



Singita

PAMUSHANA LODGE

Malilangwe • Zimbabwe

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

From the first to the thirty-first of December
Two Thousand and Eleven

Temperature

Average minimum: 20.5°C (68.0°F)
Average maximum: 31.9°C (87.8°F)
Minimum recorded: 15.9°C (50.0°F)
Maximum recorded: 40.7°C (104.0°F)

Rainfall Recorded

For the period: 83.4mm
For the year to date: 493.1 mm

December has delivered good rains, prolific green growth, an abundance of flowers, and a whole kingdom of fungi.

Updates from some of the recent journals are that the four cheetah cubs and their doting mother are doing very well, and the Cape clawless otter has been seen frolicking in the water with a mate!

Outstanding sightings have been a crash of six black rhino together, and two kills seemingly all the more gruesome for their unexpectedness – a lioness crunching into the innards of a leopard tortoise, and a leopard with a doomed tree squirrel twitching in its mouth!

A leopard in a baobab!



Setting out in the sleepy hours of a morning and finding fresh sharp leopard (*Panthera pardus*) tracks in the soft sand of the path ahead swiftly accelerates your senses to high alert mode.

Leopards seem to like to use the roads at night and the early hours of the morning, when they are most active. It is a combination of the soft sand being easy on their paws, the open road ahead not concealing any unwanted encounters and often it provides the shortest route to where they want to go.

While following these four-toed three-lobed tracks my guest gazed at the magnificent baobabs that tower over the reserve. "Have you ever seen a leopard in a baobab?" he asked.

A leopard in a baobab is a bushveld enigma. There are people who have worked here for many years and never seen such a sight, even though we have healthy populations of leopards and baobabs. I was explaining the

whole mystery of it and going to great lengths to describe why it is so odd considering that a baobab offers an obvious height advantage as a lookout point, has relatively soft fibrous bark which would give leopard claws good purchase and that the wide branches would offer a comfortable spot to rest...



Not a minute later I turned onto a track that led off one of our main roads, glanced over my guest's shoulder, and there it was – a leopard in a baobab! If I didn't have my camera with me I'd have thought I was hallucinating!

I quickly photographed her with each of the lenses I carry with me and, although she was of average size with a very ragged left ear and a big wide scar on her back, she looked like a little kitten stuck in a tree!

She lay contentedly in the baobab and looked towards a grazing herd of impala and a distant rocky outcrop, but as the morning wore on and the reserve became more active she realised her cover had been blown and fluidly bounded down the broad trunk, slid through the golden grass and disappeared into a concealed ravine.

Having been treated to such a rare and wonderful sighting I can only conclude that a leopard does not change its spots – only what we know about its spots!



Sentry duty



These young baboons (*Papio ursinus*) were keeping a lookout for any signs of danger in the form of would-be predators. Sentry duty is an activity practised mainly by young males, and I had to stop and admire the rather laid back style of these two characters.

My attention and paparazzi behaviour eventually moved one of them to advance toward me, posture brashly and give me a filthy look in an attempt to scare me off. Had I been a leopard the hullabaloo would have been heard all through the valley below as they barked their alarm call to the rest of the troop.

There is one thing you can always be guaranteed of when watching baboons – and that's

entertainment! As primates their unadulterated behaviour is blushingly familiar!

Chacma baboons have a multimale-multifemale social system. A linear hierarchy exists within each troop based on the female line of descendants. By the time males reach adulthood they disperse from their natal troops to join other troops, or occasionally stay on their own as a one male unit.

Upon joining a new troop, and often thereafter, there is much aggression and jostling for position between the males because of competition for the females.



Being shown up by your little brother





Shortly after splashing about in the shallows and having a drink, this adolescent elephant bull took a tumble on the bank. As he flailed about an older male calmly walked over and carefully lifted his head using his trunk and tusks as leverage, and set him on terra firma, while a third little elephant, possibly his brother, looked on.

Once the adolescent had steadied himself and gained his footing he tried again, but the little brother was impatient and bustled in. While contemplating the big step up the little one did a nifty hop and a jump while sticking his rump in the air, dropping his head to the floor and using his trunk as a walking stick!

Tail and head held proudly aloft the little imp scampered off and out of range of an inevitable lesson in manners and respect for one's elders.





Jenny Hishin

Game viewing in between game drives

Sometimes the best wildlife viewing can be seen from the deck of your villa or around the lodge. The newly hatched African paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone viridis*) chicks seen on the first page are in one of five nests we know of in the lodge gardens – that particular one being outside the bedroom window of Villa 5.

This Natal spurfowl (*Pternistis natalensis*) made quick work of some crumbs I'd left on the balcony railing. Spurfwowls are normally rather shy, spending much of their time in dense undergrowth – away from the sharp talons of large predatory raptors. The size of this one's spurs indicate he is a male, as females have smaller reduced spurs. (I am chuckling away while



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checking my facts on this bird as one of my revered bird books describes its call as, "a raucous, unmusical screeching"! Having been woken up by this sound too many times I must concur!)



