

# Singita Arumeti Reserves

Wildlife Journal

For the month of November Two Thousand and Eleven



## Rainfall Records

Sasakwa	Month 100.5 mm,
Sabora	Month 114 mm,
FaruFaru	Month 128 mm,
Samaki	Month 109 mm,
Risiriba	Month 93.5 mm,
Samisami	Month 102 mm,

## Temperature and Wind Recordings

Average Mean High Temperature	20.6° C
Average Mean Low Temperature	16.4° C
Average Mean Temperature	18.5° C
Average Wind Speed	2.6 km /h
Average High Wind Speed	43.5 km /h
Predominant Wind direction	WNW

## Just Add Water!

Dry river beds, dried out drainage lines, dust bowls instead of water holes; these are things of the past. All of the rivers and drainage lines are flowing in full spate and the water holes are filled to capacity. The influx of water from the rains has breached the wall of Sasakwa dam. Some days it looks as if SingitaSasakwa Lodge has been built overlooking a sea and when you get down on the plains and look through the grass there is water: one of the most precious commodities on earth, and it is the lifeblood of man, animal and plant alike. During the dry season there are very few water points for animals and many plants restrict their growth to survive. In the wet season most animals give birth and plants grow at an amazing rate. Soon it will be dry again but we appreciate the rains when they are here. They hold a promise of excellent game viewing for the months ahead.



German Bridge, on the Grumeti River

....and again, after the rain....



Normally a dry river bed, this crossing on the Rahu was impassable for ten days as it flowed strongly after the heavy rains.

## Cheetah (*Acinonyxjubatas*)

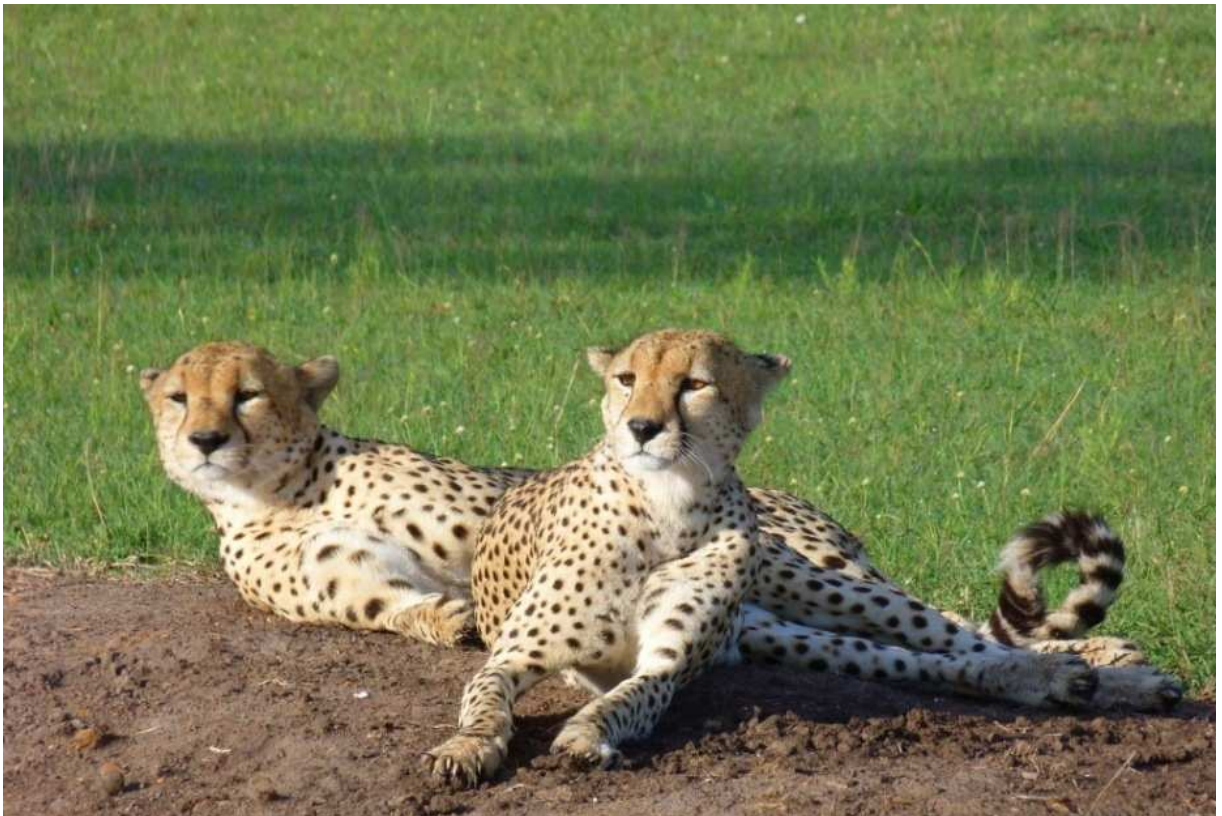
Cheetah from the Hindi "Chita" – means "the spotted one". The estimate is that there are approximately only 7500 to 10 000 of these cats left in the world today, a decline from 15 000 in the seventies. The decline can be attributed mainly to habitat loss, killing and or capture.

