

Case Study #7: The Banhine and Maputo National Parks in Mozambique – Rebuilding the Ecological Functionality of Two Key Wetland Areas in Southern Africa

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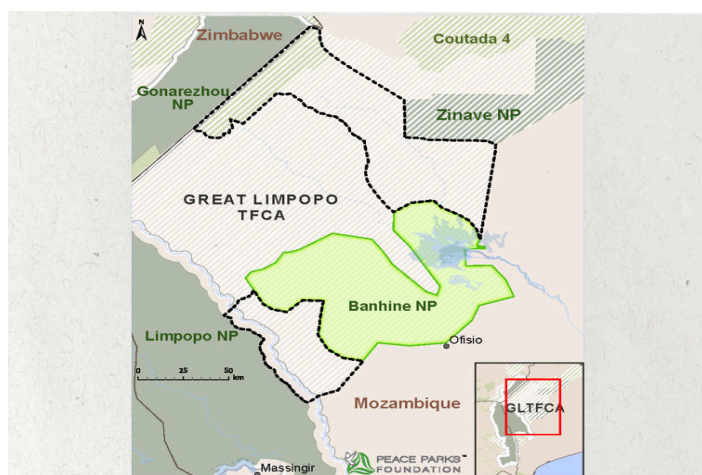
1. Introduction

Human evolution, the survival of prehistoric communities, and the development of civilisations owe much to the natural capital provided by wetlands (Maltby, 2022). According to Ti Xu et al. (2019), wetlands play an irreplaceable role in regulating the global climate, maintaining the global hydrological cycle, protecting the ecosystem diversity, and safeguarding human welfare (Hu, S.J et al, 2017 & Ramsar Convention Bureau 2001). Wetland ecosystems not only provide indirect services to human beings but also generate direct economic benefits to people (Constanza et al. 1997, Smardon 2009).

The Ramsar Convention ([1992](#)) defines wetlands as areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary - with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water where the depth at low tide does not exceed six metres. This definition provides a clear guidance for countries in shaping their policies and legal framework for wetland conservation.

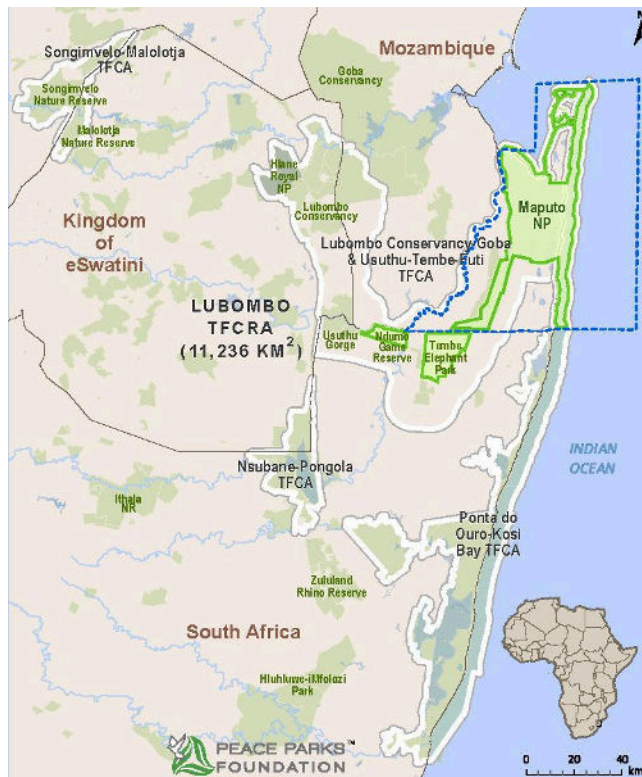
According to [The Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016–2024](#) (2016), wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, including biodiversity support, water supply, water purification, climate regulation, flood regulation, coastal protection, useful fibres, spiritual and cultural inspiration and tourism. Wetlands play a key role in economic activity linked to transportation, food production, water risk management, pollution control, fishing and hunting, leisure and the provision of ecological infrastructure.

