Singita



Male lion from the coalition of six seen on the Sasakwa Plains. Photographed by Calson Luka

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

Temperature	
Average minimum:	19°C (65°F)
Average maximum:	32°C (89°F)
Minimum recorded:	17°C (62°F)
Maximum recorded:	33°C (91°F)

Rainfall Recorded	
Faru Faru	62 mm
Sabora	156 mm
Sasakwa	168.5 mm
Lamai	140.03mm

Sunrise & Sunset	
Sunrise	06:08
Sunset	18:17

In true September and the start of spring style we watched the burnt, brown and dusty plains of Grumeti transform into a lush, green and emerald landscape with the onset of some early rains. July and August had been very dry but by the end of September the area looked dramatically different. The Grumeti River is up again and flowing a thick, chocolate brown colour. The grass, trees and bushes all have green shoots and the wildlife flocks to the previously burnt areas to capitalise on the fresh, nutritious grasses. Waterholes and pan system have filled up and we have seen the terrapins reemerge.

Prior to the rain and at the start of the month there was very little water around. Animals had to move far and had a choice between either the Grumeti River or Sasakwa dam. Big, long and dusty animal paths lead to all the safest watering spots while lion and leopard lay in ambush at the more dangerous ones that were surrounded by thick bush and limited escape routes.

When the rain arrived we watched as the plains game and wildlife dispersed – moving into areas they had avoided because they now had access to water and good grazing opportunities. The plains game gravitated towards the previously burnt areas with their short green grass - good grazing and much easier to spot hunting predators. The elephant and giraffe really took advantage of all the new green shoots on the trees in the woodlands and large numbers were seen.

From mid-September we saw lots of new babies being born – noticeably zebra, impala and topi. There seems to be a lot of young giraffe and elephant calves around which are always fun to spend time with and watch. Grouped into nursery herds the young giraffe stay out in the open watched carefully by their mothers who feed on the fringe of the woodlands.

The lion viewing has been exceptionally good and there are more cubs stashed in den sites than we can count. Some lionesses have grouped together accompanied by 11 cubs or more at a time. Other lionesses are still secretively denning, and we have yet to see their cubs. Most cubs seem to be around 2-3 months old.

Lion activity on Sasakwa hill has been exciting and we often hear lion and hyena disturbing each other during the night. There is at least one lioness with a three 2 month old cub on the hill and another lioness that looks pregnant but is not lactating yet. We had two big male lions spend some time on Sasakwa Hill and they were determined to find the lionesses. The lionesses did their best to avoid the males but inevitably they did meet up and we could hear lots of roaring and fighting. Last year we lost cubs to infanticide on the hill and we hope the same does not happen again. It does however make for interesting lion behaviour and dynamics.

Far out west in the short grass plains there are reports of large herds of Topi congregating together and starting to calf and the Ikorongo has also started to become busy with plains game as well as elephant herds. The first wildebeest started to arrive in the Ikorongo towards the end of September.

Lamai has continued with its impressive game viewing over this period. Huge migratory herds have remained on the northern side of the Mara River congregating in the Lamai Triangle before pushing north into the Masai Mara. River crossings have been pretty consistent although there was a shift of animals pouring north at the start of the month along the stretch of river close to Mara River Tented Camp. Towards the middle and end of the month we noticed herds starting to push south again and were crossing the river south much further east of us (crossing points 7 and east wards). From the 20th September the push south by the big herds was very noticeable as they began to drain out of the Masai Mara, south across the Mara River and into the Serengeti where big rains had fallen.

Lion, leopard and cheetah sightings have been very good in the Lamai Triangle. A pride with impressive males and a number of young cubs has been seen often about 40 minutes away from camp towards the border. Along the course of the small river that is a tributary to the Mara River our Singita camp there has been numerous sightings or a relaxed male and female leopard.

A September wildlife sighting overview for the Grumeti follows:

Lions:
The lion viewing over the course of the month has been very impressive. Females with cubs ranging from a few weeks old to 3 months old are scattered across the reserve. A number of coalitions of older, mature male lions have been present and we even had lions mating on Sasakwa Hill as well as two mating pairs right in front of Sabora camp. The presence of the bigger males seems to have pushed the coalitions of younger males out of the area for now which is normal lion behaviour.