I photographed this serene scene at midday, at a waterhole, from a hide. The flock of tiny red-billed quelea (*Quelea quelea*) waited for the comparatively large Meve's starling (*Lamprotornis mevesii*) to take a drink before braving this vulnerable activity themselves.

I suspect that these two Transvaal flat geckos (*Afroedura transvaalica*) that keep an outside wall free of bugs, beetles and grasshoppers by eating the insects, were having an altercation about territory, females or both. The lower gecko was clearly losing the fight by being trapped in a cunning tail headlock and receiving a snappy bite on his flank.



It's not only the guests who've gone fishing this month...

Shortly before the heavy rains arrived our guides and guests enjoyed some excellent fishing in the waters of the Malilangwe Dam.



The luck began when a guest lured a small aptly named tigerfish (*Hydrocynus vittatus*) onto the line – ‘tiger’ because of its black stripes and orange markings, sharp teeth and aggressive fight. Then Japhet landed an impressive Mozambique tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*), and before long a world-renowned angler landed a larger tigerfish.



Later this month the dam rose by 1.5 metres thanks to the heavy rains, and the water became turbid with the churned up detritus. Seeking a purer source of oxygen many fish swam to the dam's surface and, in a weakened state, were washed on to the banks.



Our conservation scouts arrived the next morning with the intention of throwing some of the live fish back into the waters, but nature had already dealt with the issue... They found that during the night animals such as hyenas and leopards had feasted on the bounty, and it seemed as though every fish eagle from miles around was now skimming the surface of the dam with its talons and flying off with a “free” fish to feast on.

Dangerous game encounters - Part 2

If you intentionally want to observe dangerous game on foot there are rules to never be broken, and dire consequences if they are.

A guide will explain that a buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) bull like this belligerent old individual alongside, or a bachelor group of buffalo bulls should be avoided at all costs. Breeding herds of elephants – i.e. mothers and their calves should never be approached and it is also career limiting to approach any black rhino or any rhino mother and calf. If you are on foot and surprise a pride of lions on a kill or with cubs, as with a leopard, and you live to tell the tale, it will be one you'll never forget.

All that said, there are dangerous animals you can observe on foot with a highly experienced guide.

We tracked this large herd of buffalo cows and calves for about three hours. A while after we found them they heard a crunch of leaf litter and immediately became suspicious. Not wanting them to investigate us we stood up in full view so that they could see we were boring humans and not marauding lions. They gave us the once-over, then slowly moved off and continued grazing.



Breaking The Rain Tree

There was a snap and a crash as she fell to the dusty floor,
She had stood against the winds of time, but *Lonchocarpus* was no more.
Elephants had broken the rain tree, not because they didn't care,
There'd been no thought for chameleon, scops owl nor scrub hare.

Elephants had been wandering through the bush for many days.
Waiting to be patient, much too hungry to give praise.
Expectant skies had promise, but the rains did not deliver
And the golden sands that glittered were but a thirsty river!

Elephants broke the rain tree when they saw her standing proud,
They were parched and needed water, so they trumpeted aloud!
In all her crowning glory, she rained on their parade
And they sent her falling swiftly, to the ground where she'd been made!

There was a scuttle and a squawk as a francolin took to flight,
Heralding the wilderness of this earth maneuvering fright!
The army ants ceased marching in their sandy little tracks
To confirm of these happenings under elephants' attacks.

Her shiny leaves ashamed, were dappled grey with dirt
As the elephants stripped her clean, of her leafy apple skirt.
A yellow-bellied snake wriggled from her tumbled wooden core
In whispered utter disbelief that *Lonchocarpus* was no more!

A chirruping chide and twitching tail, as squirrel fled his nest!
Outraged by this inconvenience, turtle dove puffed out his chest!
How would the rains ever find them in this hot and dusty land,
Now that the rain tree's broken and she's lying in the sand?

Elephants kicked the dirt and turned their trunks against the raucous.
Fending off the other beasts, they warned them to be cautious!
But as they turned to leave, the blue skies turned to grey
And the clouds began to cry, for *Lonchocarpus* had died that day.

Shelley Mitchley, Pamushana Lodge Manager



Jenny Hishin



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Auld Lang Syne

2011 has been an exhausting year for many, including these two young lion brothers who flopped down next to the water's edge and engaged in a bout of unbridled, unapologetic contagious yawning.

From all of us at Singita Pamushana we wish you a very festive holiday with friends and family, punctuated by many pauses of peace, relaxation and re-energising. If you are planning a safari in 2012 we hope to welcome you to our piece of paradise, and make you feel right at home.



Shelley Mitchley

"The lodge, staff, guides and management were wonderful. What a marvellous place to spend a perfect 7 days!"

*Diane Vaught, Burlington NC,
USA*

By Jenny Hishin
Singita Pamushana
Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve
Zimbabwe
Thirty-first of December 2011