Two important wetland areas in Mozambique are Banhine National Park (BNP) and Maputo National Park (MNP). The Banhine National Park (725,000 ha) in the south-western part of the country is situated in the core area of the landscape of the Mozambique component of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, GLTFCA. Positioned between the Limpopo and Zinave National Parks, it serves as a safe and vital wildlife corridor enabling safe migration across the borders of South Africa and Zimbabwe.



Location of the Banhine National Park in south-western Mozambique. [Image source](#)

Maputo National Park (170,000 ha), located southern Mozambique on the south-eastern coast of Maputo Province in the Matutuíne District, lies within the Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation and Resource area. It forms part of the Ponta do Ouro/Kosy Bay Transfrontier Conservation area linking up with South Africa ISimangaliso Wetland Park, a World Heritage site. The Park also lies within the boundary of the Environmental Protected Area of Maputo, which was established in 2001, with 623,355 hectares.



Location of the Maputo National Park in southern Mozambique. [Image source](#)

The purpose of this paper is to examine how wildlife conservation and restoration shapes wetland functionality in these parks, with implications for conservation and local livelihoods.

2. Overview of Banhine and Maputo National Parks Wetlands

Both parks play a vital ecological role within their respective Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) to which they belong. While each park has its own unique and distinguishing features, both contain diverse and ecologically rich seasonal wetland systems.

Banhine National Park

Banhine National Park's wetlands are fed by intermittent streams that originate near Mozambique's border with Zimbabwe. The largest of these is the Chefu River, which rises in the basalt and rhyolite formations of the Karoo system in southwestern Zimbabwe, near Gonarezhou National Park (see map). It has given the park the nickname "[The mini-Okavango Delta of Mozambique](#)". As the rains arrive, the park's wetlands stretch over 500 km² (50,000 ha), a welcome refuge for thousands of migratory birds.

The wetlands of the BNP are important for many migratory and aquatic species of birds. According to ANAC, 2024, the freshwater fish of the BNP have been surveyed (Bills & Da Costa, 2005, Darwall et al., 2009). There is evidence that the Mozambican tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*) remains untainted by hybridisation with introduced species (Firmat, Alibert, Losseau, Baroiller, & Schliwen, 2013) and that it is uncommon and needs protection. The uncommon biophysical dynamics of BNP are likely to have resulted in novel biodiversity, including species yet undescribed, being discovered once more detailed survey work is conducted in the park.



*The seasonal wetlands in the Banhine National Park provide important habitats for many wetland birds, like the Red-billed teal (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) and African pygmy-geese (*Nettapus auratus*).*

[Image source](#)

Although the large mammal populations have been substantially depleted over the past decades, BNP is the natural home to populations of many of Africa's iconic wildlife species, such as elephant, lions, buffalo, wildebeest, ostrich, etc. There is considerable biodiversity value derived from the BNP enabling a fully functioning suite of ecological processes as well as delivering a range of ecosystem services from the area. This is due, in part, to the relatively intact state of the vegetation and the size of the park.

Maputo National Park

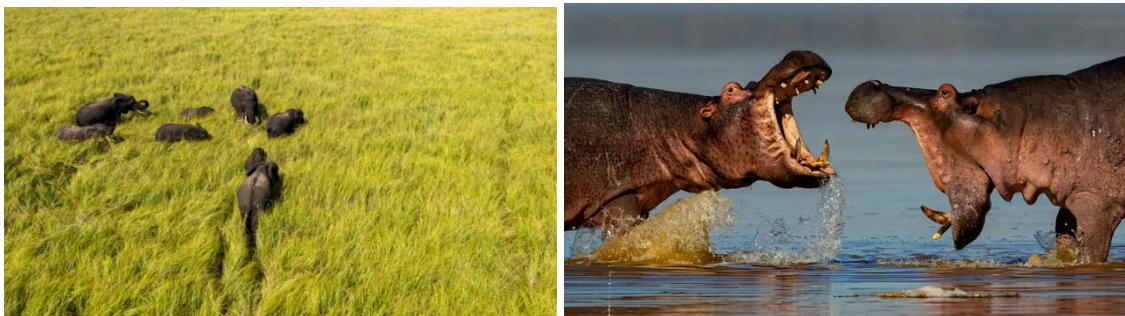
In contrast, the wetland system of Maputo National Park is sustained by the Maputo and Futi rivers all the year around, which originate in South Africa, as well as by several coastal lagoons and lakes—some permanent, others seasonal – ranging in size from eight kilometres long to less than 100 m wide. The Indian Ocean coastline, including rocky beaches and shorelines, subtidal reefs, mangrove forests and intertidal sand plains, seagrass meadows, estuaries, and mudflats, forms an integral part of the wetland system in the park.