- 20 members of Butamtam pride,3 lionesses,6 big males and 11 cubs sighted along Chui drainage – this now seems to be the prides preferred den site area.
- 13 members of Ridge pride, 5 lionesses and 8 Cubs sighted at junction Sabora access and Mak link.

- 5 members of Nyasirori pride, 3 subadult lions and 2 subadult lionesses sighted at junction fungo and Serengeti road.
- A pride of 6 (4 subadult lions 2 subadult lionesses) sighted in the Albizia Woodland.
- 2 adult lionesses sighted at Martin hill.
- 6 members of Nyasirori pride,1 subadult male,1 subadult female and 4 lionesses sighted North of Sabora Camp.
- Mating pair of lions x 2 around Sabora camp for a number of days over the midmonth period
- 2 x lionesses, 3 x cub of about 2 months as well as two male lions seen at different times on Sasakwa Hill. The males are believed to be the same males that were seen with the Ridge Pride around Sabora Access and Fungu Road earlier in the month.
- 2 adult lionesses sighted West of Kigelia crossing.
- A pride of 16 (unknown breakdown – in long grass and thickets) sighted West of Balanites Explore Camp.

Leopards:
The density and spread of lions does seem to change the leopard viewing. We are still fortunate to see good sightings but we do think the leopard and the cheetah do become more secretive as they attempt to stay out of the way of the lions.

- 1 adult Female sighted at Mbogo drainage.
- A relaxed female was seen along Raho drainage upstream from Kigelia crossing with Bohor reedbuck kill.
- A big male was seen on Sasakwa Hill
- A skittish unsexed leopard was sighted North of Sasakwa airstrip.
- A male was sighted West of Balloon launch site and he was relaxed.
- A skittish leopard was seen between Grumeti river and Nyabeu drainage line.
- A female and her cub were sighted along river road.(Calcrete crossing) – believed to be Grumeti North female

Cheetahs:

- 1 adult male sighted East of marsh area. Most likely the new, young male that now dominates the Sasakwa Plains and surrounding areas. Seen around WD waterhole and Old School areas too.
- 1 adult male sighted East of Balloon launch site
- A young female was sighted West of Sabora Camp.
- Male with Thomson gazelle carcass sighted west of Nyasirori ranger post.
- A single female was sighted East of Nyuki bush breakfast site.
- 2 young males seen near boundary pan – Nyasirori high grounds – hunting young warthogs

Elephants:
We continue to remain fortunate with numerous elephant sightings. The rains mean they have dispersed from the Grumeti River and back into all the woodlands – capitalising on the fresh growth on the trees and the abundance of water everywhere. There are also a lot of young calves in the herds at the moment. Mostly herds seen and a handful of bulls interestingly.

- At the start of the month while it was still dry good herds were seen along Grumeti River however following the rains the herds moved up and into the woodlands and into the Ikorongo. Good numbers were seen out west of Sabora too.
- A breeding herd of about 20 individuals sighted Nyuki bush breakfast site.
- A breeding herd of about 20 Elephants were sighted Southeast of Sabora camp.
- A breeding herd of about 40 Elephants were sighted East of Faru Faru lodge.
- A breeding herd of 15 Elephants were sighted Northwest Sasakwa dam.

- A breeding herd of about 15 individuals sighted North of Grumeti small hill.
- A breeding herd of about 30 individuals sighted East of Uwanja wa ndege.
- A breeding herd of about 7 individuals sighted North of Koroya hill.
- A breeding herd of about 15 individuals sighted along Faru access road.

Migration

At the start of the month when it was still hot and dry we had very good numbers of zebra (many 1000 strong) congregating around Sasakwa dam and safe drinking points on the Grumeti River. The rest of the herds had moved up to the Mara River, Lamai and Masai Mara.

The rains which resulted in water becoming available everywhere meant that the zebra herds pushed into the previously burnt areas. Good numbers on Sasakwa Hill and surrounding areas, many on Nyasirori plains, and good zebra numbers in the Ikorongo.

