region of the Serengeti, however, the larger herds are still some distance away. Mega herds stretch across the horizon from the Gol Kopjes to the Masai rocks in the south-east.

The Grumeti grasslands are still wet in places, even though the last ten days of the month saw little rain. The Grumeti River still flows strong and muddy and it may be some time before we start to see the water levels drop considerably.

Wildlife viewing, as always, has been brilliant with some great photographic opportunities this month.

Here's a sightings snapshot for May:

Lions

Wonderful lion sightings for the month with some great sightings of our resident prides.

- A Butamtam mating pair observed at the base of Pundamilia Hill.
- 14 members of the Butamtam Pride seen just north of Sasakwa Dam.
- 12 members of the Nyasirori Pride seen just east of the Nyasirori Ranger Post.
- 15 members of the Butamtam Pride were seen on a buffalo carcass in the marsh area.
- The Sasakwa Pride of five seen on the hill close to sales pavilion.
- The Nyasirori Pride seen on the Nyasirori high ground close to the Boundary Pan drainage.
- Three members of the Mkuyu Pride seen on the Faru Faru access.
- Four Butamtam lionesses seen on a wildebeest kill on the Nyati plains.
- 10 Butamtam lionesses seen hunting buffalo just south of OP 7.
- 19 members of the Butamtam Pride gathered together on a buffalo kill, Sand Road.
- Seven members of the Nyasirori Pride seen on a buffalo kill, Sabora drainage.

Leopards:

- Mbogo female seen with her two cubs of four months old, just west of the Mbogo drainage. The cubs are well, looking fit and strong.
- A young male seen on the River Road close to Eagles Nest Loop.
- Sasakwa male leopard seen on the concrete strips passing maintenance block.
- A male leopard seen at Boundary Pan, up in a sausage tree, with a Nile monitor kill.
- Mbogo female with her two cubs were seen again a little further down the Mbogo drainage.
- Mbogo male leopard seen on the drainage line, north of the main Fort Ikoma Road.
- A shy male seen on the Sabora drainage.
- The Sasakwa female leopard seen with her two cubs of five months old on the airstrip road at the eastern base of Sasakwa Hill.
- A male leopard seen on the Nyasirori drainage with a porcupine kill.
- The Mbogo female seen just north of the Faru Faru lodge access.

Cheetahs:

- Some lovely sightings of a female cheetah on the Nyasirori high ground. This female was seen hunting Thompson's gazelle successfully on a number of occasions in the area. She has occupied the area between Nyasirori Dam and Mbuni crossing for the month of May.

Elephants:

May has been a wonderful month for elephant viewing on the reserve, as is usual for this time of year.

- Matriarchal herds have been seen moving through the greater region on many occasions. Some herds consisting of up to 30 individuals, other smaller herds in the region of Sasakwa Hill.
- Towards the end of the month, we observed groups of large bulls following some of the herds in the central regions.
- A group of 4 large bulls was seen in the southern Ikorongo close to Mbega Bridge.
- "Zito" arrived on the Nyasirori high ground on the 29th of the month. This is incredible news for us here on the Grumeti. This bull elephant of 50 years plus is a true icon of the Serengeti and it has been quite some time since we had last laid eyes on him. Very excited to have him return once again.

Buffalos:

- Large herds of buffalo seen all over the reserve.
- Good buffalo bull activity on Sasakwa Hill during the night.
- A lovely herd of buffalo bulls seen close to Pelican Pan on the Grumeti River Road.
- Some huge herds of 500 – 700 strong out on the Gambaranyera plains in the West.

- Herds shifting considerably at night as being hassled regularly by lions.
- Large herds often seen with great numbers of cattle egrets this month. Such a beautiful spectacle!

Rhinos:

- The rhinos on the reserve continue to do very well.
- A particular female dispersed considerable distance, met and spent time with an established male from the northern Serengeti population. As a result, this female fell pregnant and is now rearing her first calf.
- Preparations for further relocation projects of the eastern black rhino are underway and we hope to successfully add another 10 individuals within the system in the coming years.

Other interesting sightings:

- We have had some great serval and caracal sightings this month, despite the very long grass. I think this is probably the reason why we have had such great sightings - due to the fact that these cats just can't resist the opportunity to get away from the grass from time to time. As a result, we are experiencing some great sightings on the roads and two-tracks across the reserve.
- Fantastic plains wildlife seen on the Nyasirori high ground including eland, zebra, warthog, Thompson's gazelle, Robert's gazelle and giraffe.
- Some lovely Temminck's and violet-tipped courser sightings this month.



A Nyasirori lioness snoozing in the heat of the day. Picture by Barbara Coccia.

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

Birding is one of my favourite aspects during a drive. After the long rains, over the last six months, life is restored once again to the grasslands and all the waterholes and drainage lines are full. These micro habitats are the perfect little places for interesting species of birds to reside. Many aquatic plants and vegetation types of these seasonally flooded depressions attract and support bird species such as kingfishers, ducks, geese, warblers, plovers and many other specials. The malachite kingfisher can be seen at most little waterholes, like this one I captured at Pelican Pan on the Grumeti River Road.



A bright and beautiful malachite kingfisher.

