Mana Pools Ramsar Site

Introduction

Mana Pools National Park is located in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. It shares its northern border, the Zambezi River, with Zambia. Uniquely its other borders are almost exclusively protected areas – Nyakasanga Safari Area on the western side and Chewore Safari areas on the east. Its northern boundary borders on State land and Mukwichi Communal area. The park covers 2208 km² and is one of Zimbabwe’s seven Ramsar sites. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands provides a framework for wetland conservation and requests nations to promote conservation of wetlands and where appropriate sustainable utilization. Zimbabwe became a signatory to this convention in 2011.

Mana Pools is protected by Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks). It is a World Heritage Site under this UNESCO Convention and a core area of UNESCO the Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve and is now a Ramsar site.

Biodiversity

Big game concentrations in the valley floor during the dry season is the most striking feature of Mana’s biodiversity attributes. From July to December it probably holds the biggest large game concentrations in Africa. The floodplains attract populations of elephant, buffalo, eland, kudu, zebra, impala, waterbuck and warthog. The termites probably consume more plant material than the game. When the rains start towards the end of November, the game moves into the mopane and Jesse woodlands.

In and along the Zambezi, are huge numbers of hippo and crocodiles and the waters are shared by many water birds including migratory bird species, 64 fish species and turtles. Along the shores are waterbuck. Predators; lions, leopard and hyena are common and a wild dog pack often dens down near the main camp site.

As the pans near the flood plains dry out, pelicans, marabou and fish eagles arrive to eat the trapped fish.

Inland vegetation is mainly mopane and Joyce as well as unique dry forests. The ephemeral pans, permanent springs and sandy rivers provide water for permanent big game populations. Big buffalo herds are preyed on
by lions at sites such as Chitake, a sandy river with a spring.

Over 400 species of birds are found. The populations of Lilian’s Lovebirds and colonies of Carmine Bee-eaters are notable. Mana forms one of the Important Bird Areas for Zimbabwe.

**Cultural Values and Tourism**

In the past the Middle Zambezi Valley was lightly settled due to diseases transmitted by mosquitoes and tsetse fly, the remoteness of the area and dangers posed by big animals. Dinosaur remains were discovered in 1972 and are nearby the famous dinosaur footprints in Chewore.

Mana Pools is a popular tourist destination. Activities like walking, game watching from vehicles and canoeing and fishing are concentrated on the flood plains. Low impact exclusive camping sites and a few lodges limit the number of visitors. This helps maintain a wilderness experience.

The park is unique in that visitors are permitted to walk unescorted in the flood plain area. Visitors peaked at 12000 people in the early 1990s but declined to about half that number a decade later. Small inland camps are being developed.

**Conservation measures**

One non-profit organization, the Zambezi Society, has for decades provided research and assistance in transport and communication fields and assists in averting threats to Mana. Zam Soc sources funding and materials for anti poaching teams. There is a “Carry in Carry out” refuse policy for waste in the park.

Friends of the Zambezi Society contribute to funding and in kind donations. It started collaborating with safari operators, local communities such as Mukwichi and Zambian counterparts in Mana to improve conservation strategies. The Tashinga Initiative has provided a small clinic and helps with pre-school infants’ learning recently.

ZimParks continue with monitoring game and managing their anti-poaching teams among other activities.

The surrounding safari areas provide employment for many workers in the controlled hunting industry and offer protection and conservation for Mana Pools. These areas act as a buffer zone. Bird Life Zimbabwe between 2008-2011 did a management programme funded by the European Union for staff at Mana.

**Threats**

Mana Pools is managed by ZimParks as a wilderness area. Threats to this site are:

i. Pressure for more floodplain accommodation.

ii. Zambian tourist facilities across the 2.5 km Zambezi provide noise from motorboats and engines disturbing Mana’s peace. Road building and mining downstream by Zambia may be permitted adding to noise and chemical pollution.

iii. Poaching of big game on the increase fuelled by Far East’s demand for illegal ivory.

iv. Drying out of the main floodplain chiefly caused by impoundment of the Zambezi at Kariba.

v. Illegal alluvial gold panning on the northern borders and sand mining prospecting in the Ruckomechi and Chiwore sand rivers

For more information on Ramsar convention or Mana Pools contact:
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