The freshwater systems support animals ranging from Nile crocodiles (*Crocodylus niloticus*) and hippos (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) to three species of fish endemic or near-endemic to MCPE (*Croilia mossambica*, *Serranochromis meridianus* and *Aplocheilichthys myaposa*), and birds like the Small grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Black-headed heron (*Ardea melanogaster*), Lesser flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*), Black coucal (*Centropus grillii*), Grey crowned crane (*Balearica regulorum*), and Rosy-throated longlaw (*Macronyx ameliae*).

The park is considered one of the eight key biodiversity sites (“Seascapes”) of global importance within the [Eastern African marine ecoregion](#) (PPF et al. 2024). The marine component of the national park stretches from the edge of the isiMangaliso Wetland Park in South Africa, to the Maputo River Mouth in Maputo Bay in the north, and includes the waters around Inhaca and Portuguese islands. It stretches three nautical miles into the Indian Ocean.



In the Maputo National Park marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mangroves, estuaries and mudflats meet with inland wetland types such as lakes, rivers, and swamps. [Image source](#)



In the Maputo National Park elephants, hippos and dugongs could meet on the beach. Image sources: [top two](#), [bottom](#)

3. Wildlife Presence

Banhine National Park

The BNP management plan approved by the Ministry of Land and Environment in 2024 refers that in 1973, when the Park was first proclaimed, its primary objectives were to protect the ostrich, the tsessebe antelope (*Damaliscus lunatus*), and the waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*). Although antelope numbers were low, there were still reasonable numbers of elephant, giraffe, and ostrich present. The reduction in wildlife was primarily because of over-hunting, but the drying up of the Banhine wetland and Changane River during the drought of 1965-67 also impacted population numbers of the territorial, water dependent species.

In the mid-1970s, during the transition from Portuguese rule to independence, a wave of illegal elephant hunting occurred by Europeans who exported the ivory to Portugal and neighbouring countries. Between 1975 and the late 1990s, no law enforcement staff were stationed in the BNP and armed forces in the area hunted wildlife for food. This led to the local extermination of eland, wildebeest, giraffe and zebra. Although hostilities ended in 1992, there was still no government control over hunting in BNP until 1998, when the first staff from the National Directorate of Forest and Wildlife were stationed in the area.

Although the original Park boundary in 1973 excluded an area on the eastern side of BNP where irrigation and a cattle ranch were established, this area was included within the park around 2003. The boundary was revised again in 2013, in an effort to exclude larger human settlements and sites of habitation and to include areas of biodiversity significance. This exercise resulted in an approximate 8% increase in the total area of BNP, along with a noticeable change in shape, marked by a significant intrusion from the north.

The large mammal fauna of BNP is typical of the region, but has been severely reduced due to centuries of human activity. No systematic game count has been conducted in the BNP in the past decade, and knowledge of population sizes across all wildlife species remains limited. Figures from a 2012 and a more methodologically limited estimate in 2018, likely to reflect a minimum count with likely false absences, show small increases of some species. For example, the African buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) population rose from 1 in 2004 to 138 in 2013, while ostrich numbers increased from 71 in 2004 to 505 in 2023. However, data on several species, such as bushpig (*Potamochoerus larvatus*) as well as larger predators, remain unavailable.

While certain key plains games, including zebra, wildebeest and giraffe appear to be locally extinct, anecdotal sightings include cheetah, spotted hyena, elephant and lion, which are known to move through the BNP. Hippos are also known to migrate between the Limpopo and Save rivers and BNP following good rainfall; however, the water level is usually insufficient for hippos in periods of drought.

