

MANA POOLS NATIONAL PARK

Mana Pools National Park is a 219,600 ha wildlife conservation area and national park in northern Zimbabwe. It is a region of the lower Zambezi River in Zimbabwe where the flood plain turns into a broad expanse of lakes after each rainy season. As the lakes gradually dry up and recede, the region attracts many large animals in search of water, making it one of Africa's most renowned game-viewing regions. The park was



inscribed, in conjunction with the Sapi Safari Area (118,000 ha) and Chewore Safari Area (339,000 ha) as a single UNESCO World Heritage Site (for a total of 676,600 ha) in 1984. The Mana Pools were designated a Ramsar wetland of international importance on 3 January 2013. Mana Pools National Park is a World Heritage Site based on its pure wilderness and beauty. It is home to a wide range of mammals, over 350 bird species, and aquatic wildlife, and is one of the world's wildest and best preserved natural ecological areas.

ECOLOGY

Mana means 'four' in Shona, in reference to the four large permanent pools formed by the meanderings of the middle Zambezi. These 2,500 square kilometres of river frontage, islands, sandbanks and pools, flanked by forests of mahogany, wild figs, ebonies and baobabs, is one of the least developed national parks in Southern Africa. It has the country's biggest concentration of hippopotami and crocodiles and large dry season mammal populations of the zebra, elephant and Cape buffalo. The area is also home to other threatened species including the lion, cheetah, Cape wild dog, and near-threatened species including leopard and the brown hyena. When the area was inscribed by UNESCO, it was one of the most important refuges for eastern black rhinoceros populations in Africa, with about 500 animals. By 1994, poaching had reduced these to just 10 remaining rhinos, which were removed to another area for their protection.

CONSERVATION

The area was saved from a hydro-electric scheme in the early eighties which would have seen the flooding of the area. The area's ecology is affected by the regulation of the Kariba Dam and there are concerns that another potential dam on the Zambezi River, in the Mapata Gorge, might dramatically undermine the value of the area. Recently, the area was again saved from the Mupata Gorge hydro-electric scheme, where the chosen project was the Batoka Dam instead.

SURROUNDING AREA

The park is contiguous with Zambia's Lower Zambezi National Park on the opposite side of the Zambezi River, and the larger UNESCO area is contiguous with the Urungwe Safari Area (287,000 ha), the Dande Safari Area (52,300 ha) and the Doma Safari Area (76,400 ha).

WILDLIFE AND LANDSCAPES



The park itself is a network of long and twisting ox-bow lakes and pools that are formed where the mighty Zambezi slows its pace after crashing through the Victoria Falls, meandering through the Lower Zambezi Valley. The river is spread across a flattened floodplain stretching as far as the distant hills of the escarpment and reflecting the many islands and sandbanks where copious animals and birds roam. This is especially so in the dry season, from June

to October, when herds of thirsty elephants and buffalo make their way from the Lower Zambezi National Park to the pools, where pods of hippo, crocodiles, kudu, wild dog, leopard, lion and cheetah may be found, drawn in by the sweet water. The largest of the four main pools, Long Pool, covers an area of 6 kilometres and it is an ideal place for walking safaris, mainly thanks to the large acacia trees that provide a shady canopy from which to observe the wildlife. This pool is a popular place for herds of elephants to congregate as they emerge from the densely vegetated forests in the south to drink, and

you can also see hippo and crocodile here. Canoe safaris are popular in the lower Zambezi area, spending a few days floating down meandering waters, dodging hippo pods as you go, and stopping at mobile camps or islands along the riverbanks is exhilarating. The world renowned Zimbabwean guides here are experts in bringing you close to the big game and you stand a great chance of spotting hippo, buffalo, elephant and even wild dog.

*“BIRD-LOVERS WILL BE NO LESS
REWARDED BY THIS UNIQUE
EXPERIENCE AS THE MANA POOLS
AREA IS SAID TO HAVE OVER 380
SPECIES THAT INCLUDE THE BANDED
SNAKE EAGLE, LIVINGSTONE’S
FLYCATCHER AND NYASA LOVEBIRD.”*

