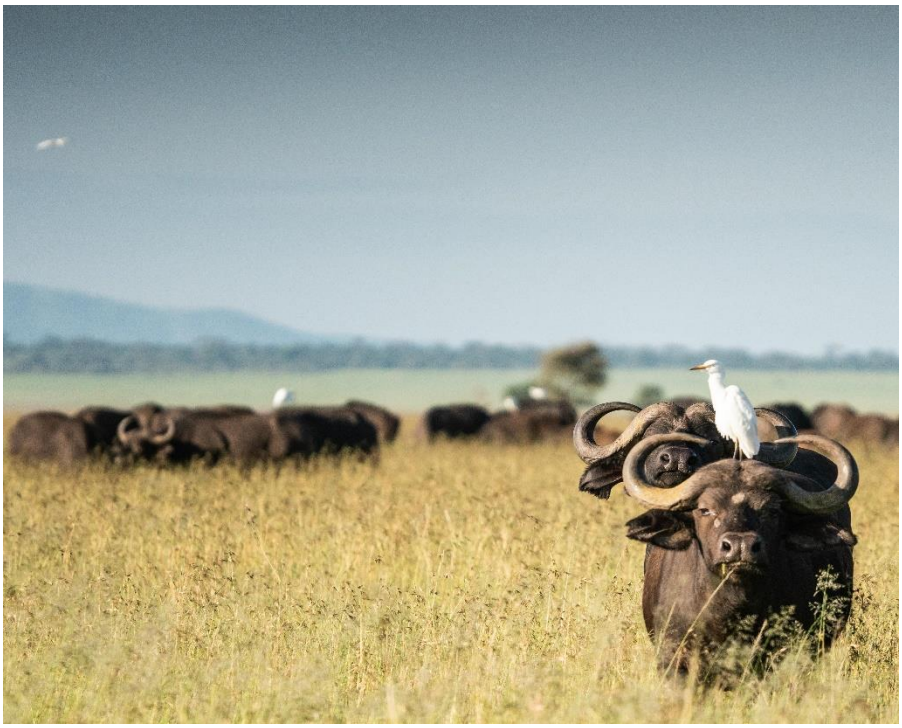
Singita



WILDLIFE REPORT
SINGITA GRUMETI & LAMAI, TANZANIA
For the month of December, Two Thousand and Twenty-Three

Temperature	
Average minimum:	19°C (66°F)
Average maximum:	33°C (91°F)
Minimum recorded:	16°C (60°F)
Maximum recorded:	37°C (98°F)

Rainfall Recorded	
Faru Faru	111 mm
Sabora	147 mm
Sasakwa	139 mm
Lamai	111 mm

Sunrise & Sunset	
Sunrise	06:36
Sunset	18:51

The final month of the year and it finished off with the bush looking green and lush. The grass has responded to the mix of rain and sun and now stands around waist hight. Cycadas and insects call from the fissures in the bark of trees and many pairs of birds are caught up in feeding their growing and hungry chicks.

The Topi started their rutting season on the high ground around Nyasirori Ranger Post towards the end of the month and some wildebeest calves were born around the middle of the month on the short plains of Nyati area. These wildebeest calves form part of the resident herds and it is interesting that they seem to give birth a month earlier than the migratory animals which we expect to start calving in Jan and Feb on the Ndutu plains.

The Grumeti River burst its banks once or twice during the course of the month and as a result we saw crocodiles in unusual areas like WD watering hole and along the Robana River. Hippo tracks were seen up on the Ridge Hills, near the airstrip and deep inside the community grazing lands to the north.

December Sightings Overview for Grumeti:

Lions:
Lion viewing has remained quite consistent for the month considering how long the grass is. The large prides have fragmented a bit due to the high competition within the pride when a kill is made. General game is far more scare and tends to avoid the areas with long grass and thus the lions find themselves having to go days without a meal and then they will take on a buffalo. Typically they seem to focus on older bulls who do not have the protection of the herd. Subadult lions face a lot of challenges through this time and find themselves having to compete fiercely with older members of the prides.
Other highlights include:

- A pride of 4 (3 adult lions and 1 adult lioness) sighted East of boundary pan.
- A pride of 5 (2 adult lionesses and 3 sub adults) sighted West of Mbuni crossing.
- A pride of 4 (2 adult lions and 2 adult lionesses) sighted West of Nyasirori ranger post.
- A coalition of 2 sub adult lions sighted North of Fort Ikoma road and West of Chui drainage.
- A pride of 4 sub adults sighted South of Sabora drainage.
- A pride of 18 (9 adult lionesses and 19 cubs) sighted oat old school.
- A pride of 3 (2 adult lionesses and 1 adult lion) sighted along the boundary pan.
- A pride of 5 adult lionesses sighted West of Balanitis Explore.
- Lions seen on the rocks of northern Ikorongo by the walking team.
- On the 1 December 31 members Of Butamtam pride were seen - consisting of 20 cubs, 9 lionesses and 2 adult male lions seen west of old Pundamilia camp. Considering that this pride has a 6 male coalition dominating over it, it really is an impressive sight when all together.
- 11 members of Bangwesi pride,10 lioness and 1subadult cub sighted along Chumvi drainage North of Bangwesi hill.

Leopards:
The long grass hides the spotted cats well and true to their nature they have been quite elusive. Our opportunities to find them have been mostly when they are up in the branches of a tree or with a kill. Some of the sightings for the month included

- A male was sighted along Fort Ikoma drainage with porcupine kill over a period of three days.
- 1 adult female with 1 cub sighted along Sabora drainage – relaxed at a distance.
- 1 adult male sighted at the junction Watershed and Fort Ikoma road.
- A shy male sighted along Sabora drainage.
- A large male was seen on Sasakwa hill a few times during the month.
- Subadult seen around Acacia Bridge
- A male sighted up in the tree at Sabora morum pit area.

Cheetahs:
Cheetah like the leopard have been keeping quite a low profile however we are lucky to still see the dominant male for the Sasakwa plains on a regular basis. He is strong, healthy and does well to avoid the lions scattered across the plains.

- The dominant male was seen around Pundamilia hill a few times using the high ground to his advantage. These are also good areas to find impala in – twice he was found with an impala kill. Same male was seen around Old School, Arab Camp thicket, Fort Ikoma road on different occasions.
- 1 adult female sighted West of Faru Faru Lodge.

Elephants:
This time of the year provides us with really good elephant viewing. The herds tend to gather into decent numbers and there are numerous big bulls crisscrossing the plains in search of females in oestrus. There are a lot of young calves around and during the midday heat it has been very enjoyable to watch the calves playing in the mud wallows.

- A breeding herd of about 80 individuals sighted East of Sasakwa airstrip.
- A breeding herd of about 15 individuals sighted North of Arab camp road.
- A breeding herd of about 30 individuals sighted North of Grumeti North hill.
- A breeding herd of about 30 individuals sighted South of balanitis Explore.
- A breeding herd of 80 individuals sighted West of Sabora Camp.
- A breeding herd of 17 individuals sighted at Maruru river.
- Many young bulls and a few very impressive older bulls throughout the month trailing the herds.

Migration
Typically, during this time of the year and considering the high amounts of rain as a result of El Nino the southern plains (Ndutu) of the Serengeti have attracted the migratory animals. The mineral rich soils come alive with grasses that the herds gravitate towards. It means that we do not see much of the migratory animals during this period however there are small herds of resident wildebeest and zebra on the short grass plains to the south and along Nyasirori high grounds.

Buffalos:
The buffalo numbers remain high although the big herds do seem to have splintered into smaller herds with the abundance of water and grazing. They avoid the low wet areas and prefer the drier, elevated slopes and plains. Good numbers of buffalo along the high ground near Nyasirori ranger post. There has been a lot of lion and buffalo interaction this month.

- A breeding herd of about 150 individuals sighted East of marsh area.
- Many bulls around the airstrip and Sasakwa Hill
- A breeding herd of about 300 individuals sighted East of Twiga scrapes.
- A breeding herd of about 150 individuals sighted South of Nyati/WD road junction.
- A breeding herd of about 200 individuals sighted South of Arab camp thicket.
- A breeding herd of about 100 individuals sighted at Sasakwa dam.
- A breeding herd of about 200 individuals sighted along the boundary drainage.
- A breeding herd of about 50 individuals sighted around watershed and Fort Ikoma roads junction.
- A breeding herd of about 50 individuals sighted near the Spine and Fisi roads junction.
- Two large herds of approx. 150 each up near Nyasirori Ranger post as well as many bulls.

Rhinos:

- All rhino are accounted for and are reported as doing well.
- The calf in the boma is growing daily – although not seen very often reports from the monitoring team are positive.

