

Singita



Spotted morning-thrush singing

Photo by Paulo Kivuyo

WILDLIFE REPORT SINGITA GRUMETI TANZANIA

For the month of May, Two Thousand and Twenty Three

Temperature

Average minimum: 18°C (64.4°F)
Average maximum: 32°C (89.6°F)
Minimum recorded: 16°C (60.8°F)
Maximum recorded: 34°C (93.2°F)

Rainfall Recorded

Faru Faru	105 mm
Sabora	79 mm
Sasakwa	92 mm

Sunrise & Sunset

Sunrise	06:40
Sunset	18:39

We've had a fantastic end to a great month as thousands of wildebeest poured into the Grumeti Reserve, from the east. The larger herds arrived on the Nyabeu River and quickly pushed south-west of Bangwezi Hill, headed for the Sasakwa plains. The herds reached Faru Faru Lodge within a matter of hours and began to cross the shallow Grumeti River. The energy within the herds is incredible, the bulls vocalising as they charge up and down ushering the cows. A deep hum is audible from a distance as the great herds advance. Large herds of topi and zebra have been observed on the Kawanga plains. The animals appear to be pushing east towards the Sabora region.

Weather-wise May bought sporadic rainfall and the Grumeti River continues to flow well. The waterholes and drainage lines still hold good water. Towards the end of the month the dry winds began to blow from the east and the rains have shown signs of perhaps beginning to dwindle away.

Here's a sightings snapshot for May:

Lions

Lion sightings in the central regions have been fantastic this month.

- Lions continue to do battle with the resident herds of buffalo providing some awesome sightings.
- Towards the end of the month, we have had some good lion activity on Sasakwa Hill.
- A lioness was unfortunately lost in a fight with male lions at the base of Sasakwa Hill earlier in the month.
- The three new members to the Butamtam Pride are two-months-old now. The lioness most likely gave birth to these cubs in the thickets of the Chui drainage. This is where they are currently hiding.
- The Mkuyu lionesses continue to hunt from the banks of the Grumeti towards the Grumeti North drainage, just west of Faru Faru Lodge.
- The six Butamtam male lions are spending much of their time in the central region close to Koroya Hill.
- The West Pride have been sighted on a number of occasions close to Explore Marula Camp, on the Raho drainage.

Leopards

- A shy male leopard has been observed in the Boundary Pan region offering some exciting sightings.
- A female was sighted in the rocky outcrop on the Faru Faru Lodge Access. No sign of the cubs yet.
- The Mazingira female was sighted alone on the western side of the rhino boma.
- The lovely Sabora male leopard had been seen a number of times in the drainage itself and in the region just west of Sabora. This male leopard is habituating well, becoming more and more relaxed with the game viewers which is fantastic.

Cheetahs

We have had some wonderful sightings of cheetahs this month, and have seen significant movement of individuals across the reserve as they search for prey.

- The mother and four youngsters have been seen in the Nyasirori region, offering some incredible sightings.
- We have been lucky enough to observe the Sasakwa male cheetah on a number of occasions in the central regions.
- A single female was seen passing through the reserve, close to the Sasakwa airstrip.
- Another mature male was also sighted close to Koroya Hill.
- A female was sighted hunting on the Kawanga plains earlier in the month. She was successful with a Thompson's gazelle kill.

Elephants

- Elephant sightings have been steady across the Grumeti Reserve.
- Some wonderful matriarchal herds sighted out on the grasslands of the western regions.
- Bulls have been sighted on occasions throughout the reserve.
- Very pleasing to witness "Zito" back at the end of the month, sighted in the western rain tree woodlands. We believe this bull elephant to be in the region of 40 - 50 years old, and he has the largest ivory in the Serengeti ecosystem. Zito was last sighted at the same time last year. We can only wonder how far he has travelled in this last year. Such a pleasure to have him back and see that he is in good shape and looking strong.

Buffalos

- The large resident herds of buffalo are looking healthy and well. However, they have been unsettled this month as the pressure from lions continues to mount, especially when they are hunting at night.
- We have seen great numbers of calves within the herds this rain season and numbers are on the rise.

Rhinos

All rhinos are well and accounted for.

- There have been some lovely sightings of Eric (the black rhino bull) on the south-eastern side of the boma. He is in good condition, looking fit and strong.
- Mothers with calves are doing very well and despite significant dispersal the conservation teams and the specialized rhino research unit continue to monitor them successfully.

A short bush story follows as well as the May Gallery.

