



WILDERNESS

ZIMBABWE WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

Zimbabwe lies between the great Zambezi River, its northern frontier, and the languid Limpopo River in the south. In between, the country has a variety of habitats, and consequently wildlife in diversity and numbers. The mighty Zambezi hosts the iconic Victoria Falls along its course as well as the remote Mana Pools National Park downriver..



In Hwange National Park, the easternmost tongues of the Kalahari mix with teak forests, so that desert-adapted animals share the same habitat with woodland species. Zimbabwe is blessed with rich diversity: the country supports 672 bird, 196 mammal, 156 reptile and 72 amphibian species.

Biogeographically, Zimbabwe sits at the crossroads of the northern tropics of Central Africa and the southern temperate zone of South Africa. Its more than 5 000 species of flowering plants and ferns are testament to the diversity that is possible in a relatively small country at such a meeting place. It is bisected by a well-defined east-west watershed where the northern half of the country drains into the Zambezi River while in the southern reaches of Zimbabwe, rivers wind their way southwards, flowing into the Limpopo or its eventual tributaries such as the Savé or Nuanetsi. The Zambezi zigzags through the Batoka Gorges below Victoria Falls before it carves a giant arc around the north of the country, great cliffs sliding down into riverine forest and wide floodplains. The river traces the northern border of the country flowing into Lake Kariba and then onward through the hot low-lying Zambezi Valley and the World Heritage Site of Mana Pools National Park.

WILDLIFE



672 bird species



156 reptile species



196 larger mammal species



72 amphibian species

ELEVEN DISTINCT ECO-ZONES

- Kalahari Acacia-Baikiaea Woodland
- Southern Africa Bushveld
- Southern Miombo Woodlands
- Zambezian Baikiaea Woodlands
- Zambezian Mopane Woodlands
- Eastern Zimbabwe Montane Forest-Grassland Zambezi River-Lowveld
- Zambezi River-Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands
- Zambezi River-Zamebzian Plateau Highveld
- Zambezi River-Middle Zambezi Luangwa



The Limpopo is a very different river, as it ploughs its way between Zimbabwe and South Africa providing a corridor between Gonarezhou National Park and South Africa's Kruger in the south-west and forming the nucleus of another transfrontier park between Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa in the south-west. Both the Zambezi and the Limpopo reach the Indian Ocean on the coastal plain of Mozambique.

In the east, a rugged mountain range forms the border with Mozambique. Known as the Eastern Highlands, this area is home to heath and rolling grasslands interspersed with Afro-montane forest – a complete contrast to the low-lying river valleys. This region is an extension of a series of relict isolated forest patches that stretch down the eastern seaboard of Africa and play host to an array of highly restricted plant and animal species such as Swynnerton's robin. The western region is known for the rounded, impossibly balanced boulders and granite domes of the Matobo Hills. The hills are also famously a stronghold for birds of prey, providing a refuge for more than 50 species including the characteristic Verreaux's eagle.

Zimbabwe's largest national park, Hwange, is home to some of southern Africa's last great elephant, buffalo and sable herds and plays an integral role in a network of southern African conservation areas. Likewise the mopane woodlands of the south-eastern lowveld, whose elephant herds continue to migrate between here and neighbouring Mozambique and South Africa. For these and other reasons, this beautiful river-bounded country is a vital link in the broad sweep of intact wilderness areas across the southern half of the African continent.



Over 650 species of birds occur in Zimbabwe, of which many – while not true endemics – are difficult to find elsewhere. About 420 species have been recorded in the Hwange region, with several being special to the western part of the country: red-billed spurfowl, red-eyed bulbul, crimson-breasted shrike and black-winged pratincole (seasonal). Bradfield's hornbill, racket-tailed roller and Arnot's chat are found in the teak woodlands while grey crowned cranes share the area with ostrich and Kori bustard. Mana Pools National Park has a diverse bird population that includes about 400 species. Rufous-bellied heron, African skimmer and other waterbirds patrol the Zambezi River, with southern carmine bee-eater (breeding visitor), Lilian's lovebird, Meyer's parrot, crested guineafowl, collared palm-thrush, western banded snake-eagle and white-breasted cuckooshrike just some of the specials in the fringing riverine woodland and mopane areas.

72 amphibians are currently recognised in Zimbabwe, although new species are still being identified. Seven species are currently listed as endemic, five of which are montane species of the Eastern Highlands.