

Mana Pools Ramsar Site

Introduction

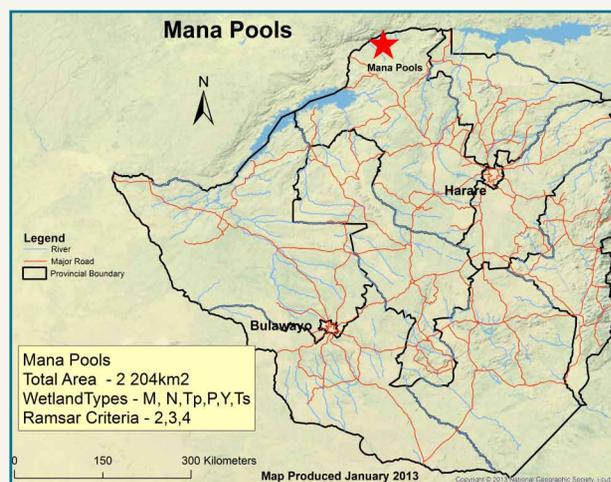
Mana Pools National Park is located in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. It shares its northern border, the Zambezi River, with Zambia. Uniquely its other borders are almost exclusively protected areas – Nyakasanga Safari Area on the western side and the Sapi and Chewore Safari areas on the east. Its southern 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 part of the Mana Pools/Sapi and Chewore World Heritage Site under the UNESCO Convention and a core area of UNESCO the Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve and is now a Ramsar site.

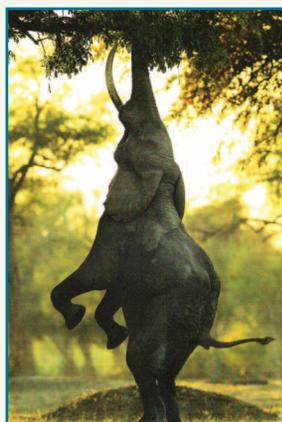
Biodiversity

Big game concentrations in the Zambezi valley floor during the dry season is the most striking feature of Mana's biodiversity attributes. This is due to the year-round presence of water in the Zambezi River, and the existence of alluvial vegetation in the floodplain area, including large stands of "Winter-thorn" trees (*Faidherherbia albida*) which provide leaves and protein-rich pods during the driest months of the year. From July to December the Park probably holds the largest big 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 back inland 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 there are several wild dog packs in the vicinity. As the pans near the floodplains dry out, pelicans marabou and fish eagles arrive to eat the trapped fish.



Map of Mana Pools Ramsar site



Above: Chitake lions feast on a buffalo.

Left: Acrobatic elephants search for food in Mana Pools.

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.



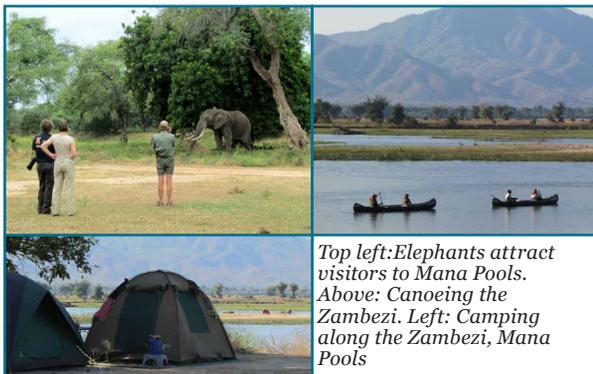
Left: Cliff breeding carmine Bee-Eaters. Right: Globally significant numbers of Lilian's Lovebird.

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 footprints were discovered in Chewore in 1972, and dinosaur bones near Chitake in more recent years.

Mana Pools is a popular tourist destination. Activities like walking, game watching from vehicles, canoeing and fishing are concentrated on the floodplains. Low impact exclusive camping sites and a few ecotourism 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 floodplain 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 in an attempt to remove tourism pressure from the sensitive floodplain ecosystems.



Top left: Elephants attract visitors to Mana Pools. Above: Canoeing the Zambezi. Left: Camping along the Zambezi, Mana Pools

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 Chewore sand rivers

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. The Zambezi Society 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. The organisation is collaborating with safari operators, local communities such as Mukwichi and Zambian counterparts in Mana to improve conservation strategies. The Tashinga Initiative has recently provided improved communications, a small clinic and helps with pre-school infants' learning.

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. BirdLife Zimbabwe between 2008-2011 did a management programme funded by the European Union for staff at Mana.

For more information on The Ramsar Convention or Mana Pools contact:

The Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate

Phone: +2634 701681/5 or 701691/2

The Environmental Management Agency

Website: www.ema.co.zw or

Phone: +2634 705671-3 / 705661-2

The Zambezi Society

Website: www.zamsoc.org

Phone: +263 4 747004

Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority

Website: www.zimparks.org

Phone: + 263 4 706077/8