Cheetah have an exceptionally small gene pool, and it is thought that this can be contributed to extensive inbreeding among a few individuals that survived population bottlenecks in the past. In the Serengeti it is estimated that only 44% of the cheetah population are effective breeders. Another factor that compounds the problem is that cheetah are defined as a low density species which in turn means that large conservation areas are needed to ensure the populations are big enough to breed.

Females can have large litters, nine or more, but the survival rate of the cubs is very low. A female will seldom raise more than two or three of these cubs. This combined with the low contribution females make to future generations could also be a contributory factor to the decline in the species, despite the fact that males tend to be bigger contributors, successful mothers and more breeding females will play a large role in the survival.



A female cheetah and one cub. She spent three or four days with us at the beginning of the month, and when she returned after being away for two weeks she was on her own. Somewhere, somehow she had lost him.



The two brothers seen regularly on the reserve; both are extremely successful hunters and spend a lot of time on the plains south, east and west of Sasakwa Lodge. When they are not on these plains they are not far off the property. They head to an area south of us in the Serengeti for brief periods and tend to only be away for a week or so at a time.

## Topi (*Damaliscus korrigum*)



Very similar to hartebeest, though they are darker and their horns are not as sharply angled, the face and upper legs of topi have dark patches that stand out from the reddish brown bodies. Like the wildebeest and zebra, topi enjoy short grasses and will harvest tender new shoots, avoiding mature stems and older grass. Also, like the wildebeest the males will gather a harem of females and will actively defend them from other males hoping to run off with them.



Challenges and fights between the males are typical of the family. Two males will charge at one another and at the last minute drop to their knees, exchange a head butt and stand up again, to repeat the movement over and over again until one retires.

Calving generally takes place during the wet season, just after the onset of the "short rains". Unlike predators whose young can hardly walk for the first few days, topi calves can follow their mothers immediately after birth.

Cleaning Department



Dung beetles of the Scarabadaeinae family feed almost exclusively on feces, and can often be found gathering at a source of dung, such as the elephant dung shown above. The beetles will "pack" the dung into compact balls which are then rolled rapidly away from the source. Other dung beetles will try and steal the ball from them if they do not effectively move the ball to a safer location. Once the beetle has found a suitable spot the ball will be buried for use as either food or a brood area. If it is used as a brood ball, the hatched larvae will live inside the ball and feed on it, finally emerging as a fully developed dung beetle.

The beetles play an important role in the eco-system; by burying the dung they remove habitats for flies and enrich the nutrient levels in soils.

## The Secretary Bird



*Sagittarius serpentarius*

This unusual predatory bird is endemic to Africa and can be seen stalking across the plains on long, thin legs as it hunts for food, which comprises mainly of insects, small mammals such as mice, and reptiles. Snakes form a part of their diet but they are not the main part. They are killed by the bird stomping on their backs in an attempt to break their backs.

Listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List and Near-Threatened in South Africa, the future of the Secretary Bird could be very bleak. They first became protected as far back as 1968 and since then there has been a decline in their numbers. There is strong evidence that suggest rapid declines in their numbers particularly in South Africa and Tanzania. The major threats to them are the spreading impacts of agricultural and commercial forestry, as well as other cultivations and urbanization.



Down the hatch, a grasshopper is swallowed.

Singita have committed to help conserve the Secretary Bird by adopting it as one of our wildlife causes and we have joined Birdlife International as Corporate Members. Currently we manage close to five hundred thousand acres of conservation areas in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa and will assist with monitoring these unusual predators.

## Fashion in a Tree



The African Rock Python (*Python sebae*) is the largest snake occurring in Africa; some of more than 6 meters (20 feet) have been recorded! However specimens of this size are not common these days as most of them have been exterminated.

They enjoy a variety of habitats and it is not at all uncommon to find them in trees, water or rocky areas. They are still heavily persecuted, despite the fact they are protected. The skin and fat is still used in traditional medicine and it wasn't that long ago that their skins were used to manufacture shoes, belts and purses.

They are extremely valuable as they help control rodent populations. Rats and mice form a large part of their diet when they are still young and it is only the larger snakes that are capable of taking large prey, like impala.

## Trouble in the Head!

Macca and I had been out for the day looking for new sites for Singita Explore, our mobile camp operation, when we came across a buffalo bull laying in a small mud wallow. When we first saw him we both thought he was dead but as we got closer he jumped up. He was very wobbly on his feet and kept staggering around and shaking his head to and fro.



We noticed there were hundreds of flies buzzing around his ears and that he was foaming at the mouth. We notified Matt from the Wildlife Division and he immediately contacted the veterinarian located at Seronera who informed us that it is something seen in buffalo on occasion. It is apparently caused by a fly that has accessed the aural canal and is irritating the beast.

We observed him for a while and then he charged us, still on very unstable legs, but before he had taken ten or so paces his legs collapsed and he fell.



Some of the little fellas



Kirks DikDik



Family of Bat Eared Foxes



Warthog sow and piglets

Lee Bennett  
Singita Grumeti Reserves  
Serengeti  
Tanzania