Wildebeest numbers remained quite low during the month but on the 24th Sep there were reports of the first decent herds entering the Ikorongo around Nyabehu area heading towards Grumeti. The area continued to fill up over the following days to an estimated 5000 animals by the end of the month.

Buffalos:

- The buffalo herds are strong at the moment. Healthy adults with many calves protected within the herd. Big bulls guarding the flanks of the herd make it a tough opponent for hunting lion and hyena. Even the herds of Batchelor bulls can number 30 – 50 strong.
- A breeding herd of about 400+ individuals sighted South of Koroya hill.
- A breeding herd of about 80-100 sighted North Faru access main Ikoma junction.
- A breeding herd of about 200+ individuals sighted along Komre drainage.
- A breeding herd of about 200+ individuals sighted West of Sabora Camp.
- A breeding herd of about 200+individuyals sighted East of Grumeti North drainage.
- Good herds out west and in the Ikorongo.

Rhinos:

- The rhino in the sanctuary are all well and the male has been seen frequently this month.
- Reports of at least 3 calves under 6 months old from the rhino population that we released into the Ikorongo – Serengeti areas. Really pleasing to hear the population slowly growing.

Unusual sightings

- A female giraffe was seen who had, had a miscarriage. On closer investigation the guides realised there were twins which is quite unusual. The mother was healthy, not too young and there was plenty of resources in the area for her (food and water). So we concluded that although it has been recorded for giraffe to have twins it is very unusual. Most of the time the two foetus become too big for the mother to carry and she will miscarry in order to ensure that she at least can survive and go onto to reproduce again in the future. We shared the information with the RISE research team.



An already well fed crocodile takes advantage of an exhausted wildebeest calf in the Mara River.
Photographed by Jeremiah Morris

September wildlife sighting overview for Mara River Tented Camp:

Lions:

- We are fortunate to have the Lamai triangle as an area to do our game drives in when we are not exploring the Mara River looking for crossings, crocodile and hippo. In the Lamai triangle there is very good lion viewing. Numerous impressive males broken into coalitions of 2 or 3. Strong lionesses use the thick riverine bush along the gullies and deep river courses to hide their cubs in. They capitalise on the 1000's of wildebeest around during this time of abundance.
- A pride of 11 (5 lionesses 4 cubs and 2 big lions) sighted West of Daraja Mbili several times throughout the month. The pride would be seen together at times but the males would often split off and patrol their territory.
- A pride of 7 consisting of 3 lionesses and 4 cubs was seen along Kenyangaga road out towards the top north-eastern corner of the Serengeti.
- A pride of 8 (3 lionesses and 5 subadults)were seen around Korongo La Minazi.

Cheetahs

- We have been fortunate to continue to see the mother with her two cubs often in the Korongo la Saa Kumi open plains.
- The two dominant males have also been seen frequently across the Lamai triangle and across the border into Kenya.
- The cheetah have targeted wildebeest calves and occasionally they have been stolen by the hyena which are in good numbers in the area.

Elephants:

- The elephant herds continue to frequent the tree and bush line along the Mara River as well as the numerous smaller rivers and gullies in the area. Mostly browsing the herds can vary in number from 10 to 40 animals and occasionally we are see some with impressive ivory.

Leopards:

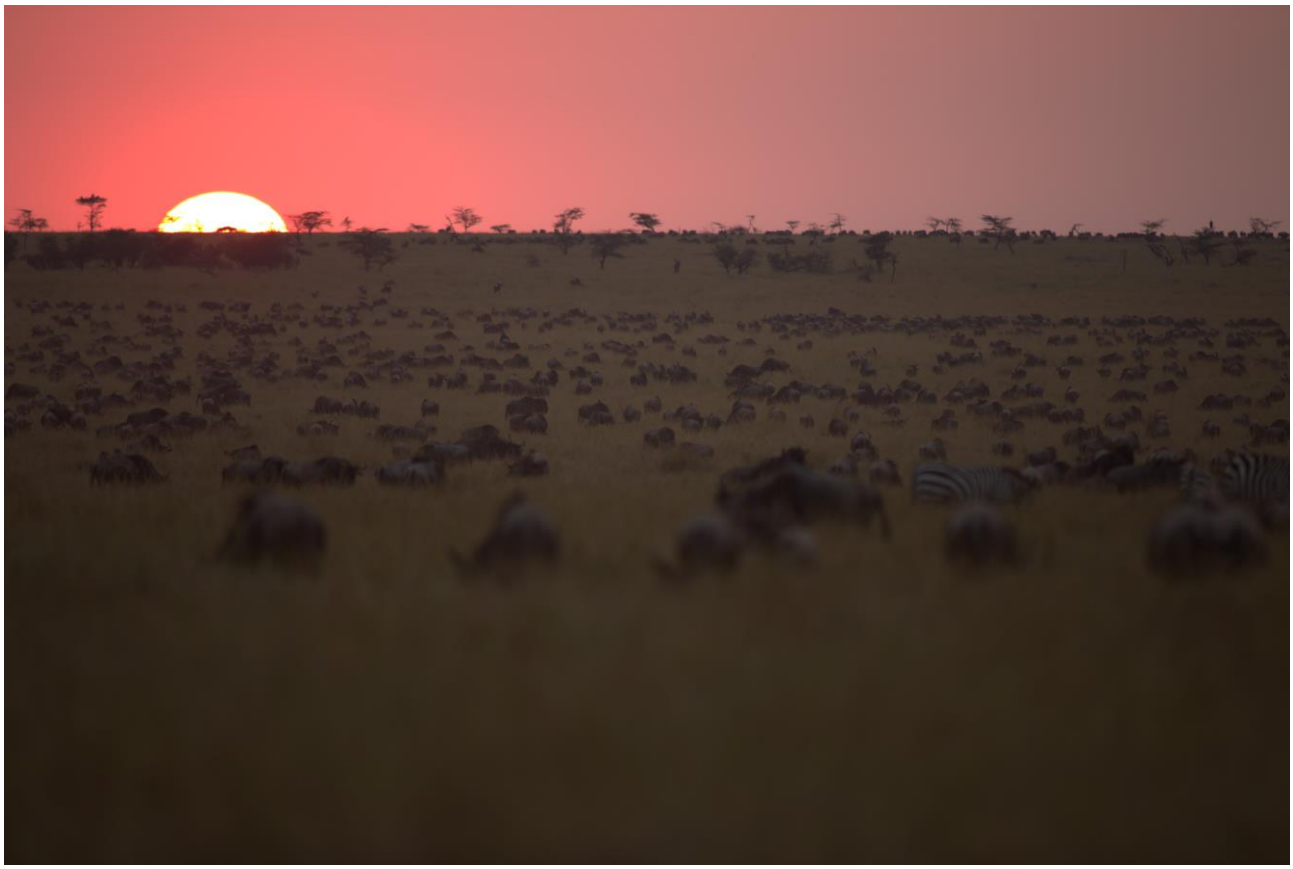
- Leopard viewing continues to surprise us up in the Lamai. There are now a few relaxed individuals that are seen far more frequently than ever before. This bodes well for the future and when the wildebeest are in the area the leopards tend to stay more local and we see them more often.
- The big male is still seen quite frequently up and down the Daraja Jeusi drainage line which is not too far from camp.
- Skittish female sighted Korongo la minazi.
- A big male was seen in Daraja Mbili tributary with a wildebeest calk kill hoisted in a tree.
- A male and female were seen together along the drainage line of Korongo la Fisi.

Migration:

- The Lamai area continued to hold huge herds of wildebeest because of the frequent afternoon thunderstorms. At the start of the month the crossings continued almost daily and predominantly animals going north. From about mid-month when the rains began in the Serengeti and in the western corridor we began to notice a shift in the wildebeest movements. Many animals began to move south and most crossings were from crossing points number 6 and eastwards. By about the 20th of the month there were reports of huge crossings going south and wildebeest pushing towards the Bologonja areas. If the rains persist in the central and western Serengeti it is possible many of the herd will leave the Mara River areas and head south and arrive back on Grumeti earlier than expected. The month of September has been a very good month to be visiting Mara River Tented Camp and the game viewing has been exceptional.



