

### Wildlife

#### INTRODUCTION

During the British colonization, Nimpala was considered a world-class sanctuary for wildlife, in terms of diversity of species. In the past, the country was known for its undisturbed and isolated wilderness areas, a sharp contrast to neighboring countries. Its wildlife populations were coveted by British colonies. The wide range of wildlife species and migratory birds have also taken refuge in Nimpala due to its ideal sanctuary and critical ecosystems.

The long periods of violence from civil war and population pressure decimated the wildlife populations and their habitats in the past 30 years. What has survived has a high value internationally and is an important potential resource for Nimpala and future tourism prospects.

Each sub-region of the country has various wildlife pressures and concerns. The variation has made national planning more difficult in addition to regional disagreements and competition. No comprehensive biodiversity assessment has been conducted since the early 1980's when international tourism was picking up before the civil war. The lack of a responsible government party to protect and manage biodiversity has left this issue under-analyzed and increased vulnerability. The absence of technical fieldwork has meant a lack of virtually any current information on wildlife stocks and distribution. Most information remains anecdotal and based on sightings and reports by local NGOs and the limited ministry officials.

#### OVERVIEW OF WILDLIFE AND HABITATS

The arid and semi-arid habitats in Eastern Nimpala have placed natural barriers and limitations on population levels of most larger species and their growth potential. Desertification has also led to the deterioration of natural habitats and ecosystems. The harvesting of animals in Nimpala is usually done for two reasons: commercial poaching for non-meat products and bush meat.

The Northern areas have vast populations of migratory birds and waterfowl. This abundance and the international importance of these sites have led to the creation of numerous national parks and game reserves. Other countries north of Nimpala, with a high cultural and social connection to the migratory falcons and fowl, are concerned with dwindling protected areas and have expressed willingness to intervene and support protection.

Arid regions, which have low human population density, have greater numbers of wild sheep and several species of gazelle. Larger predators are limited to jackals and leopards.

The Western River area supports mainly birdlife and smaller animals due to high population density impacts.

The central dryland plains has heavy agricultural cultivation and roaming pastoralists has diminished large animals species, except for occasional migratory birds. Aerial surveys carried out in the savannah in the 1970s showed a range of white and black Rhinos, an endangered species and of great interest to foreign tourists.

The wetlands and floodplains in the West and North are key areas for migratory birds. There have been numerous international NGOs trying to protect these areas and support government efforts. The birds stop here on their way north and it serves as a critical stopping point, of value to northern countries.

**Key Species:** Hippopotamus, Leopard, Lion, Barbary Sheep, Gazelle, Rhinos, Elephants, Horn-skinned bat, Greater Spotted Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Houbrara Bustard. Lesser Kestrel, Spurred Tortoise

## PROTECTED AREA

A historic interest from the British colonial era in documenting the wildlife diversity and classifying species resulted in a series of protected areas designated and maintained through the high value they placed on wildlife protection. These areas were accepted after independence, but never maintained their importance to Nimpala's independent governments. The level of protection actually afforded to these areas was little to negligible. Compounding this, many of the areas are located in areas where civil war violence was most severe and continue to pay the consequences of absence of long-term rule of law. One of the main threats to the existing park system, whether enforced or not, are the encroachment of pastoralists and their herds. Many of the areas were used by pastoralists long before being designated as a park.

## KEY CHALLENGES

**Habitat destruction and fragmentation:** The rapid conversion of vast areas of savannah and dryland pasture into agricultural land have caused wide ranges of destruction and fragmentation of ecosystems and their biodiversity. The loss of these vast areas leaves only limited shelterbelts and other forms of wildlife refuge. The result is that larger wildlife species have diminished far faster from most of the species in the Central and Eastern areas of Nimpala. Additionally, the rush for infrastructure development has furthered limited the space for the wildlife to roam freely.

**Park encroachment and degradation:** Pastoralists who have traditionally and more recently used the land for herds are causing significant damage. Armed conflicts in the regions have also threatened these areas.

**Commercial poaching and bush meat** has led to quick fall in certain species. This has also had a minor role in funding certain rebel groups through the trade of ivory and wildlife on illegal black markets.

**Wildlife Tourism:** This does not exist at a commercial scale. The combination of the violent civil war and deteriorating infrastructure has reduced wildlife tourism in parks to several thousand people each year. This is compared to a thriving wildlife tourism industry during the period before the civil war.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop interim strategies and plan for the management of protected wildlife areas.
- Invest in national park identification system and increase management capacity of park rangers.
- Reform the institutions, laws and regulations of national parks and protected areas.