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Travel Zimbabwe

Nantwich Lodge
Zimbabwe's Hidden Gem

African Parks
and the Matusadona
Conservation Trust

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African Parks and Matusadona

Article - Eva Reid

Images - Kelly Landry, Mana Meadows & African Parks

Matusadona National Park is one of Zimbabwe's recent good news stories, where a partnership development between the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) and the non-profit nature conservation organization African Parks provided an exciting progression in the tourism and conservation arena in Zimbabwe. The two organizations established a 20-year partnership in late 2019 and formed the Matusadona Conservation Trust (MCT). Together they are implementing management strategies to secure the park and restore wildlife populations, unlocking its ecological, social, and economic value and enabling communities to derive long-term benefits.

This extraordinary National Park on Lake Kariba is well known for its splendid fishing opportunities in the river systems and along the scenic shoreline of Matusadona. Elephants roam past your boat and graze alongside hippos and impala in the green grass of the lake's edge and lions roaring in the background. The Matusadona Conservation Trust is working together with the local community and the fishing camps, to promote sustainable fishing practices, increase educational and employment opportunities in the region and develop small-scale grassroots enterprises. The organization has doubled its Anti-Poaching capacity by employing and training an additional 33 rangers in early 2021 bringing the total to 62. These rangers are out in the park every day, and protect the entire area from illegal activities- from lakeshore

to the far southern hills of Matusadona – creating a safe landscape that enables people and wildlife to benefit. The Tashinga headquarters, located in the western part of the park, has grown exponentially during this first year of operations. To ensure the park is well managed, a backbone structure of technical employees and a fleet of vehicles and heavy machinery is available and used to ensure roads are accessible and infrastructure is renovated or constructed by the Matusadona technical team. A new airplane is also providing 'eyes in the sky' to monitor activities

in and around the National Park, feeding information directly down to the rangers on the ground.

Alongside the management activities, elevating Matusadona as a significant wildlife tourism destination is moving more to the forefront. By increasing its commercial development, Matusadona can better contribute to Zimbabwe's growing economy while simultaneously providing a sustainable source of benefits for local communities. To boost tourism activity and aid the restoration of the existing wildlife populations in the park, a large game translocation took place in August 2021 where 223 zebra were moved from Bubye Valley Conservancy to Matusadona National Park in a ground-breaking move.

Dr. Fulton Mangwanya, Director-General of Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority stated, "We are facing extraordinary challenges given the pandemic, which has hit Zimbabwe at a time when our economy has been faced with climate shocks associated with drought and Cyclone Idai. But this translocation is a proactive measure and an important moment for conservation, wildlife, and tourism in our country. In collaboration with African Parks, we are taking bold measures to invest in the protection of our natural resources, which is one of the most cost-effective ways to mitigate climate change and prevent future pandemics, and importantly to ensure that the people who live around these critically needed wild areas can depend on them now, and long into the future."

The translocation was carried out over



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the course of three weeks, transporting 20-30 animals every two to three days by trucks from Buby Valley Conservancy. The first 95 were released into the south of the park and the remaining 128 were released onto the valley floor after they were transferred from trucks to a purpose modified ferry across the lake to Matusadona in a complex and groundbreaking first. "This translocation showed how together with our Government partners and fellow conservation operators in Zimbabwe, we have been able to relocate these incredible animals to even the most inaccessible areas. While the move was not without difficulty, the tenacity and resolve of the teams and partners involved demonstrated what is possible", said Rob Reid, Matusadona National Park's Park Manager. The zebra were all kindly donated to Matusadona by the Buby Valley Conservancy, which will allow for the growth of the zebra population in Zimbabwe and create 'seed-stock' in a safe and protected National Park.

For visitors, Matusadona National Park has a diversity of activities and accommodation options on offer. The park comprises 1,470 km² and borders the Lake Kariba Recreational Park, with dozens of small bays in which you can always find a piece of privacy to enjoy the wonderful scenery. The avid fishermen can indulge in sustainable fishing opportunities and sunset boat cruises, while game walks and drives are on the



cards for those keen to stay on the land. Those exploring the Sanyati gorge will be awed by its scenery and the waterfalls coming down into the river, especially in the wet season. The majority of the wildlife is concentrated on the open and grassy shoreline, with regular lion and leopard sightings. Roads that are being opened up in the park are revealing their secrets, wildlife sightings not seen in many years. Large herds of buffalos against a stunning Kariba sunset, and elephants swimming in the lake to cool down after a hot day: photographic opportunities galore.

Matusadona is host to a variety of lodges and safari camps, largely concentrated in the eastern shoreline of the National Park. Spurwing lodge provides a bustling base for fishermen and a wonderful

place to take the kids and enjoy the fenced-off green lawns. Changa Safari Camp is a unique boutique camp with absolutely splendid cuisine and a wonderful platform for game drives and walks up the nearby rivers. The newly built Fothergill Island is a treat for the eye and an incredible luxury product. The western end of the park hosts the tranquil Rhino Safari Camp, which is fantastic for walking safaris.

For the keen 4x4 traveler, a beautiful shaded campsite is set up at Tashinga, highly suitable for families and children, with elephants roaming on its fringes. The Matusadona Conservation Trust is currently evaluating the tourism development potential for the park and we can expect exciting opportunities to develop over the next few years.

If you are interested in following what is happening in Matusadona National Park, follow them on Facebook

(www.facebook.com/MatusadonaNP) or Instagram (www.instagram.com/matusadonanationalpark)



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