The rank wet grasslands become home to many rare and secretive birds such as flufftails, rails, snipes and crakes. These birds exist in an underworld of water and tangled tall grass. Sometimes you may be lucky enough to hear some of these birds call and this is often the only clue that we have that they exist!

We were fortunate enough to confirm the presence of a streaky-breasted flufftail which is probably one of the most difficult birds in Africa to view, and only a handful of people in the world have ever actually seen one! What an incredible find!

I was also happy to reveal a highland rush warbler just south of Sabora camp this month! This species had not been formally recorded here on the Grumeti Reserve before. There are over 450 bird species that have been recorded in the Serengeti ecosystem but just imagine how many other species frequent the area without having been recorded! We continue to log new species all the time and it really is quite exciting!

We were very fortunate to have a fantastic sighting of a violet-tipped courser here on Sasakwa Hill for the first time! This species is also known as the bronze-winged courser and is the largest and one of the most striking coursers. These birds obviously move around the country depending on agreeable habitat and conditions but we really know very little about where they go or where they have come from.

George Tolchard managed to capture the bird whilst a pair resided on the top of the hill close to the newly cut grass tracks of Farasi.



Violet-tipped courser by George Tolchard.

A very striking bird, I think you will agree. We were very fortunate to have seen and captured this species for records here on the reserve. This bird is largely nocturnal and does most of its foraging during the hours of darkness. Notice the large eye, giving us quite the clue that night vision is most likely pretty good!



A rosy-breasted long-claw.

May has offered us a fantastic opportunity to spend time with a particular female cheetah that has been occupying the Nyasirori high ground, south of Sabora camp.

We have had numerous sightings of this cheetah this month and her story unfolding before us has offered both guides and guests great satisfaction. Her successes, her challenges, trials and tribulations as she walks her trail through life on a little slice of high ground in the middle of the Serengeti.



Photo by Sabora manager, Barbara Coccia.

She is constantly hounded by larger, more powerful predators. She must remain neutral and stay off the radar. If the lion prides and spotted hyenas in the area are aware of her presence then it can only mean trouble and she is certainly not looking for trouble. She is slender, built for speed. Unable to match the brute forces of lions and hyenas.

She is hungry, she negotiates the long grass carefully as she scans the plains ahead looking for an opportunity to approach a small herd of Thomson's gazelle. Patiently she watches the herd, assessing, reading the lay of the land, anticipating her quarry's movements.

She is close now, she has not fed for four or five days and the aching within her belly is almost overwhelming. She focusses hard, forces herself not to rush into anything too soon. This one has to count, this one must be a success.

All of a sudden, over her left shoulder, a spotted hyena gives its watchful position away. Ears just popping out above the Crotalaria thicket it had been hiding in.

Her cover has been blown, the hyenas have eyes on her, this is not good. She has no option but to walk away and she knows this all too well. If she were to go ahead with the hunt it would be in vain for as soon as she was able to bring down her prey, the hyenas would swoop in and steal it from her. Bullying her off her hard-earned efforts with brute strength.



She relieves herself of the stalk, stands up tall in the grass, stretches, turns and walks away. Her hunger aches on.

Head hanging just a little lower than usual, she makes her way towards the Nyasirori drainage line. Snaking from thicket to thicket, head low, nose working overtime. She knows she may just be lucky enough to flush a scrub hare - a welcome meal at this stage of the day. She must keep her energy levels up until she can afford to follow the Thompson's gazelles another day. For now, she must do what she can to disappear from the hyenas' radar.

Another day will come, another hunt will ensue, the fight for survival continues.

We were in fact fortunate on a number of occasions to see her successfully bring down prey. She fed undisturbed and fed well! Life is by no means easy for the animals out on the plains, tragedy and challenges invariably lie in wait further down the trail.

It is such a pleasure to be a part of this animal's story, even if for just a short time. Powerful connections are made with Mother Nature and we walk away both humbled rejuvenated. We will be keeping you posted on her movements in the coming weeks.

May Gallery



The Nyasirori female cheetah watches a herd of Thompson's gazelle closely. Picture by Paulo Kivuyo.



Two male lions out on the western plains, captured here by Barbara Coccia.



Lionesses of the Nyasirori begin to stir in the early evening. Picture by Barakel Mtalo.



A Nyasirori mating pair, captured here by Calson Luka, close to Sabora camp.



Success for the ostriches! Seen out on the Nyati high ground. Picture taken by Calson Luka.



Plains wildlife gather on the Nyasirori high ground in the evening light. Picture by Calson Luka.



A battle-scarred buffalo bull captured here by Barbara Coccia. I am sure this character has some stories to tell! Broken horns, a weathered face and shredded ears, a warrior of the plains having shaken lions from his back on more than one occasion!



A burst of colour with this lovely little capture of a parasitic weaver (cuckoo finch).
Photographed by trainee guide Abdul Shematulu.



An awesome capture here of a caracal in the tall grass
by trainee guide, Laurance Eliyahu.



Beautiful pictures here from the Mbogo drainage. Paulo Kivuyo managed to capture the Mbogo female's cubs of a little over four months old now. The family is well and strong. The cubs are growing fast now and continue to provide some magical sightings.





Zebra on the endless plains. Some beautiful colours coming through here. Captured by Paulo Kivuyo.



The stunning southern red bishop (male) captured here by Barbara Coccia.
This little chap is busy with nest maintenance.