



The Convention on Wetlands, previously known as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (or the Ramsar Convention, after the Iranian City where the text was adopted in 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for international co-operation for the conservation of wetland habitats.

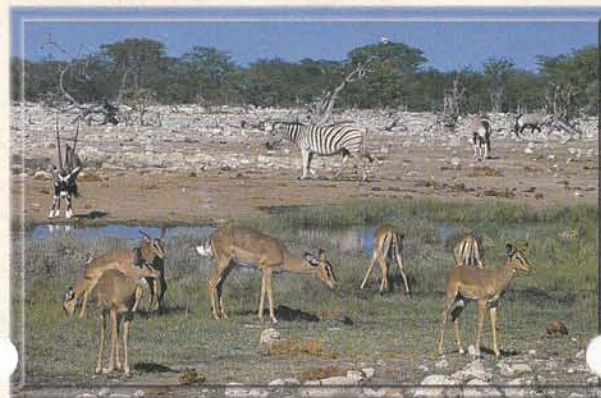


The production of this pamphlet was made possible by a generous financial contribution from the Ramsar Small Grants Fund. The Ramsar Bureau, whose aim it is, to promote an understanding and awareness of our fragile wetland habitats, thus contributing to their conservation, administers this Fund.

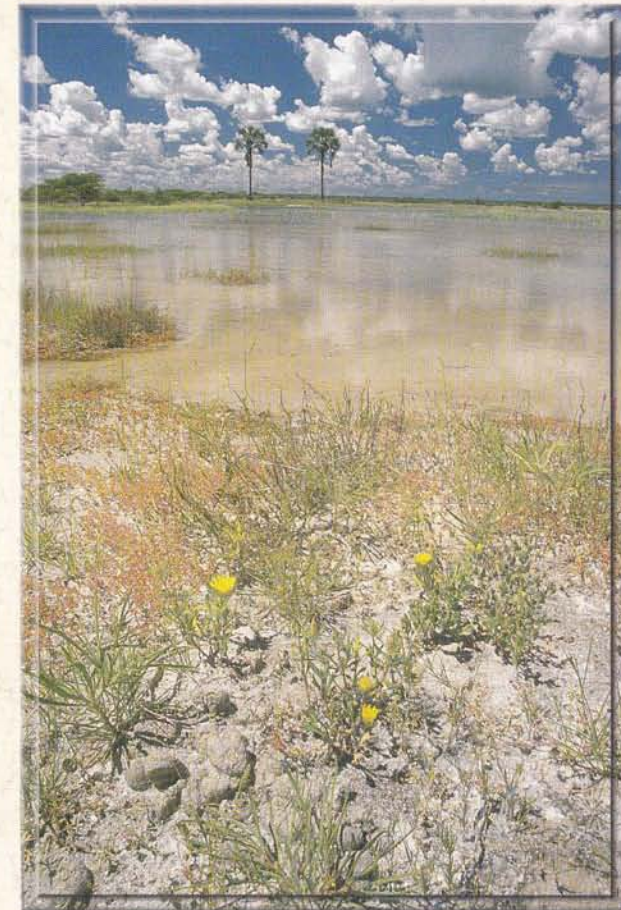
The conservation authority responsible for the management of Etosha National Park is the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Contact details follow below:



Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Private Bag 13306
Windhoek
Namibia
Tel: (061) 263131
Fax: (061) 259101
E-mail: metreper@iafrica.com.na



Etosha Pan



a wetland of international importance

Text by Claire and Holger Kolberg
Photos and design by Dirk Heinrich Photo Library

Etosha Pan

... a vast open space ...

Central to the Etosha National Park, and from which it derives its name, is the vast open space of Etosha Pan. The Pan, originally a lake, gradually dried two to ten million years ago as climatic changes and movements of the earth's crust caused the river that once fed it to change course and flow into the Atlantic Ocean. Today, only the dry baked alkaline clay marks where the once great lake existed. Torrential rains, often years apart, fill a relatively small part of the pan via rivers and we get a glimpse of what the lake may have looked like.

