



Trees and branches, carried away by the swollen river during the rainy season

GAME DRIVES IN DIFFERENT REGIONS

MFUWE AREA

The wider area of Mfuwe with its main access into the park is the biggest visitor attraction in the Luangwa Valley. You have to share its magnificent impressions with others, but on the plus side the animals are nowhere else more accustomed to the presence of tourists and vehicles and nowhere else under greater protection. Their great tolerance of visitors allows the animals to be approached more closely. The convoluted network of roads is extensive, and so the many safari vehicles can quickly spread out.

The little green house at the park entrance stands directly in front of the Luangwa Bridge under a few monkey pod trees (*Senna petersiana*). In April/May this ornamental tree produces filigree yellow blossoms, not to be confused with the similarly attractive African weeping wattle (*Peltophorum africanum*).

On the Luangwa Bridge we recommend that you stop, get out of your vehicle and enjoy the scenery both up and down the river: the quiet dugout canoes in the sluggish river, in which fishermen are casting their nets, the palm leaves rattling in the wind, the wide hippo tracks on the steep sandy banks. Skeletons of trees jut out of the river, their bare twigs serving as perches for herons and pied kingfishers. Anyone who stands on the bridge in the early morning can observe numerous hippos at sunrise, hurrying to get back from their pasturelands into the water. In the distance elephants quickly cross the river-bed, returning to the park from their nocturnal outings to the Lupande GMA. At this early hour crocodiles can be spotted, usually swimming only just beneath the surface of the water, whereas in the heat of the day they will rest, languidly, on the shore and on sandbanks.

After the bridge are the turnings off to Riverside Drive, leading upstream, and the smaller Elephant Loop, which runs along the



Luangwa Bridge at the main park entrance

Mfuwe Lagoon, passing the Norman Carr memorial in its grove of beautiful ebony trees. Otherwise river-bank thickets of combretum predominate, in which you mostly find elephants, baboons and bushbucks. Meyer's parrots and pretty little Lilian's lovebirds also love to flutter about.

Anyone who stays on the main track will end up at Mfuwe Lodge, nestling on the lagoon of the same name. Huge crocodiles spread out across this long stretched-out lagoon, with a few languid hippos, agile Nile monitor lizards and turtles. On the leaves of the water hyacinths African jacanas strut about, while saddle-bill storks and sacred ibises walk along the bank, catching prey.

Our personal recommendation: in the morning the long stretches to Katete Bridge and further on to Chichele Lodge; in the afternoon, when the sun is on your back, a shorter trip to Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon and Chipela Chandombo Lagoon.

As its name suggests, Riverside Drive keeps constantly close to the river-bank, where during the day hippos throng in the Luangwa. More than 50 hippos, which during the dry season must always keep close together, live here per kilometre of river. The narrow sandy track leads along Wamilombe Drive to the Katete Bridge. In this semi-open habitat impressive kigelia, fig and marula trees stand and the chances of espy giraffes and zebras are particularly good. Where the road leads directly onto the Luangwa, you should keep watch for nests of the magnificently coloured carmine bee-eaters, which dig their hollow nests in a different place in the steep river-bank wall every year. In the dense, shady scrub and beneath the beautiful Natal mahogany trees on both sides of the Katete River lions and hyenas like to rest during the day. Grysbok too can occasionally be discovered in the protective thicket. Next the all-weather track leads via the landmark 'Twin Baobab' to the turn-off for the Twin Baobab Loop, which turns back towards the Luangwa and runs across a wild, dusty plain.



Male lion siblings often stay together for years

In the dry season stately buffalo herds come to a flat watering place in the Luangwa, their droppings visible far and wide. Giraffes, pukus and warthogs are also numerous in this area. At the level of Chichele Hills Lodge, a lion-rich area near to Kapiri Nkonde Hill, the Loop opens out onto the all-weather track, via which you can return to Mfuwe. You can take this opportunity to follow the game-stalking tracks around the Kakumbi airstrip by the Mushilashi River and visit the Big Baobab, both typical lion regions. The massive birds' nests on the thick branches of the Big Baobab, by the way, do not belong to eagles, but are the communal nests of small White-billed buffalo weavers (*Bubalornis albirostris*).

