



WILDERNESS

# ZAMBIA WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

Zambia at the Cholwezi Rapids, and thereafter forms the southern border of the country with neighbouring Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The Zambezi and its valleys are one defining aspect of this country; another is the southern end of the great African Rift system that cuts through the eastern and southern parts via several deep rifts along the course of the Luangwa River. Natural features also include the breathtaking Victoria Falls, Lake Tanganyika (the second deepest natural lake in the world) and the floodplains of Busanga, Barotseland, the Kafue Flats and the Bangweulu Swamps.



Kafue National Park in central Zambia offers a heady mix of miombo woodlands and game-filled floodplains. Endemic subspecies of giraffe and wildebeest are found in the Luangwa Valley, where an impressive watercourse famously supports high densities of game. Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, a short distance from Victoria Falls, comprises mopane and teak woodlands with luxuriant riverine forest along the banks of the Zambezi River. Zambia's biodiversity count includes 740 bird, over 200 mammal, 143 reptile and 57 amphibian species.

With such enormous tracts of wilderness, Zambia is able to provide important refuge for vulnerable species from cheetah, lion and wild dog, right down to large-eared free-tailed bat and checkered elephant-shrew. Endemic subspecies of giraffe (Thornicroft's) and wildebeest (Cookson's) are found in the Luangwa Valley, along with good populations of lion; extensive herds of black lechwe inhabit the floodplains of the Bangweulu while Luangwa is renowned for one of the highest leopard densities in Africa. Kafue's Busanga Plains is a magnet for game species such as buffalo, red lechwe, puku, and roan antelope whereas fringing miombo woodland is good for key species such as Lichtenstein's hartebeest, defassa waterbuck, oribi and yellow baboon.

## WILDLIFE



740 bird species



143 reptile species



200+ larger mammal species



57 amphibian species

## SIX DISTINCT ECO-ZONES

- Zambezian flooded grasslands
- Western Zambezian grasslands
- Cryptosepalum dry forests
- Zambezian Baikiaea woodlands
- Zambezian and Mopane woodlands
- Miombo woodlands



Tree hyrax is another unique mammal to look out for in Kafue. The dominant predator on the Plains is lion, as well as occasional cheetah, while the wooded areas host leopard and wild dog. Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park near Victoria Falls offers excellent sightings of buffalo, giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, impala, puku and white rhino. Elephant can also often be seen swimming across the Zambezi River here.

In general, the country is situated on a high plateau and is characterised by immensity of space and gentle horizons, broken by the enormous valleys of the Upper Zambezi and its tributaries – of which the Kafue and Luangwa Rivers are the largest. With an average height of 1 200 metres (3 937 feet) above sea level, the climate is comfortable rather than tropical, while the valleys of the middle Zambezi, the Luangwa and its tributaries, all about 300 m (985 ft.) above sea level, are hotter and more humid. The Kafue Flats form yet another valley trough, although the altitude, about 975 m (3 200 ft.), is only slightly less than the surrounding plateaux.

In the south, the Zambezi River hurls itself over the lip of the Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, twists silently through the narrow Batoka Gorges before flowing into Lake Kariba and on through the Lower Zambezi Valley.

The Kafue and Luangwa Rivers both flow into the Zambezi and their fertile banks play host to some of the country's most important conservation areas. In the east, the vast floodplains of Barotseland flank the Zambezi with the best known wildlife areas being the Liuwa Plain and Sioma Ngwezi National Parks. Much further along its course, the Lower Zambezi National Park replaces the wide-open nature of Liuwa with a juxtaposition of woodland, escarpment and river.





The 2.25 million-hectare (5.5 million-acre) Kafue National Park and surrounding game management areas in central Zambia make up the largest conservation area and are a mix of miombo woodlands and seasonally inundated floodplains. Like Liuwa and Sioma Ngwezi it is under-visited and is enveloped in an atmosphere of solitude, wilderness and timelessness. The North Luangwa and South Luangwa National Parks and associated game management areas in the east of the country make up almost as large an area where they straddle the Luangwa River and provide an exceptional harbour to flora and fauna in the ancient riverine woodlands adjacent to the river.

Of Zambia's 740 bird species, there is one true endemic, Chaplin's barbet, and a smattering of other exciting species restricted to central Africa. Species such as rosy-throated longclaw, red-throated twin-spot, wattled crane, rufous-bellied tit and sooty chat are commonly seen amongst Kafue's 500 recorded species. The Zambezi River along Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park is good for African finfoot, half-collared kingfisher, Schalow's turaco and rock pratincole. Zambia is also the southernmost extreme of the eccentric-looking African shoebill's range for example and one of the best places to see this sought-after species.