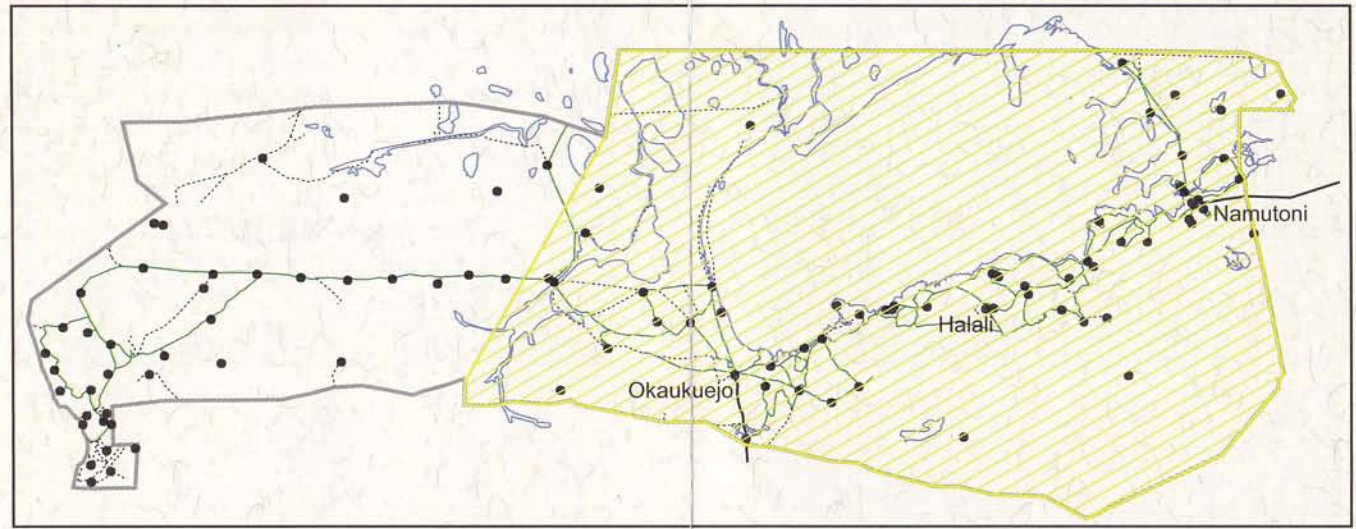
The name Etosha is derived from the Oshiwambo word Etosha meaning "bare place" and very aptly describes the immensity of this flat, clay plain. The original inhabitants of the area were Hei//om-people, hunter-gatherers who existed in harmony with the huge numbers of wildlife. The Pan first became known to Europeans in 1851 when explorers Charles Andersson and Francis Galton reached a cattle post called Omutjamatunda, today known as Namutoni. They provided the first written account of the pan.

... an exceptional wetland ...

Etosha is one of the world's largest national parks, stretching more than 350 kilometres across and covering an area of 22 270 square kilometres. The area, once privately owned, was first proclaimed by the German governor in 1907 as "Game Reserve No. 2". Today, after two major boundary changes, only one quarter of that original area remains. Etosha Pan is without question the central feature of the park. With an area exceeding 5000 square kilometres, it is almost one quarter of the total area of the park. It is the largest pan in Namibia and one of the largest in the southern African sub-region. Although it is dry for most years, water in the form of natural fountains, can be found year-round along its southern edge. These provide an important source of water for Etosha's thriving wildlife. The pan is largely without vegetation, except for some salt tolerant grasses.



The average rainfall in Etosha varies from 450mm in the east to only 300mm in the west. Most rain occurs during the January to April wet season when temperatures are around



50 0 50 100 150 200 Kilometers

● Waterholes √ Tracks √ Gravel Roads √ Tar Roads √ Pans ■ Ramsar Site □ Park Boundary

40°C. This is also the time when most species of mammals give birth to their young.

Although water reaches Fischer's Pan in the eastern extremity of Etosha Pan almost every year, it is only during seasons of exceptional rainfall, locally known as efundja, that the pan floods through the Ekuma river which has its origin in the Cuvelai drainage in Angola and northern Namibia. The sun-cracked pan partly fills with water and becomes, however shallow and alkaline, a lake again. Sixty species of birds sporadically breed on the seasonal wetlands and it is the only known mass breeding ground for flamingos in Namibia. At times over one million flamingos congregate on the pan, their breeding plumage reflected in the shallow waters, creating a mirage of pink. The water disappears all too quickly within a few months, leaving behind the whitish clay soil, which cracks into hexagonal fragments as it dries.

... teeming with wildlife...

Etosha Pan is surrounded by sweetveld savanna plains, which sustain extraordinary numbers of wildlife. Etosha is home to 114 mammal and some 340 bird species. It houses large numbers of globally endangered or threatened species, most notably black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). All large predators,

such as lion and cheetah, occur in impressive numbers. Because of its size, the park serves as a genetic reserve for various species of animals and plants. Many animals breed in the park and it contains endemics such as the Etosha agama (*Agama etoshae*). Because of its importance as a wetland, Etosha Pan was listed as a Ramsar wetland in 1995 [see box]. Etosha National Park is also listed as an Important Bird Area because it holds significant numbers of globally threatened and near-threatened bird species and four species occurring here exceed 1% of their biogeographical population. It also holds twenty bird species that have a restricted range or are restricted to a particular biome.

Today, the park is one of Namibia's premier tourist attractions, mainly because of the large numbers of game that inhabit the park. During the dry months the animals are drawn in spectacular numbers to permanent waterholes, their dependence on this water making them visible to the tourist.