Plains game:

- Numerous zebra and thompson gazelle numbers on all the short grass lands to the south and on the border with the Serengeti.
- Giraffe numbers remain high across the reserve. Some journeys of as much as 40 were seen.
- Topi rutting up on the high ground of Nyasirori (approx. 300).
- Wildebeest (resident) first calves seen on Inyati open areas.

Unusual sightings

- A few sightings of honey badgers during the course of the month.
- A single Southern Ground hornbill chick has hatched at the Fig tree nest on River Rd down stream from Pelican Pan. A potential second nesting family using a site near River Rd and Eagle Nest Rd in a fig tree.
- Spotted Eagle owl nesting on Sasakwa Hill.
- Bushpig tracks near the EEC school / Mazengira area.
- African rock python trying unsuccessfully to hunt White-tailed mongoose in a termite mound.
- Dusky turtle dove recorded for the first time.
- Lots of Leopard Tortoise activity at this time of the year including some very small hatchlings.

December Sightings Overview for Lamai (Mara River Tented Camp):

December in Lamai is a very beautiful time of the year. The area is very quite in terms of other guests and vehicles and we get to experience the Lamai triangle pretty much to ourselves. The short grasslands up towards the boundary were very productive with a variety of mammals and birds seen across them. Around mid December the Lamai area experienced very big rains causing the rivers and tributaries to flood, roads to disappear under water and many areas became inaccessible. It was incredible how much water was coming down from the Great Rift Valley escarpment, however a few days later and once the water drained away we had the area back to ourselves to explore.

Migration and general game:

- Good numbers of topi, gazelle, zebra and wildebeest along the international boundary line.
- Stable herds of waterbuck, impala and zebra around the camp.
- A journey of about 20 giraffes sighted West of Alex walker's camp.
- No migratory animals – they have all pushed south.

Lions:

- A pride of 11 - 2 adult lions, 4 adult lionesses, 4 sub adults and 1 cub sighted on buffalo kill along Korongo la saa kumi.
- A pride of 11 (6 adult lionesses, 4 sub adults and 1 cub) sighted South of Chaka la Kigelia.
- A pride of 6 (5 adult lions and 1 adult lioness) sighted near the boundary marker.
- A pride of 13 (2 adult lions, 6 adult lionesses and 3 cubs) sighted West of Chaka la majangili.

Cheetahs

- A female sighted at Korongo la Fisi.
- Coalition of two males seen occasionally in the open areas to the north.

Buffalo

- A breeding herd of about 300 individuals sighted at the high ground North of Korongo la saa kumi.
- A breeding herd of about 200 individuals sighted East of Korongo la Fisi.

Elephants:

- A breeding herd of about 15 individuals sighted upstream of daraja jeusi.
- A breeding herd of about 20 individuals sighted North of Korongo la Fisi.
- A breeding herd of about 150 individuals sighted North of Chaka la croton.
- A breeding herd of about 40 individuals sighted at daraja mbili.
- A breeding herd of about 60 individuals sighted at Kampikampi plain.

- A breeding herd of about 15 individuals sighted at daraja nyeupe.

Leopards:

- 1 adult male sighted at Chaka la Masanja.
- 1 adult male sighted at Daraja jeusi.
- 1 adult male sighted at Chaka la Kigelia.



The big open plains of the Lamai triangle – the diversity at this time of year coupled with very few other companies operating in the area makes this place very special to explore.
Photo – Wilson Kilong

December fireside chat

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY.

It is mid December as the short rains continue to pound the plains of western Serengeti. The wildebeest and zebra herds have moved south traversing briefly the area from their return from the north. These species count as the bulk of prey to most of the lion prides in the Serengeti ecosystem and especially here in the Western Corridor. Prides here will hunt more wildebeest and zebras as their favored prey. It is an easy hunt but when they move on, the lion have to start learning how to go for a more formidable prey which proves to be tuff to bring down.

This is a lesson that needs to be learnt and passed on to younger members of the pride.

On one of our afternoon game drive we went out searching for the Butamtam pride (one of the main prides from the central areas of the Singita Grumeti reserve). They hadn't been seen for a week and we were determined to find them. We drove everywhere in the areas that we suspected to find them but with no luck.

We were almost about to give up the search as it started to rain. Suddenly one of the guest shouted out "why are the buffaloes running". We stopped to put our binoculars up and to our amazement it was lions being chased by buffaloes.