The fish species within the park's wetland system form part of the Zambezian fauna, a biogeographic group with around 180 species which extends southward from the Zambezi River catchment to the eastern parts of South Africa and across to Namibia and southern Angola. Records suggest the area supports a relatively diverse fauna, with as many as 40 species of fish (Skelton, 2001).

Although not intensively surveyed, herpetological fauna numbers are seemingly low in BNP. A recent survey of the parks and its surrounding areas (Pietersen, Pietersen, & Haacke, 2013) identified four

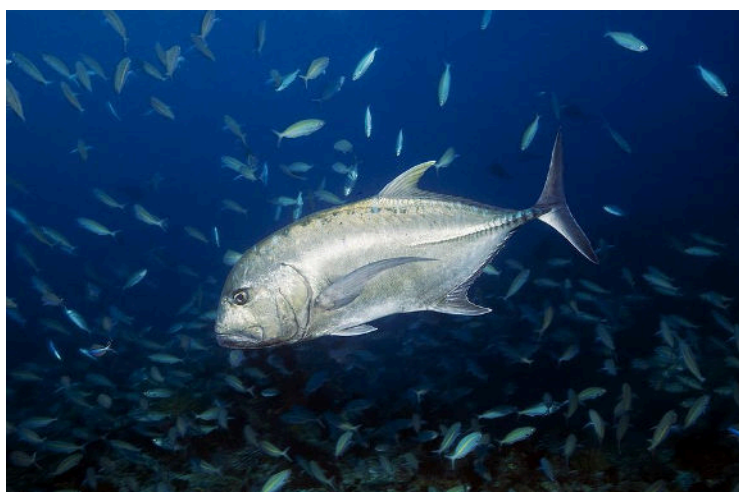
chelonian species, 13 snake species, one amphisbaena, 16 lizard species and 15 frog species. An additional six snake, five lizard and two frog species were recorded in close proximity to the park and are likely also present within BNP.

Maputo National Park

The importance of the park to Mozambique's coastal ecosystems cannot be overstated. Its 80 km shoreline protects approximately 80% of all nesting turtles along the country's 2,800 km coastline. The last remaining individuals of the dugong are also found in the waters off the Inhaca Island's western shores.

Resilient coral communities, such as those at Barreira Vermelha and Ponta Torres, occur off the island's western shores and are unique within the Western Indian Ocean region. In addition, Inhaca Island has the largest coverage of seagrass (*Zostera capensis*), categorised as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

These coastal habitats also support various other flagship species, including cetaceans, sharks, and rays. From June to November each year, Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) make their way up the east African coastline to their calving and mating grounds. The Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve, located within Maputo National Park, hosts the largest recorded aggregation of the giant trevally (*Caranx ignobilis*), an apex marine fish which is considered playing an important ecological role in coastal reefs, coral atolls, and granitic islands in western Indian Ocean (see section 8 on marine fish in the main report).



The Ponta do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve in Maputo National Park hosts the largest recorded aggregation of the giant trevally (Caranx ignobilis), an important marine apex species. [Image source](#)

The park is also home to more than 500 Nile crocodiles. Historically, the naturally occurring elephant populations of southern Mozambique moved freely across the border with South Africa.

The MNP supports at least three fish species that are endemic or near-endemic to the Maputaland Plant Endemism Centre (DNAC, 2009). The park also hosts reptile populations, and the marine coastline is an important nesting site for the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). Both turtle species are currently in Appendix 1 of the

International Convention of Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Levels of endemism are particularly high in digging burrow species in dune forests (DNAC, 2009).

4. Management arrangements and Rewilding Efforts

Under the Mozambique Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) Program, both Banhine and Maputo National Parks benefited from collaborative management through co-financing agreements. Under these agreements, Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) in Maputo National Park and the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in Banhine National Park were responsible for providing technical support to the government agency by managing funds from the Transfrontier Conservation Area and Tourism Development Project (TFCATDP), funded by the World Bank. In addition to administering the co-financing agreements expired in 2014 when the TFCA program was closed. Following this, AWF abandoned the Banhine National, while PPF continued its support in Maputo National Park. PPF played a key role in the declaration of the Ponta do Ouro Marine Partial Reserve and supported operational activities of the Maputo Park, including anti-poaching community support and park operations. From October 2017, PPF took over the responsibility for most operational costs with ANAC covering most of the salaries. In 2018 PPF and ANAC signed a co-management agreement for the management of Banhine National Park .

