

PALMWAG NORTH WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

The remote, northern reaches of the 450 000ha (1 111 935-acre) Palmwag Concession are in stark contrast to the south. Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp is located in this part of the Concession, straddling the Palmwag area and Skeleton Coast National Park, in one of the most remote areas of the Kaokoveld. A land of rugged scenery, the area has a historic coastline, mountains, vast plains, and dry riverbeds inhabited by incredible desert-adapted plant and animal life.

CAMPS

- Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp



Here the landscape is dominated by the form of the Hoanib River, a swathe of sand that meanders through rocky gorges and past arid sandy plains. The transient Hoanib River, more an underground aquifer than river, supports a ribbon of vegetation along its length, this presenting the only visible food source for the herds of desert-adapted species roaming free among these desert ramparts. The riverbed – an ephemeral linear oasis penetrating the depths of the desert – is lined with albida trees, the pods of which form the staple dry season diet of desert-adapted elephant, giraffe, gemsbok and springbok. Lions spend the heat of the day in salvadora and salsola thickets waiting for the cool of night. Cheetah and black-backed jackal roam the area as well.

Early morning fog generated by the icy Benguela Current in the Atlantic Ocean meeting the warm desert air of the Skeleton Coast drifts inland over the Namib Desert, providing precious water to the flora and fauna in this incredibly harsh environment. Adaptation to the desert environment is the miracle of all that survives here.

The area has fascinating desert-adapted vegetation such as welwitschia and lithops – the succulent "flowering stones" – and the bizarre elephant's foot found in rocky crevices. More than a hundred species of lichen are found on the gravel plains and hot west-facing mountain slopes, which change colour as they absorb moisture when the coastal fog presses inland.



The iconic oasis spring of Auses lies in the dunefield to the west and is best seen from the air en route to the gravel plains on the coast, where Cape fur seal colonies dwell.

Birding enthusiasts are sure to enjoy the diverse avifauna of the Concession. Raptors include greater kestrel, Augur buzzard, lanner falcon and booted eagles. Out on drives, it is possible to see Namaqua sandgrouse, Burchell's courser, the colourful bokmakierie, grey-backed sparrowlark, Monteiro's hornbill and white-backed mousebird. Other regular endemics include Rüppell's korhaan while Verreauxs' eagle is sometimes sighted in flight. Towards the coast, tractrac chat and Gray's lark can possibly be seen. The seal colonies often have jaegers and skuas in attendance with parasitic jaeger, pomarine jaeger and sub-Antarctic skua all possible in summer.