We drove into the scene carefully and sensitively - nice and slow not wanting to compromise the situation. On getting to a good distance, we stopped to watch the drama. All this time we were looking for the pride who were hiding in the long grass.

The pride had stalked close to the breeding herd of buffaloes accompanied by some of the young cubs of approx. 4 months old.

We thought it was meant to introduce and teach or show these young members the skills necessary to deal with big, dangerous prey but by the time we had stumbled upon the action the buffaloes had ganged up together to drive off the lions. They where advancing at a determined pace towards the lions and causing the pride to retreat hastily. A dangerous situation for the cubs.

The lions started running away some of them jumping in trees and around the bushes to get the cubs out of danger. All but one of the cubs managed to get away however the buffalo did catch up with one cub and it was sadly killed beneath the horns and feet of the angry herd. That was a lesson learned the hard way.

By guide Robert Kibwana.



One little cub looking quite content surrounded by the rest of the pride. This pride specialises in hunting buffalo particularly at this time of the year.
Photo – Wilson Kilong

December photo gallery:



One of the male leopards seen frequently along the tributary that flows into the Mara River near the Singita camp. He was looking well fed after finishing a zebra foal kill.
Photo – Wilson Kilong

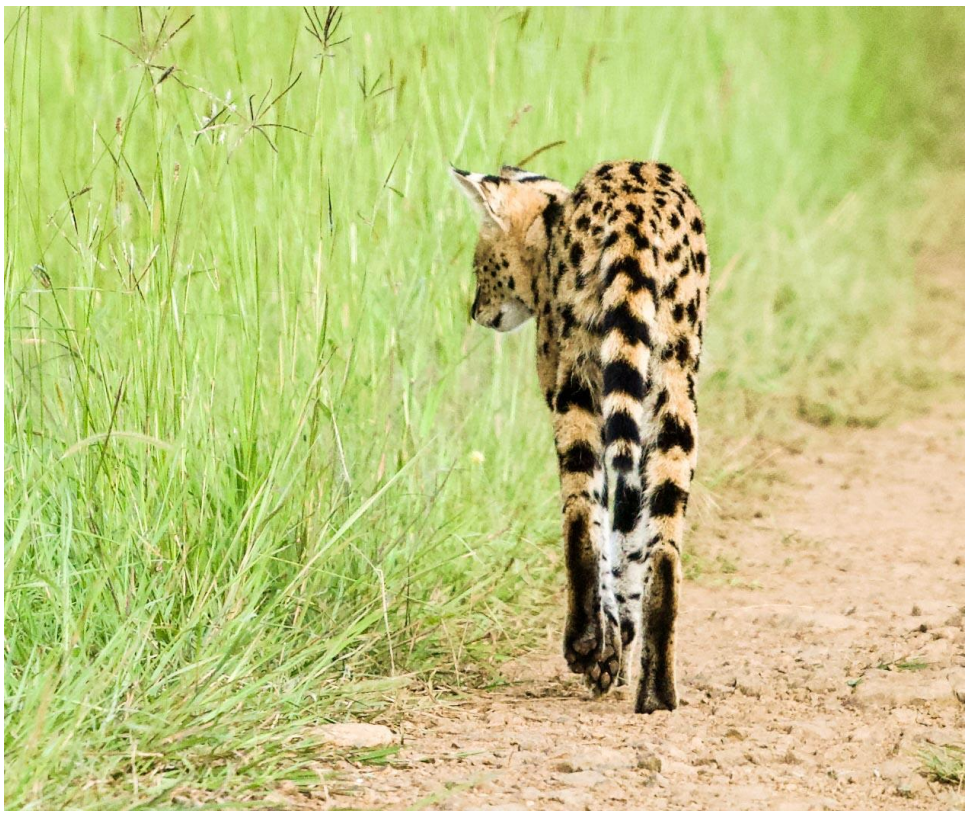






Elephant viewing both in Lamai and on the Grumeti has been very good over December. Big herds moving through the open plains and long grass trailed by large bulls.





Not often seen at this time of year because of the long grass but they are around and occasionally we are lucky to see Serval moving and hunting along the roads avoiding the wet grass in the mornings.
Photo – Calson Luka



The cubs sharp, little teeth not being appreciated by this Butamtam lioness.
Photo Calson Luka



The pride settling down to feed after a long battle with this lone buffalo bull.
Photo Peter Chatama

Report compiled by Grant Telfer.