

CHITABE CONCESSION WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

Chitabe is situated south-east of Chief's Island in a concession known as NG31 – an exclusive wilderness area of 22 000 hectares (54 000 acres). This concession borders the Moremi Game Reserve in the north and the east while the Santantadibe River and the Gomoti Channel are its western and eastern boundaries respectively.

CAMPS

- Chitabe
- Chitabe Lediba



Even though it is very flat and made up of homogeneous Kalahari sand, the Chitabe Concession has large variations in habitat patterns over relatively small distances. Seasonal or permanent presence of water is the major driver of habitat types here: Small changes in elevation of just 1-2 metres represent large differences in the frequency and duration of flooding, which creates gradients from permanent rivers and lagoons and permanent swamps with reeds and papyrus, to seasonally flooded grasslands, occasionally flooded grasslands, riverine woodlands and dry woodlands. Each of these ecosystems has a distinct species composition of mammals and birds.

The eastern half of the concession is characterised by grassy floodplains which separate the Gomoti Channel from acacia and stunted mopane woodland. The western half has as its boundary the Santantadibe River with more permanent water and the associated papyrus and wooded island habitat mosaics, further bolstering the diversity of bird species.

The high numbers of impala in the area means that leopard are often seen. Also encountered are Cape buffalo, elephant, lion and frequent sightings of wild dog – the subject of the Botswana Wild Dog Research Project that took place in the area. Abundant general game species include southern giraffe, warthog, Burchell's zebra, tsessebe, steenbok and blue wildebeest. Bat-eared fox is always a good find



The Chitabe Concession's total bird population is estimated at 345 species, comprising both resident and migratory birds, and varying throughout the year, depending on water levels and season. Raptors are abundant here and include African hawk eagle and hooded vulture, which often nests on the island or seen following packs of African wild dog in search of any scraps after a kill.

Of particular note on Chitabe are breeding and visiting wattled crane and slaty egret – complementing the rest of the Delta as a major global breeding area for these species. The Okavango Delta and Chitabe are recognised as being of conservation importance for the large number of congregatory waterbirds such as rufous-bellied heron and African pygmy-goose that are found here. Floodplain specialists frequently seen include long-toed lapwing and collared pratincole with a high summer density of black coucal in rank grassland areas, particularly around Chitabe Camp and Chitabe Lediba itself.

Other important resident species include copper-tailed coucal, chirping and Luapula cisticola, secretarybird, southern ground-hornbill, swamp boubou, Hartlaub's babbler, and Dickinson's kestrel. The Chitabe Concession is also important for various Palearctic migratory species during the austral summer such as red-backed shrike, barn swallow, spotted flycatcher and Eurasian golden oriole.