The black-headed heron and its interesting diet

By George Tolchard

When I think of the regal heron I imagine one at the edge of the water, watching, as it stands motionless before attempting to spear a fish. Herons are not usually found too far from the water, however, the black-headed heron of the Grumeti will hunt for its favourite foods out in the middle of the grasslands. The spear of a bill is a formidable tool and the bird is able to launch it at its unsuspecting food items. Favourite foods of the open grasslands include small rats and mice, large insects such as grass hoppers and locusts, even smaller birds, snakes and lizards!

Out on a drive with our trainee guides, we were lucky enough to stumble across a number of black-headed herons that were hunting the grassland close to Gardenia Waterhole. Some individuals were in flight and returning to rest in the trees surrounding the waterhole when we noticed one with something particularly eye-catching hanging from its bill... A plated lizard! This heron had ambushed one of the larger lizard species and made a meal out of it.

It was at that time of the morning when conditions begin to change and the heat from the sun begins to get hot. The time where you would expect reptiles to be basking in the sun on termite mounds or moving around in search of food. Had this heron noticed this plated lizard emerge from its hole, expose itself, then struck with pinpoint accuracy?

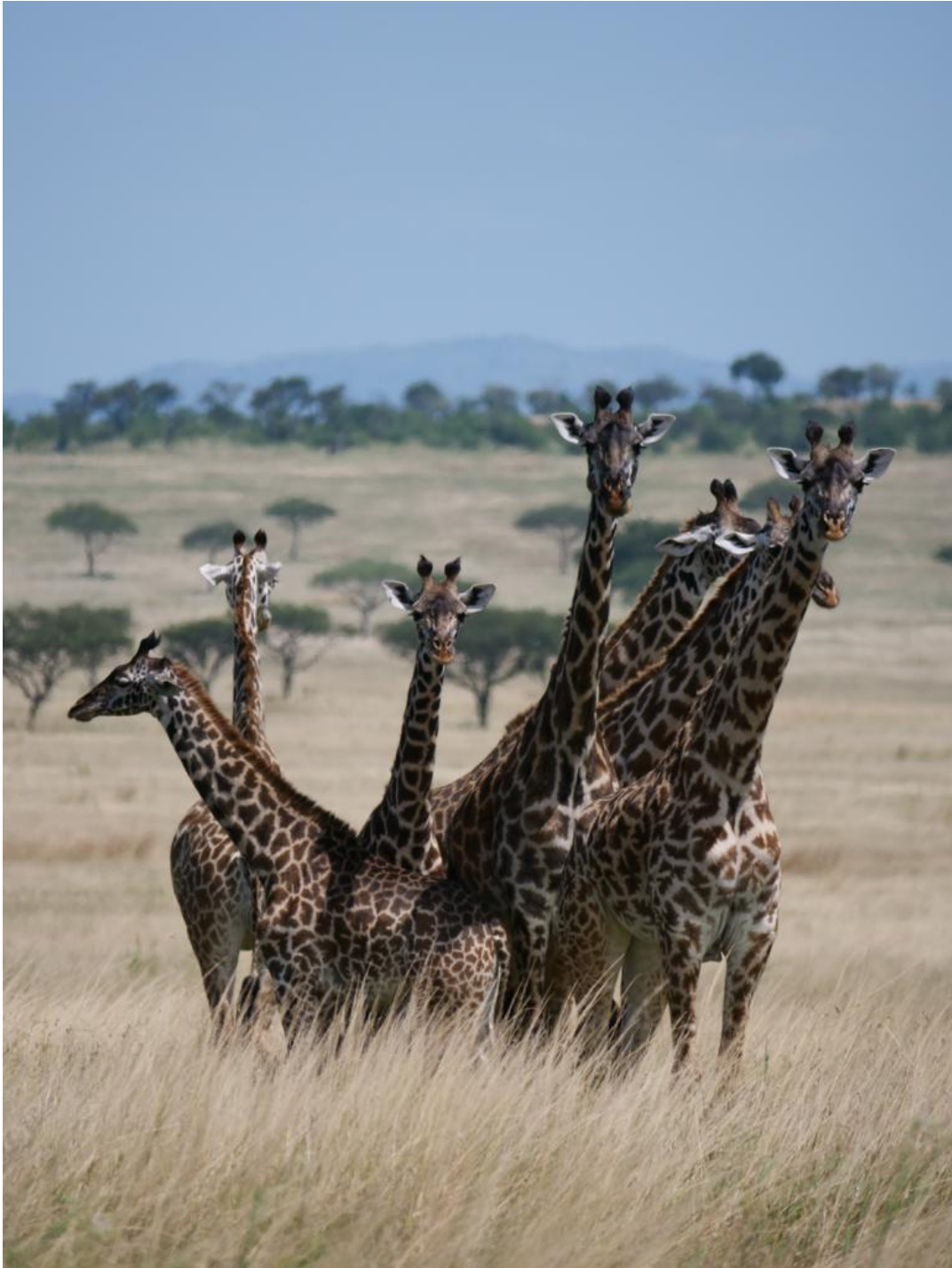
When you watch a heron hunting, you will notice how motionless and silent the bird can be. Its awareness of what is going on around it together with sharp eyes makes it quite the hunting machine. In just a minute or two it had begun to swallow the lizard, head-first.