The game drive, going upstream, follows the course of the picturesque, kidney-shaped Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon. The name of this famous oxbow lake actually just means 'Dead Luangwa'. In the background behind the lagoon stretches a wooded savannah with black cotton soil. Here many attractive ancestral trees stand

together with a few African ebony trees. Zebras can often be seen there, as well as numerous pukus and impalas. The lagoon itself attracts birds such as the rare skimmers, pelicans, marabou storks and yellow-billed storks. A few hippos and crocodiles also reside in the stagnant oxbow lake water, and on the particularly high river bank trees once in a while beautiful African fish eagles sit and watch out for prey.

Between the Luangwa Wafwa and the adjacent Chipela Chandombo Lagoon, parallel to the Luangwa, runs the narrow Owani Drive, at times directly at the edge of the steep river-bank. Hundreds of pukus graze in the adjoining meadows on the fertile grasslands, showing little fear of people. Baboons and vervet monkeys jump around between the antelopes. The scenery appears like a blissful park landscape. In the shady wooded savannahs beyond the meadows impalas, kudus, bushbucks and elephants linger. Ground hornbills and tree squirrels make their home in the mopane forest regions.



Trusting look of a baby baboon
Ellipsen waterbuck

Even outside the National Park the wild animals are ubiquitous. The Lupande GMA is situated directly opposite South Luangwa National Park. In the late dry season the elephant herds wade through the Luangwa at sunset, in order to spend the night in the GMA looking for food, since the park vegetation at this point in time has already been severely decimated. At sunrise the herds will return, almost soundlessly, back to the park.

On the way to Kafunta River Lodge a side road branches off in the direction of the mountains, leading to the little-known Kakumbi Salt Pan. Here you can always come upon pukus and birds, above all crowned cranes.





Remote Baobab forest is a seldom visited atmospheric place

LION PLAIN AND BAOBAB FOREST AREA

To get to this extremely charming area, you follow the track beyond Luangwa Wafwa Lagoon and Chipela Chandombo Lagoon up to the Luwi Sand River, cross its sandy river-bed, and after a further 10 km you will reach the equally dry Chambowa Sand River. Normally only guests from Lion Camp and the two Shenton Camps, Kaingo and Mwamba Bush Camp, can get this far in the park – around 30 km from the park entrance.

Yet the area has a few very special natural treasures in store: the biggest forest of African ebony trees right by Kaingo Camp, a Baobab forest located out of the way in the north and countless lagoons and oxbow lakes of the Luangwa, which here moulds into particularly broad loops and windings. Fish Eagle Lagoon, Pelican Lagoon, Tsetse Lagoon and many others were all created through changes in the course of the river, as the meandering Luangwa sought new paths.

