



Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) & Mudumu National Parks

Just add water

In an arid country like Namibia, an abundance of fresh water is the part of the recipe that makes the Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) and Mudumu national parks special. Flowing rivers and a mosaic of flooded grasslands, braided flood-plain channels, extensive reedbeds and papyrus swamps, heavily wooded islands and open-water habitats constitute a wet world that attracts a special variety of animals you won't find in the country's drier places.

Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)

are considered by many to be the most dangerous animal for humans in Africa. These huge (2 000 kg) semi-aquatic creatures emerge at dusk to graze on grass, and while they aren't territorial on land, do not put yourself between a hippo and the water; you will be in a hippo's territory and security zone. A hippo will run right through you to get to the water.

Hippopotamus get their name from the Greek word 'hippo' meaning 'horse' and 'potamus' meaning 'river'. They are most at home in the water where pods or family groups of between 5–30 live together in a defined and defended territory.

During the day they remain cool by staying in the water or mud. Watching them emerge, blow and snort and then descend back into the water is one of nature's most peaceful offerings. Reproduction and childbirth both occur in water, where territorial bulls preside over a stretch of river. Bulls will attack boats, mokoros and fishermen if threatened, so it is best to give them a wide berth in the water as well as on land.

Despite the physical resemblance of hippos to pigs, their closest living relatives are cetaceans (whales, porpoises, etc). Their stocky shape and short legs belie their speed. Hippos can easily outrun a human and have been clocked at 30 mph (48 km/h) while running short distances, faster than an Olympic sprinter.

While there are an estimated 125 000 to 150 000 hippos remaining throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, in some places they are still threatened by habitat loss and by poaching for their meat and ivory canine teeth.

IUCN Conservation status – Vulnerable

Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) is a species that looks as prehistoric as it is. Crocodiles are believed to have been on earth for 200 million years, surviving long after dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago.

A male crocodile may weigh well over 600 kilograms and reach five metres in length. Given their size, powerful tails, scaly hide, strong jaws and rows of sharp teeth, crocodiles are dangerous predators. Yet they are surprisingly tender parents.

About two months after mating, females lay their eggs, burying them up to 500 mm deep on sandy shores. Females lay between 25 and 80 eggs and then guard them over the three-month incubation period. The father-to-be often stays nearby, and both parents fiercely attack anything that approaches their eggs.



The hatchlings start to make a high-pitched chirping noise before hatching, which is the signal for the mother to rip open the nest. To release their offspring, both the mother and father may pick up the eggs in their mouths, and roll them gently between their tongue and palate to help crack the shell. Once they are hatched, the female may lead the hatchlings to water, or even carry them there, in her mouth.

There are an estimated 250 000 to 500 000 individuals in the wild.

IUCN Conservation status – lower risk in Namibia, that allows for some ranching or sets an annual quota of skins taken from the wild.

Sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*), a shy swamp-dwelling antelope that ranges from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Botswana and Namibia, is rarely seen and beautiful to behold.

Its water-resistant reddish brown coat is marked with white strips and spots, with the pattern continuing on its face with more spots and a white strip running across its nose. Males have a small mane of hair and horns that can reach almost a metre in length. Both males and females have long, narrow hoofs with extended false hoofs to help them move through their swampy lairs.

Sitatunga are excellent swimmers. When threatened by predators such as wild dog and leopard, they flee into

deep water. They may also hide by submerging themselves almost completely underwater, with only their nostrils above the waterline. While sitatunga are both nocturnal and diurnal, they are most active at dawn and dusk, and may move onto marshy land at night.

IUCN Conservation status – lower risk, near threatened

Lechwe (*Kobus leche*) is another antelope that is adept in the water. They often graze in shoulder-deep waters, but rest on dry land. Like the sitatunga, their hoofs are long, narrow and soft, making it easier to move in the marshes. They can be distinguished from the other marsh antelope by their beautiful lyre-shaped horns.

Generally, females and their young are found in groups of up to 400 strong and in the wetter areas, where they are safer from predators such as lion, leopard and hyaena. But they have no strict social system, and often the only lasting bonds are between a mother and her recent offspring.

Males tend to be solitary or live in bachelor herds and do not have extended territories. Instead 20–200 males defend small patches (15–200 metres in diameter) within a common 'arena' associated with a large herd of females. This behaviour, known as 'lekking', is intensely competitive.

IUCN Conservation status – lower risk, conservation dependent

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Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

- For your own safety, stay on existing roads and in your vehicle.
- Note that fishing is not permitted inside the park.
- Collecting firewood is not allowed inside the park.
- Visitors must report to the MET office before entering the park.
- Please follow the rules and regulations listed on your permit.

Have a fabulous, wet, wild time!

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