A meal such as this will certainly provide the heron with nutrition for days.

So, when you next cast eyes upon a heron, know that it is not just fish that they are after but a long list of other prey species that satisfy the hunger of this specialist hunter.



A herd of giraffe bunch closely together. Picture by John Ngowi



A male cheetah surveys the land. Picture by Paulo Kivuyo



The three new additions to the Butamtam Pride. Picture by Andrew Kavenga



A lovely capture here of a green-capped eremomela. By Paulo Kivuyo



The beautiful silver bird. By Paulo Kivuyo



A dozing male leopard resting in the heat of the day. Picture by John Ngowi



A Nyasirori lioness claws at the base of a tree, maintaining her claws and exercising the tendons in her forearms. Picture by Bernard Hosea



The Butamtam Pride getting active in the early evening light. Picture by Calson Luka



Zebra dust bathe. By Calson Luka



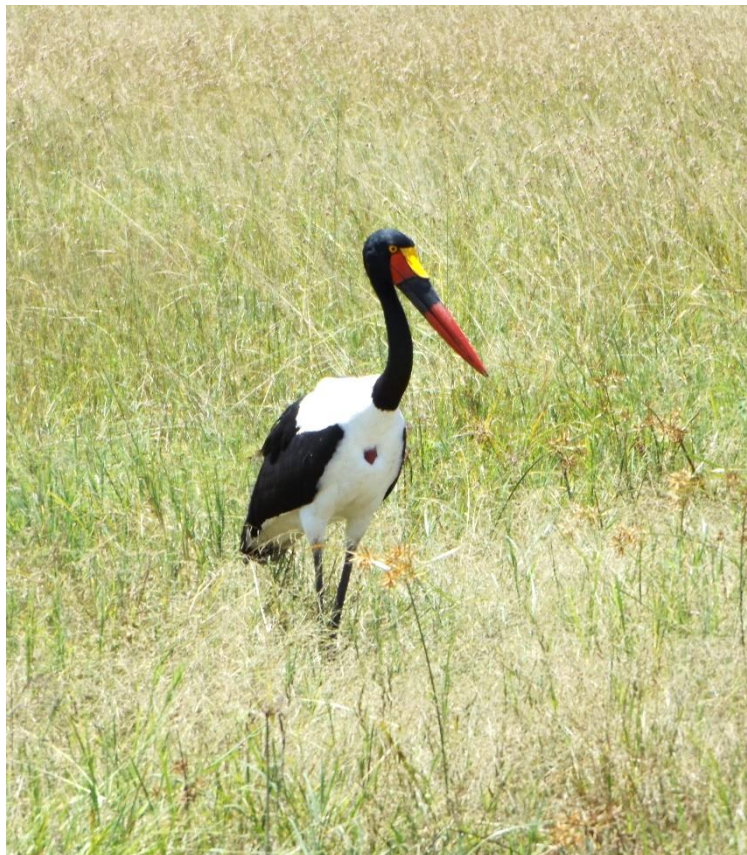
Elephants with trunks held high and eyes open wide as they process the scent of lions passing by not too far away up wind. Picture by Calson Luka.



A Butamtam lion photographed by Gadmél Kimaro in the exquisite scenery of the Grumeti Reserve.



The cheetah of the Nyasirori high ground. The mother and four cubs continue to do very well.
Picture captured by Gadmél Kimaro



The striking female saddle-billed stork. Picture by Gadmél Kimaro



The beautiful tiger snake found on Sasakwa Hill. Picture by George Tolchard

A striking orange and black snake which is seldom seen. This lovely snake is not harmful to man and can be habituated very easily. When handled gently the tiger snake becomes comfortable very quickly and relaxes. Notice the large eyes and the almost viper-like head.

This snake is nocturnal, hunting geckos and small mice under the cover of darkness. It is mainly a terrestrial snake preferring life on the ground and, interestingly enough, like the boomslang, it is back-fanged.

It is a 'friendly' snake, despite its menacingly bold colouration and it allows for study and education. Because this snake is rarely seen, many of the guiding team had never actually laid eyes on one, so it was a lovely opportunity to learn and understand further together.



On the 31 May thousands of wildebeest began to stream into the Grumeti Reserve from the east. We were there to greet them. Picture by George Tolchard

Report compiled by George Tolchard