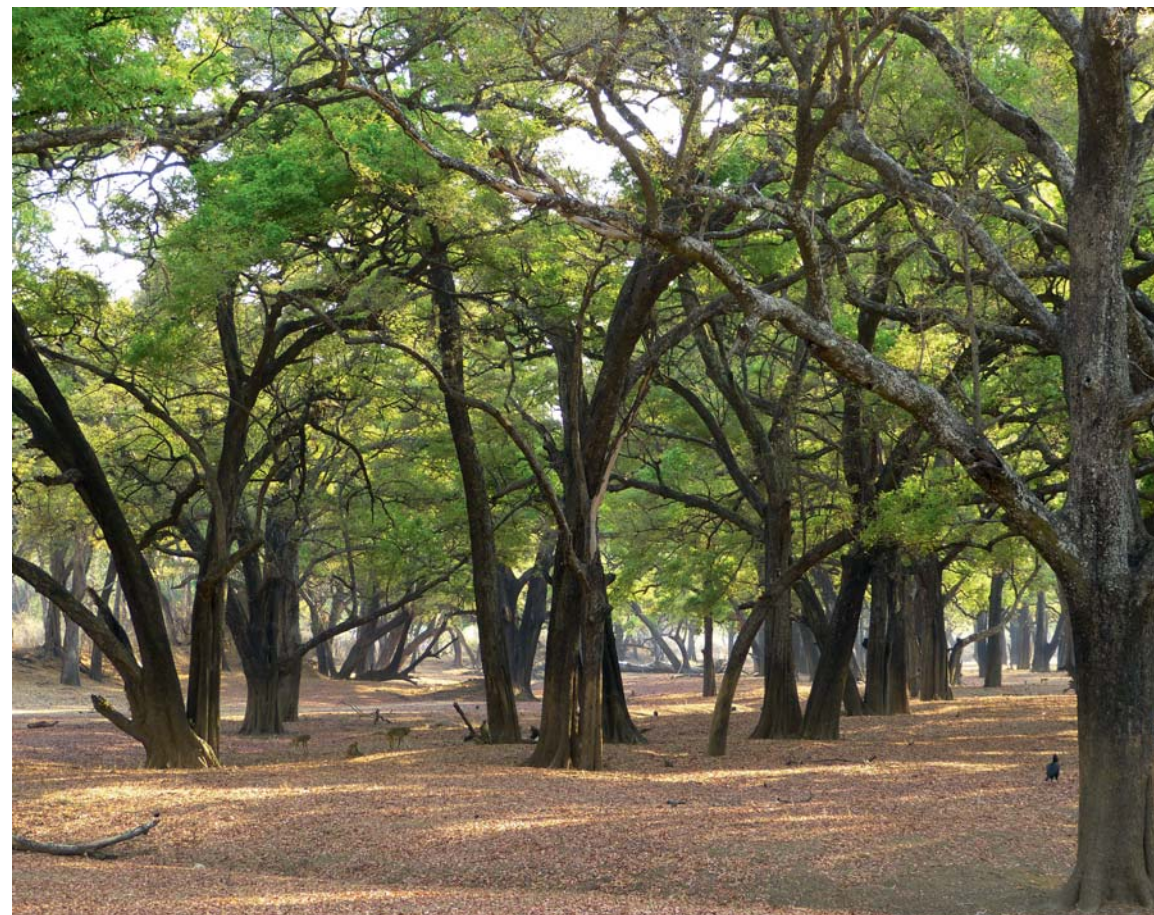
The Kapanda Lagoon was not however created by a dried-up loop of the Luangwa; it lies way too far offside. Even in the late dry season it almost always still holds water and is therefore a valuable watering place for wild animals in the hinterland, such as wildebeests, kudus and roan antelopes. To get there and to the Baobab forest, still further north, you have to cross Numbu Plain beyond Lion Plain and Mwamba Bush Camp. Unfortunately the accessible public road network ends here. The old Big Lagoon Camp and the Zebra Flats are no longer accessible, the tracks have long become overgrown.

Vegetation in this region is very much characterised by ebony and kigelia trees, winter thorn, wild jasmine and white-blooming gardenias. While around Mfuwe more elephants and giraffes are found, here are significantly more wildebeests and huge buffalo herds. Several prides of lions prowl between Lion Plain and the Nsefu Sector to the east of the Luangwa. On night game drives, sightings of leopards, hyenas and porcupines are very common in this area.



Cookson's wildebeests drink at the waterhole close to Mwamba Bush Camp

Magnificent Ebony grove near Kaingo Camp





Zebras at the edge of Mtanda Plain

NSEFU SECTOR

The Nsefu Sector on the eastern bank of the Luangwa is accessible from three sides, but has no official direct access to the rest of the park area (only in the late dry season it is possible to cross the Luangwa via three seasonal fords). The area stretches out between the Kauluzi and Mwasauko tributaries. To the south the Mtanda Plain, a charming grass savannah, stretches alongside the Luangwa. In the centre of the sector you find the notable Chichele Salt Pan and a hot spring, out of which 53 degree hot thermal water wells up. The combination of this spring with the magnificent alluvial forests along the Luangwa makes the Nsefu Sector a most extraordinary gem.