Wildebeest struggling up the banks of the Mara River – a very real danger when the river rises, and the current washes the animals away from the easy exit routes.
Photographed by Grant Telfer



The Lamai plains, and the thousands of animals dotted across it at this time of the year, makes for a special sight.
Photographed by Grant Telfer



Some short bush observations as well as the September photo gallery:



One of the two dominant lions who hold a territory that includes Sabora Lodge.
Just before the rains this male and his brother spent a week in front of the lodge mating with the lionesses that form part of the Sabora pride. Both guests and staff were fortunate to see them frequently right out in the open from the main lodge. It was a very memorable experience for all.
Photographed by Calson Luka

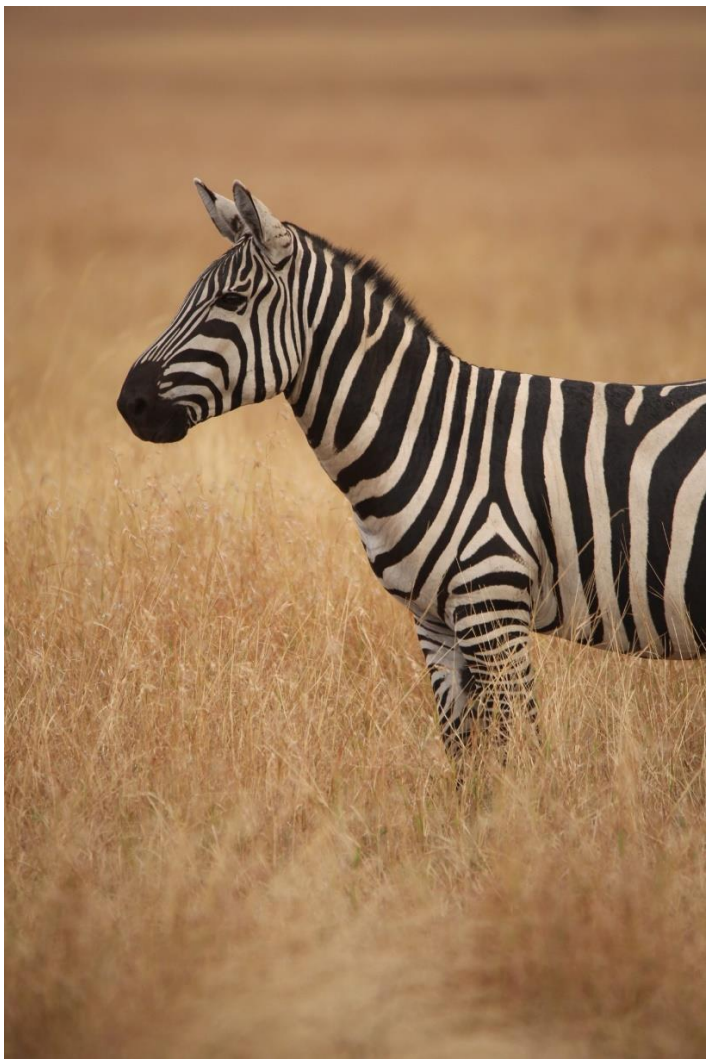


The zebra numbers grew to a few thousand everyday drinking at Sasakwa dam prior to the rains arriving.
Sitting quietly on the opposite side of the dam, and listening to all their noises and commotion,
was a great experience.
Photographed by Calson Luka



For most of the month we saw an interesting zebra foal initially around Sasakwa plains and dam and then she moved towards Nyasirori high grounds with her family unit (kingship). Higher concentrations of melanism most likely resulted in her unusual pattern. You will see her mother also has large, broad stripes on her back. Would be wonderful to see her again in the years to come.

Photographed by Grant Telfer



Another interesting thing we have noticed while spending time with the zebra is that some of the stallions have very short manes. As you can see in this picture the mane is uniformly short and isn't as a result of stallions fighting or poor health. We have only noticed stallions with these short manes – not many but more than one realises if you start looking for them. We have shown the photos to the Grumeti Fund RISE researchers and they have shown a lot of interest in this.

