



# BANGWEULU

WETLANDS  
ZAMBIA

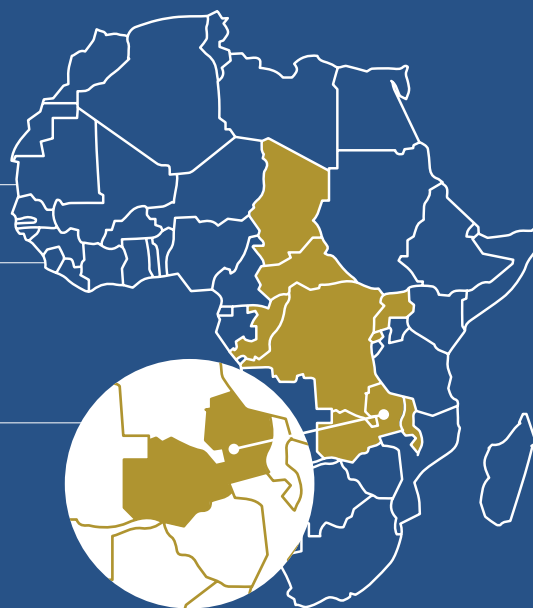
AFRICAN PARKS PROJECT SINCE 2008

Area: 6,000 km<sup>2</sup>

Partners: Six Community Resource Boards (CRBs) and the Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)

Key Funders: WWF-Netherlands and WWF-Zambia

433 avian species documented  
50,000 people co-own the wetland  
and depend on its resources for survival



## The Story of Bangweulu

Bangweulu means 'where water meets the sky', a perfect description for one of the most extraordinary and important wetlands in all of Africa. Bangweulu is unique in that it is a community-owned protected area and is home to 50,000 people who retain the right to sustainably harvest its natural resources for their survival and livelihoods. However, up to 2008 this abundant wetland's fish and wildlife populations had diminished as a result of unregulated use. This all changed when African Parks signed an agreement with the Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) to work with the communities to sustainably manage the wetland for the benefit of both wildlife and people. Today, Bangweulu is thriving, delicately balancing the needs of the communities with the preservation of wildlife. The prehistoric and endangered shoebill stork population is growing; fish stocks have significantly increased due to an annual three-month fishing ban; and the implementation of sustainable harvesting has allowed the endemic Black lechwe population to significantly increase in the last decade. Today, Bangweulu is the largest employer in the region; it is providing healthcare and education to all six Chiefdoms and is positioned to become a leading example of community-driven conservation on the continent.



BANGWEULU  
WETLANDS

COMMUNITY OWNED, COMMUNITY CONSERVED

## The Challenge

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Prior to African Parks involvement, and as a result of the absence of a management plan, Bangweulu's natural resources were being rapidly depleted. Relentless harvesting exterminated several large mammal species, but spared small remnant populations of buffalo, elephant and hartebeest. Unrestricted fishing and rampant hunting decimated fish stocks and black lechwe, on which local communities are largely dependent on for their survival. Ten years later, the implementation and enforcement of the sustainable resource harvesting strategy remains one of the greatest challenges but as communities reap the benefits of good governance and improved economic opportunities the concept of conservation has been increasingly embraced.

## Highlights

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- The shoebill stork population grew with 10 nests protected by community guards in 2017 and six chicks successfully fledged.
- 250 animals, including zebra and impala, were successfully translocated to the wetland to bolster remnant populations.
- Four new horses were added to the effective equine anti-poaching unit, increasing patrol coverage to new areas.
- Communities are benefitting from improved fishing yields as a result of the annual fishing ban that is implemented over the spawning season, allowing fish stocks to recover over time.
- Anti-poaching measures have seen the recovery of the endemic black lechwe from 35,000 to more than 50,000.
- 60 schools are supported by the park including the Self-Learning Modular Centre with 40 ZeduPads directly impacting and delivering an education to over 1,000 students.

## The Solution

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The long-term sustainability of Bangweulu is dependent on maintaining a close partnership with the communities that own and depend on the protected area's natural resources. It is critical that communities derive tangible benefits from protected areas, in order to value conservation as a viable land-use choice. This is achieved through community engagement on multiple levels including the provision of life-altering health and educational services, increased tourism and employment opportunities, and the permissible sustainable harvesting of fish and selective wildlife species. Recruitment and training of Bangweulu's law enforcement team simultaneously plays a key role in safeguarding the communities' resources. This unique wetland is a working model of community driven conservation and the ultimate goal is to create a management system whereby both people and wildlife equally benefit and thrive.

## Next Steps

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- 1 Continue ongoing enforcement of the fishery management plan, including annual fishing bans and assisting fishermen with reducing post-harvest losses and access to markets to generate an income.
- 2 Complete the translocation of game animals to help continue to repopulate the park.
- 3 Extract the full value from the sustainable harvesting zone, with a focus on Black lechwe, Tessebe and Situngas with an annual target turnover of US\$250,000.
- 4 Install and implement the Domain Awareness System (DAS) to improve park-wide monitoring and management.
- 5 Ensure the commissioning of Shoebill Island Camp, with a target of producing US\$50,000 in revenue.



African Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that takes on direct responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks and protected areas, in partnership with governments and local communities. With 15 parks under management in nine countries, 10.5 million hectares is currently being protected; this is the largest amount of area under conservation for any one NGO on the continent.