In the river-bank area stand the finest and biggest ebony groves in the Luangwa Valley and also some wonderful specimens of imposing winter thorns. In the Luangwa at this point more than 2,000 hippos throng closely together. They are so densely concentrated that the vegetation is already showing damage and river-bank brooders such as herons are being wedged out. A dense network of roads snakes along the giant trees, meadows and oxbow lakes near to the bank. The animal density is extraordinary and very species-rich. In particular many predators live here, such as leopards, lions and African wild dogs, as well as numerous nocturnal creatures that are difficult to find in any other place, for instance, porcupines, honey badgers and bushbabies. The massive buffalo herds in

the Nsefu Sector are also legendary, particularly in the Mtanda Plain.

Beyond the bizarrely beautiful river-bank forests the flora blends seamlessly into an arid plain, which floods every year. Over such areas herbaceous annual acanthads (*Acanthaceae*) grow abundantly, called Luangwa thistles in the vernacular. Scattered tree skeletons jut out from the dusty plain, reinforcing the sombre end-time atmosphere of the late dry season. Here along the transit route, the park has a forbidding and threatening feel to it.

In the middle of the park however, at the crossroads to Kauluzi Wildlife Camp, the grass cover suddenly turns green, swamplike wet meadows appear and a stream, formerly buried under the clay ground, emerges to empty here. This rivulet can be traced back several kilometres to the hot Chichele spring. Through the spring water a special habitat is formed with salt grasses, makalani palms, cassia and wooden banana trees. The wild animals in the close vicinity are numerous. Hyenas and African wild dogs rest here, zebras, wildebeests and buffaloes slowly wander along, pukus and waterbucks graze undisturbed.

The hot springs are also a true insider tip for ornithologists, because they attract numerous flocks of birds. Hundreds of crowned cranes in a small space are no rarity here. Among them lapwings, storks and ibises strut through the wet grasses while countless vultures wait for suitable thermals to lift them.