Maneless zebra, *Equus quagga borensis,* are found in northwestern Kenya (from Uasin Gishu and Lake Baringo) to the Karamoja district of Uganda. They are not recorded in the Serengeti. The zebra recorded in the Serengeti are Grant's zebra, *Equus quagga boehmi*. Is it possible that there is a hybrid sub-sub species within the Serengeti herds? Hopefully some DNA testing can help us answer that question.

Photographed by Grant Telfer



Another example of a stallion with a very short mane – notice how uniform it is as if it's been shaved with clippers. You can see by the patterns on the neck it is a different animal to the previous photo.
Photographed by Abutwalbu Ngua



Zebra with the typical mane that we expect to see in the Serengeti population.
Photographed by Andrew Kavenga



The rains finally broke the dry spell around the 8th September. The initial water that fell literally soaked into the ground like a sponge and the following morning there were no puddles to be found. From that day on it pretty much rained every afternoon and transformed the Grumeti into an emerald green landscape.

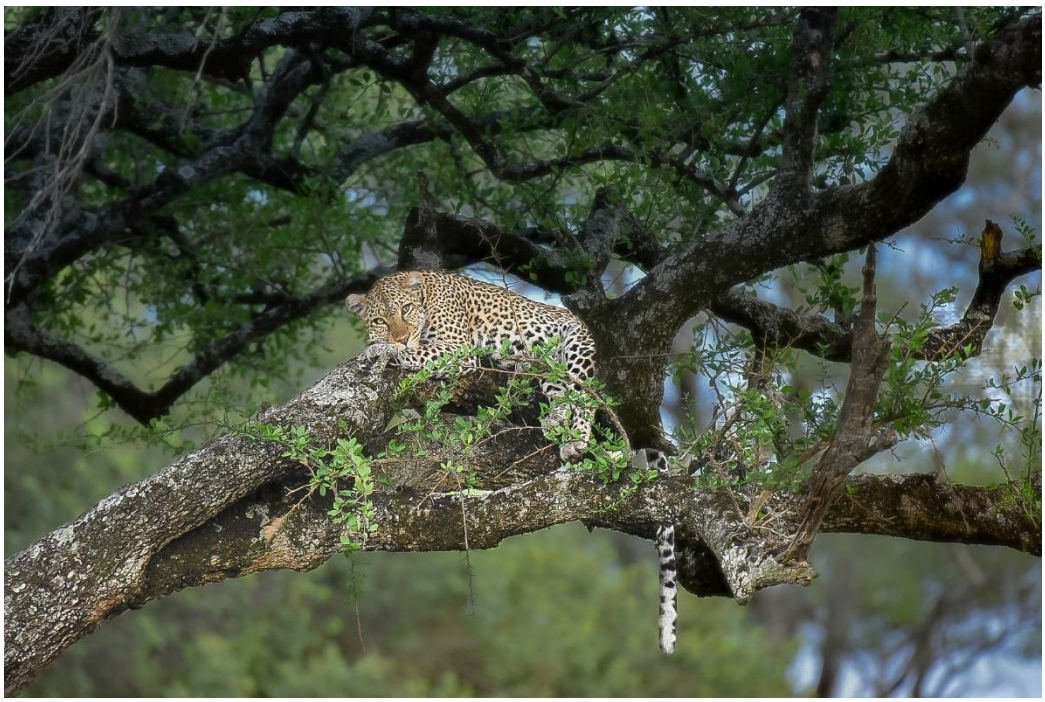


A big male lion from one of the western prides displaying a dominant stance and scent marking while the lionesses exhibit submissive behaviour. You can see the flush of green following the rains which was such a contrast to the dry conditions at the start of the month.
Photographed by Toti Olekuwai



The leopard viewing has been really good especially in the areas around Faru-Faru lodge. The leopards have been using the thick cover along the drainage lines to stalk potential prey as well as hide their kills. They have had to be far more cautious with the number of lions around.

Photographed by Paulo Kivuyo





A new lion cub and an addition to the Butamtam pride. Developing the strength and skills it will need later in life to survive. You can still see the eyes are somewhat underdeveloped and the spots in the coat that help them hide away in the thick bush when the lioness goes off hunting.
Photographed by Calson Luka

Report prepared and compiled by Grant Telfer