A vital part of the rewilding journey is bringing wild animals back to areas where they used to occur naturally but, over time, have become locally extinct. In cases where population numbers are no longer viable, existing animal populations are supplemented to reinforce populations to above certain threshold levels. Once these thresholds are reached, populations often experience accelerated growth, reducing the time between vulnerability and the establishment of a self-sustaining population. Introducing keystone species invigorates entire ecosystems by improving the nutrient flow, bringing back ecosystem balance and restoring the carbon cycle. However, rewilding is about far more than just reintroducing species.. The greatest challenge lies in ensuring that animals remain safe and secure once reintroduced. Within protected areas, this requires securing robust governance models to ensure stability and continuity in management and, in parallel, generating revenue streams to sustain operational costs (PPF, 2024).

The first 54 animals were introduced in 2010 when the wildlife reintroduction program began in **Maputo Park**. In this first operation, 3 zebras , 9 warthogs , 20 nyala and 22 impalas were introduced. Over 5,385 game animals were introduced between 2010 and 2024, (see [table1](#) below), and the numbers of free-living animals have already doubled, with an estimated 13,800 ‘game’ animals in the park at present. There is a continued northwards dispersal of some of the re-introduced species into the open grassland areas, as is expected of plains’ wildlife. Species such as warthog, waterbuck, blue wildebeest, and zebra have shown marked population increases since their reintroduction. Notably, these animals are now found in larger groups than in previous counts. The introductions have clearly been successful for most species, as reflected in the steady increases in their minimum counts (Hanekon, 2024). At this rapid growth rate, no further introductions are required, only a continuation of the high standard of wildlife protection currently being undertaken. Carnivores have also been reintroduced to promote a fully functional ecosystem and restore the food chain, including eight spotted hyenas and five cheetahs.

Table1: Wildlife re-introduced to Maputo National Park 2010-2024.

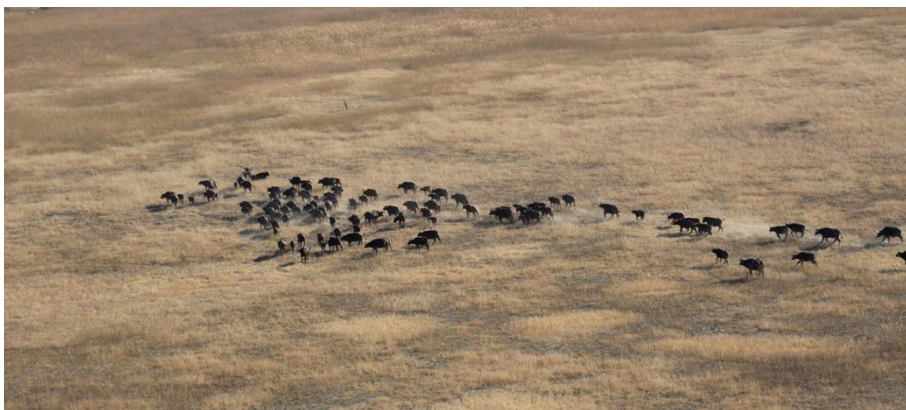
SPECIES	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Buffalo								31	42	127		7	45			252
Cheetah												4	1			5
Crocodile														1		1
Eland										21			26			47
Genet														2		2
Giraffe			8	12				12	6							38
Hyena, Spotted														5	3	8
Impala	22		74	75	125		199	498	20	22						1035
Kudu			84	26	14			50								174
Nyala	20		74	72	8			251	50							475
Oribi										50						50
Pangolin														1		1
Warthog	9		33	48			50	100		0						240
Waterbuck							204	812		250						1266
Wildebeest				73	65	127	60	201		30						556
Zebra	3	24	159	88	100	97	60	408	95	204						1238
TOTAL	54	24	432	394	312	224	573	2363	207	710	0	11	72	9	3	5388