A soggy paradise at Chichele Hot Springs outflow



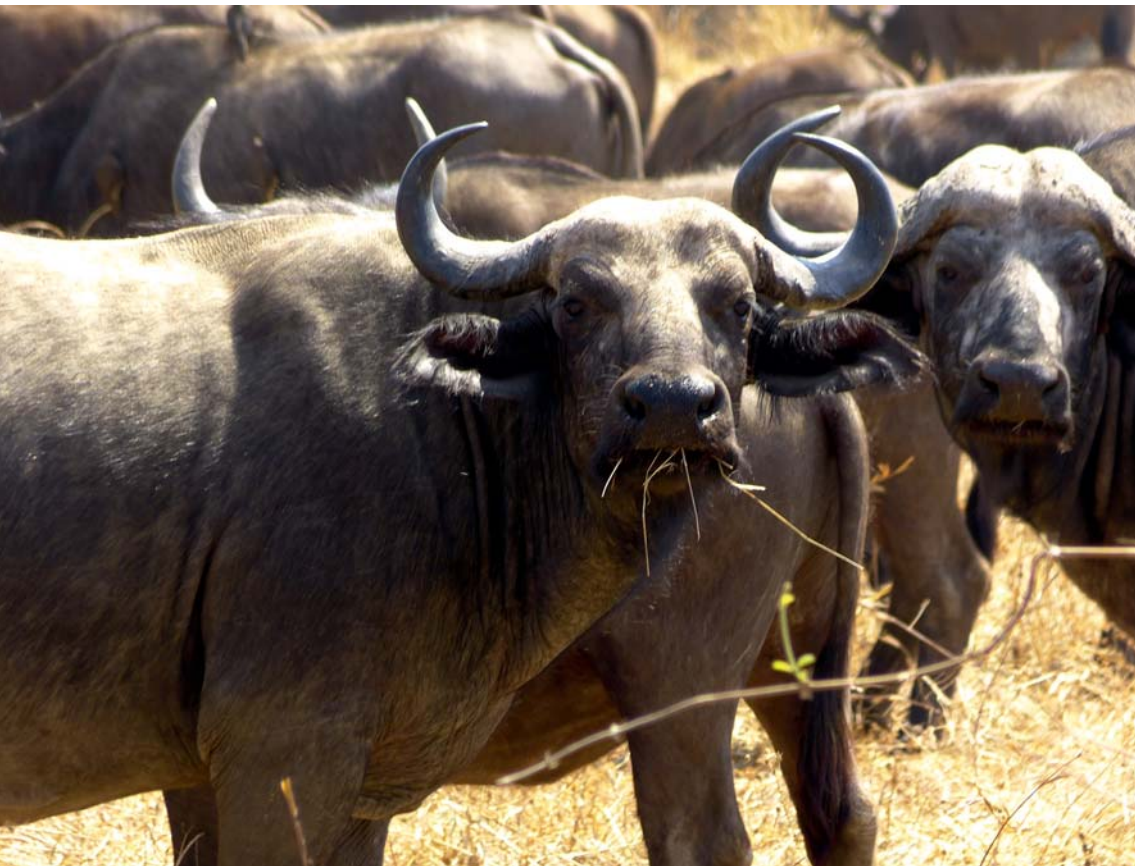
MUPAMADZI RIVER AREA

WITH CHIFUNGWE PLAIN AND LUNDU PLAIN

To reach this out-of-the-way area you must either descend via the notorious Escarpment Road from Mpika into the valley or choose the long and very lonely 'O5'-Road from Mfuwe, which starts near the Big Baobab. The side road was created in the 1960s as a 'Cropping Road' during the many years of culling the elephant herds and was at that time closed to tourists. Along this track between Mfuwe and Chifungwe Gate in the north several smaller and larger sandy fords must be negotiated, e.g. on the Luwi (also called Lubi), the Mwamba and the Mupamadzi. The land for the most part is slightly hilly and richly varied, but rather lacking in wildlife.

At the Mwamba River the sandy bank is edged with wooded savannahs and alluvial forests. Only shortly before the Mupamadzi do you reach the wide Lundu Plain, a wildlife-rich and very attractive grassy and wooded savannah. Along the southern river-bank four exclusive mobile bush camps are located, owned by Robin Pope Safaris. On the opposite bank the Chifungwe Plain adjoins. These huge grassy areas full of kasense grass, which even in the dry season stands as high as a hayfield, represent the popular feeding places of the elephants. Norman Carr once observed 700 elephants all feeding together on the Chifungwe Plain; and Robin Pope discovered a cheetah here in 1994 (this is deemed to be one of the last sightings in the valley). The legendary wildlife wealth of the Chifungwe Plain was one of the decisive reasons for expanding the National Park, because originally it lay outside the conservation zone and relatively close to the villages of Chief Nabwalya.

Vast herds of buffaloes reside in this area



Adolescent Thornicroft's giraffes

LUSANGAZI / CHILONGOZI AND LUAMFWA LAGOON AREA

The park region beyond the Lusangazi Wildlife Camp is the actual nucleus of the conservation areas in the Luangwa Valley, because here as early as 1904 the first, albeit short-lived, reserve was created between the Luangwa and the Lusangazi, at that time for the protection of the endemic Thornicroft's giraffes. Under the name Chilongozi Reserve it was brought to life again decades later, and in the 1950s preferred at the time of tourist infrastructure expansion. Eustace Poles installed a pontoon at the Luangwa here in 1956, which made it possible for the first time to get from Fort Jameson (Chipata) into the safari areas. After that the building of the red chalets in the state-run Chilongozi Camp was begun, and bulldozers cut paths into the untouched nature reserve, along which visitors were allowed to undertake game drives. At the gate there was even a petrol pump. Today everything is rather left to lie idle. The gate is mostly unoccupied, the petrol pump

rusted up over many years, visitors stay away and on the old chalets in the camp lies the veil of forgottenness. All the same the roads and bridges in the area of the Kafunta Safaris' Island Bush Camp were repaired in 2014.

The vegetation differs from the safari regions north of Chichele Hills Lodge, because along the far side of the alluvial forests and flood plains near the river-bank it is mainly combretum thickets and thorny scrub that dominate, while the vast grass savannahs are absent.

The old fuel pump

