

Nechisar National Park (or Nech Sar National Park) is a national park in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. It is in the Great Rift Valley, within the southwestern Ethiopian Highlands.

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#### Geography[edit]

The 750-square-kilometre (190,000-acre) park includes the "Bridge of God", an isthmus between Lake Abaya and Lake Chamo, and the Nechisar (English: white grass) plains east of the lakes. It is east of Arba Minch.

Park elevations range between 1,108 and 1,650 metres (3,635 and 5,413 ft) above sea level.[1] Nechisar National Park was established in 1974. Under the management of African Parks Network (APN since 2005, it was reportedly scheduled to hand over management to the Ethiopian government in June 2008.[2]

#### History and management[edit]

As part of a 1960s UNESCO plan to protect and conserve nature and natural resources in Ethiopia, a two person team of UNESCO consultants spent three months surveying most major wildlife areas in Ethiopia, and officially submitted to the Wildlife Conservation Board in 1965 their recommendations, which included a game reserve to the east of Lake Chamo to provide protection for the population of Swayne's hartebeest and other local wildlife. Nechisar National Park was proposed in 1967, then officially established in 1974. Since then it has not legally been gazetted, but has functioned as de facto national park.[3] Following the recommendations of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture recommendation, in 1982 the local Guji, who had been living as pastoralists in the lowlands beside Lake Abaya and Chamo "were forcibly evicted from the park at gun point".[4]

In the lawless period at the end of the Derg rule and immediately afterwards, Nechisar suffered much damage. Park buildings located far from the headquarters were looted and damaged. At the same time, the local Guji returned to their traditional grazing areas.

According to one source, they fled there from the attacks of the Borena Oromo, who in turn were victimized by neighboring ethnic groups, their presence degrading the environment and contributing to the local extinction of many species. The Guji also acquired firearms during this period, and used them to resist eviction from the park afterwards.[5] In 2005, Refugees International criticized their eviction.[6]

In 2005, the management responsibility for Nechisar National Park was handed over to APN.[7]

While tourism in Ethiopia has increased in the park in recent years, doubling each year from 5300 tourists in 2005 to 20,500 in 2007, in October 2008 APN announced that they were ending management of Nechisar National Park. In a magazine article reprinted on their website, APN claims that sustainable management of the Ethiopian parks is incompatible

with "the irresponsible way of living of some of the ethnic groups". African Parks added that the emphasis for resettling inhabitants out of the park, rather than educating them to work with them, came from the Ethiopian government. APN was told that the Guji were an Oromo people, and "they belong in the adjoining Oromiya province, not among the Gamo and Gofa peoples of the Southern District, where the park is".[8]

#### Geography and landscape[edit]

The important regional centre to the park is Arba Minch in the Main Ethiopian Rift. Approximately 15% of the park consists of lakes including Lake Abaya in the north and Lake Chamo in the south. Part of the habitat consists of the groundwater forest and shoreline of the lakes, but there are also dry grassy plains. The altitude ranges from 1,108 meters above sea level at the shore of Lake Chamo to 1,650 meters on Mount Tabala in the north-east, renowned for its hot springs.[9]

Taller trees found in the park include *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Acacia tortilis*, *Balanites aegyptiaca* and less common *Acacia nilotica*. The southern part of the park is dominated by edaphic grassland and a calcareous black clay soil underneath with *Dobera glabra*, *Acacia tortilis* and the grass *Chrysopogon aucheri* forming much of the landscape.[9]

Both Lake Abaya and Chamo have substantial fish populations, notably Nile perch, which forms the basis of the local fishing industry. Crocodiles inhabit both lakes and there is a crocodile farm near Lake Abaya. At Chamo crocodiles are exploited for their skins.

#### Wildlife[edit]

Wildlife in the park include plains zebra, Grant's gazelle, dik-dik, and the greater kudu as well as one of the last three populations of the endangered Swayne's hartebeest, African leopard, Hyena, Lion, Cheetah, Giraffe, African wild dog and Hippopotamus.[7] A stretch of the northwest shore of Lake Chamo is known as Crocodile Market, where hundreds of crocodiles gather to bask. The park also has populations of bushbuck, bushpig, Anubis baboon, vervet monkeys, and black-backed jackal. The endangered painted hunting dog, *Lycaon pictus*, once existed in the park (with last sightings at Fincha), but may now be extirpated due to human population pressures in this region.[10] In 2009, a small group of less than 23 lions were estimated in and around the protected area.[11]

Nechisar National Park is considered an important habitat for bird populations particularly those migrating. It has a noted population of kingfishers, storks, pelicans, flamingos and African fish eagles.[12]

Other birds include *Falco naumanni* and *Circus macrourus*, which are fairly common on passage. Other species of note include *Accipiter ovampensis*, *Aviceda cuculoides*, *Gypaetus barbatus*, *Macheiramphus alcinus*, *Chelictinia riocourii*, *Francolinus levaillantii*, *Podica senegalensis*, *Crithagra reichardi*, *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*, and *Coracina caesia*.