Source: Peace Parks Foundation (2025)

The partners are planning to translocate 400 animals in a 6,000 ha sanctuary in the centre of the **Banhine National Park** from the Maputo National Park in 2025. Apart from restoring the functionality of the ecosystem it will play a role in the development of BNP's tourism offering..For MNP, the translocation aligns with its operational wildlife management plan, which includes strategic offtakes to manage its growing mammal populations. The species to be introduced in BNP includes zebra, wildebeest, waterbuck, reedbuck, nyala, warthog and impala. The giraffes are scheduled for introduction in 2026. The rewilding program aims to translocate a total of 2,000 animals to BNP, with the goal of establishing a population exceeding 10,000 animals by 2050.



In 2014, a joint operations strategy for Maputo Special Reserve and Tembe Elephant Park was signed and fences between the two Parks were coming down, which allowed elephants to recolonise the Maputo National Park. [Image source](#)



Bahine National Park. A fixed-wing aerial census was successfully completed in 2023. Good elephant, ostrich and buffalo count numbers were observed however smaller more difficult to observe species were undercounted. With the park now more secure, the first wildlife translocations are planned for 2024. Rewilding will rejuvenate the ecosystem, and stimulate the park's eco-tourism potential. [Image source](#)

5. Wildlife and Wetland Functionality

Based on the information provided in the main report, the following animal species could potentially play a key role for the future management and rewilding efforts of the inland and coastal wetlands in the two areas:

- **Banhine** (using the Okavango Delta as the baseline): Hippo, Elephant, African buffalo, Nile crocodile, colony breeding waterbirds, various fish species, and termites,
- **Maputo**: Coastal (coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass meadows, mud flats, estuaries) – sharks (e.g., grey reef shark), giant trevally, dugong, and parrotfishes; Inland (including swamps,

lakes and rivers) – Hippo, Elephant, African buffalo, Nile crocodile, colony breeding birds, and fish.

The Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) – Banhine National Park/ Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), and Maputo National Park/ Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation and Resource Area (TFCRA) – provide ideal conditions for large mammal species to exert their critical role across large landscapes. Rivers, floodplains, and wetlands associated with megafauna typically exhibit more heterogeneous geomorphological and vegetation characteristics than those where [megafauna](#) have been extirpated. The possibility for large ungulates like elephants, buffalos, and hippos to move more freely in the TFCAs is therefore a big advantage.

Breeding colonies of waterbirds generate a lot of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) in wetlands around the world, which can be [beneficial](#). However, there is a lack of information on colony breeding birds from the two areas. The [Zambezi River Delta](#) and [Lake Urema](#) in the [Gorongosa National Park](#) seem to host the few heronries reported from Mozambique (no heronries are included from Mozambique in the [continental overview](#) published in 2019).

For future wetland rewilding efforts, it will be essential to conduct a thorough assessment of the [fish fauna](#) and identify species that play a particularly important functional role. Integrating fisheries considerations are required to meet the needs of people and nature.

6. Human-Wildlife-Wetland Interactions

In both Banhine and Maputo National Parks, human and wildlife communities are dependent on wetland ecosystems, creating complex and dynamic interactions. The management plans of the Parks take that into consideration given high importance in wetlands in conservation and management of this ecosystem. The Banhine Management Plan (2024) recognises the importance of the Banhine wetlands for the community providing the wildlife-based/nature-based livelihoods, as well as the non-wildlife-based provisions. Communities living in and around BNP depend heavily on nature for their livelihoods. Key nature-based products include charcoal, wood poles, brewing local/traditional beverages, roots of trees, fishing, fruits, nuts and seeds from trees, and handicrafts. The same landscape offers opportunities for agriculture, livestock, and commercial activities of products that come from neighbouring districts.



Community members benefiting from fishing in Banhine Pan (BNP, SC, 2025)

The Maputo National Park Management Plan divides the park into the following resource utilization zones: (i) Total Protection Area, (ii) Tourism Development Area, (iii) Controlled Use Area, and (iv) Community Development Area. Wetlands are present within all these zones. The northern part of the park, which includes low-lying and seasonally flooded areas adjacent to Maputo Bay, is designated as a Total Protection Area. However, certain activities are permitted within designated zones. These include artisanal fishing, anchoring, industrial and semi-industrial fishing, demersal (bottom) fishing, and the use of specific fishing techniques such as vertical jigging and fish aggregation devices. Additionally, the use of jet-skis (limited to fishing purposes) and parasailing from motorized vessels is allowed.

To enhance climate resilience, the Government is implementing a project in Maputo National Park funded by the Blue Action Fund: “The Ecosystem-based Adaptation to climate change in Maputo Environmental Protection Area (MEPA): Conserving and building resilience”. The project aims to reduce climate change related risks and enhance resilience for vulnerable coastal communities through the conservation and sustainable use of vital ecosystems. It also focuses on raising the awareness and knowledge of an Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) approach (EbA Call, 2021). The project supports subsistence and artisanal fishing, coral reef monitoring, beach patrolling, building walking trails, dune rehabilitation, and seagrass and mangrove restoration.

7. Co-management

Wildlife protection was one of the main activities that the co-managers took when implementing the collaborative management, with the intention of wildlife numbers recovery. Actions were also directed to mobilize local communities and integrate them in management of the Parks, while

providing support for their livelihoods. Until 2024, the two landscapes of the GLTCFA and LTFCFA have benefited 107 725 people.

Communities have received support in areas such as agriculture, fisheries and benefit-sharing mechanisms. The Government allocates **20% of park-generated revenue** to local communities through direct payments into the bank accounts of Natural Resource Management Committees. The benefits extend further into energy saving with distribution of cookstoves, agriculture and livelihoods support. Additional initiatives include:

- **Field Schools** providing hands-on training and technical assistance for both women and men,
- **Fishing access** within the parks,
- The **Herding for Health** program, which supports livestock health, pasture management, and market linkages,
- **Environmental education** through conservation seminars and awareness-building efforts.

Maputo National Park

Peace Parks has supported the development and management of this area for several years. In 2006 it signed a co-financing agreement for the Maputo Special reserve management and in 2009 for the management of the Ponta do Ouro Marine Partial Reserve. In 2018, a 15 year Co-management agreement with the National Administration of Conservation Areas was signed. In December 2019, the government of Mozambique proclaimed the Maputo Environmental Protected Area in effect. The declaration of Environmental protected Area (EPA) creates an enforceable buffer zone to protected areas and by including Inhaca Island, currently managed by Eduardo Mondlane University brings the whole network of protected areas under the umbrella of the National Administration for Conservation Areas. The protected area has now been extended from three nautical miles to 18 nautical miles into the ocean side through the declaration of the EPA.

The Co-Management Plan for the MNAP marine area aims to ensure sustainable use of fishing resources and the conservation of ecosystems in Maputo Bay. Its objectives include contributing to food security and improving the living conditions of local fishing communities, and ensuring the implementation of fisheries and ecosystem management instruments. This plan also serves as a guiding framework for the development and/or revision of related local plans, such as the updated Coastal Resources Management Plan for MNAP and the Co-Management Plans for Community Fisheries Councils (CCPs) (Maputo National Park Steering Committee, 2025). The **Community Fisheries Council (CCP)** is a legally recognized, community-based organization that collaborates in the participatory management of fisheries. CCPs are responsible for supporting conflict resolution related to fishing activities and ensuring compliance with fisheries management measures. Currently, CCPs for Mabuluku, Santa Maria, Muvukuza (freshwater), and KaNyaka Gala (freshwater) for fishing on Lagoa Piti are legalised with reinforced capacity and authority to co-manage local fisheries, empowering fishing communities decision-making participation, and for enforcing government regulations.

Banhine National Park

After the cessation of hostilities in 1992, there was still no government control over hunting in Banhine, which was responsible for decimation of wildlife. It was not until 1998 when the first staff from the National Directorate of Forest & Wildlife (DNFFB) were stationed in the area (Ministério do Turismo, 2010). Under the implementation of TFCATDP, the co-financing agreement between Government and AWF, played an important role in advancing activities that were centred in protection of flora and fauna as well as supporting community livelihoods.. As part of this initiative, the boundaries of **Banhine National Park** were revised to exclude community settlements while maintaining the representation of key habitats within the protected area. As a result, the population of ostrich increased, which was translocated to repopulate the Zinave National Park sanctuary. The implementation of the co-management agreement is showing progressive results in conservation. As part of these efforts, the partner started an ecological connectivity program, which led to the development of a land-use plan for the Mapai District, clearly defining ecological corridors. Ongoing monitoring of elephant movements has confirmed the migration of these animals between Limpopo and Banhine, providing further evidence of the importance of maintaining landscape-scale connectivity.

8. Banhine and Maputo National Parks as future Ramsar Sites

Mozambique has designated two Ramsar Sites of International Importance:

- [Zambezi Delta](#) (3,171,172 ha),
- [Lake Niassa and its Coastal Zone](#) (1,363,000 ha)

Given their high natural value and well-established management frameworks, both Maputo and Banhine National Parks would qualify for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the Ramsar List. The vision for the Ramsar List is “to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services”. The “[Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands \(Ramsar, Iran, 1971\)](#)”, adopted at COP11 in 2012 and updated at COP14 in 2022, serves as a key instrument for the practical implementation of the Ramsar Convention and the Site designation.

The rewilding plans for both parks will enhance the **ecological character**¹¹, which is a key element of the Ramsar's Wise Use pillar.

For the GLTFCA, there is no direct surface watercourse flowing from the [Makuleke Ramsar Site](#) (10,799 ha) across the border to South Africa into Banhine National Park, but both sites are part of the broader Limpopo River Basin. The Limpopo River receives inflows from the Luvuvhu (from Makuleke) and from the Changane (which drains Banhine). The migratory waterbirds visiting the Great Limpopo TFCA area provide another functional link. The designation of Banhine National Park wetlands under Ramsar has the potential to contribute significantly to filling a representational gap in the global network of arid-zone wetlands, support climate resilience strategies, and reinforce transboundary conservation within the Great Limpopo TFCA.

¹¹ “The combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterize the wetland at a given point in time”.

The Maputo National Park wetlands are close to the Isimangaliso Wetland Park (239,566 ha) across the border to South Africa, with coral reefs, long sandy beaches, coastal dunes, lake systems, swamps, and extensive reed and papyrus wetlands. iSimangaliso includes four listed Ramsar Sites: [Kosi Bay](#) (10,982 ha), [Lake Sibaya](#) (7,750 ha), [St. Lucia System](#) (115,500 ha), and [Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland](#) (39,5000 ha). There is a contiguous oceanic and ecological linkage between the marine and coastal components of the two transfrontier parks. A designation of the Maputo National Park as a Ramsar Site will reinforce the conservation of a unique and connected wetland mosaic spanning national borders, while enhancing international cooperation and ecosystem-based management in southern Africa. It would also strengthen functional ecological connectivity across borders and support climate adaptation and biodiversity protection strategies.

This opportunity comes at a key moment, as Maputo National Park is currently under consideration to become part of an extension to the iSimangaliso World Heritage Site, expected in July 2025. Such a designation would further solidify conservation collaboration between Mozambique and South Africa, elevating the shared ecological and cultural significance of the region.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The wetlands of the Banhine and Maputo National Parks provide prime examples of valuable, well-managed wetlands, covering a wide array of different inland and coastal types. Both parks are actively engaged in rewilding initiatives, which enhance the potential for key animal species to positively influence the ecological character, that is, the structure, function, and resilience, of these ecosystems. The large-scale conservation approach through the Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) and collaboration across the borders of marine ecosystems facilitates movements of key animals of high importance for the ecological functions (“the ecological character”) of inland and coastal wetlands.

Given the exceptional wetland values of the Banhine and Maputo National Parks of Mozambique, it is recommended to nominate both areas as Ramsar Sites of International importance. This designation would not only recognize their global ecological significance but also foster the creation of transboundary Ramsar site management frameworks in collaboration with neighbouring Ramsar Sites in South Africa, under the umbrella of the Great Limpopo TFCA (GLTFCA) and the Lubombo TFCA (LTFCA).

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