



# Iona-Skeleton Coast Transfrontier Conservation Area

*Dry winds blow down, caressing stark desert dunes before travelling to distant shores across the dramatic oceanscapes along the Skeleton Coast. A haunting and evocative coastline, trapping stranded ocean vessels of times long past in yellow white stretches of sand reaches north into Angola and meets rivers running through, across and around spectacular rock formations and towering mountains. Together, these spaces work to support life in this desert world.*

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Angola, Namibia</b>
<b>Area</b>	<b>19,600km<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Category B: MOU Signed</b>

## 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARK

In August 2003, an MOU was signed between Angola and Namibia to form the Iona-Skeleton Coast Transfrontier Conservation Area. Four areas were considered for inclusion, including the Iona National Park (Angola), Namibie Partial Reserve (Angola), the Skeleton Coast National Park (Namibia) and a proposed contractual conservation area (Namibia) involving local communities in the Kunene and Erongo Region provisionally known as the North West People's Conservation Area.

The Iona National Park (Parque Nacional do Iona) is found in the Namibe Province of Angola, 200km from the city of Namibe. It is Angola's oldest and largest national park, covering 15,150 km<sup>2</sup>. The Namibie Partial Reserve, covering 4,450 km<sup>2</sup> is a protected area located north of Iona National Park. It is separated by a narrow strip of occupied land along the Curoca River and has IUCN category IV status.

In the far northwestern corner of Namibia, the Skeleton Coast National Park and Iona National Park meet at the Kunene River. The Skeleton Coast National Park shares a boundary with Iona National Park along the Cunene River and the Atlantic Ocean forms its western border. The newly proclaimed Dorob National Park is to the south of the park and to the east is an area that includes livestock farms and a settled communal area. The park is divided into a northern and a southern section and covers an area of 16,845 km<sup>2</sup>. Uniquely, the northern section is only accessible by airplane, while the southern section is open to those with 4-wheel drive vehicles, and is accessible as far as the Ugab River gate.

This TFCA has much to contribute in terms of conservation, especially as regards migration of species across the region, the improved protection of the Kunene River and ecosystem, and shielding of the Welwitschia mirabilis plants.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Each of the component reserves draws on a history of conservation, with the youngest established more than 35 years ago. The Iona National Park was proclaimed a reserve in 1937 and upgraded to a national park in 1964. The Skeleton Coast National Park was proclaimed in 1971. Before independence and the Angolan civil war, this park was an animal paradise, rich in big game. Illegal poaching and destruction of infrastructure have caused considerable damage, with the government needing



to restore control and order over the park. The Namibie Partial Reserve was proclaimed in 1960.

## 3. NATURAL HERITAGE

Iona National Park and the Skeleton Coast National Park both occur in a desert biome that includes the Namib Desert. It is renowned for its incredible rock formations and spectacular mountains while the Skeleton Coast National Park is rich in minerals, including diamonds and other gemstones. The Atlantic Ocean forms the western border of the Skeleton Coast National Park with the cold Benguela current bringing much marine diversity. The shoreline is dotted with shipwrecks and is inaccessible to most tourists. Natural springs sustain the desert biome while the great Kunene River is an annual river that forms a border with Angola in the north. The Hoarusib, Ugab and Uniab rivers are also important life support systems in the park.





Both the Skeleton Coast National Park and Iona National Park have several similar species known for their uniqueness, including black-faced impala, desert dwelling elephants, the desert lion, black rhinos and the remarkable *Welwitschia mirabilis* plant. This organism can live for thousands of years in these very harsh desert environments. The endemic Damara Tern also breeds only on the beach in the Skeleton Coast National Park.

It is hoped that the range increase now available across the parks for wildlife migration will result in resettlement of species such as the endangered black-faced impala back into their historical ranges. With the merging of the component parks, reintroduction of historically occurring species such as giraffe, mountain zebra, black-faced impala, hippopotamus and roan antelope, are being planned.

#### 4. PARKS AND COMMUNITIES

With a low density population in the area, and little viable agricultural land or industry in surrounding areas, the Skeleton Coast National Park has little community engagement and communities bordering the park receive no direct benefit. Community involvement is only in areas (conservancies) that are managed outside the park and under the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

#### 5. TFCA MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

The management priority of the Skeleton Coast National Park's is conservation (due to its high natural value as a pristine environment and wilderness), rather than community engagement.

#### 6. MAIN CHALLENGES

Climate change poses several challenges to the area. One of the primary challenges is declining fish species due to rising ocean temperatures. Severe drought, rising sea levels, habitat destruction, flooding, animal migration, species extinction and revenue loss are some of the other challenges faced by the park. Off road driving and therefore access to the park is an additional challenge, limiting the amount of income generated through tourism into the area, and impacting on revenue streams to support implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Capacity also needs to be developed in transboundary communication at the TFCA level, with language and information sharing as some of the main challenges stalling progress around integrated management and joint action-taking.



Tourism development, especially into the Iona component park, is high on the wish list for the park, and linked to long-term sustainability of the area.

#### 7. TOURISM INITIATIVES

There is currently virtually no infrastructure in Iona, and so an important part of the cross-country collaboration will be in the Namibian park and wildlife staff to assist in training and up-skilling Angolan staff. It is hoped that collaboration between the component

#### 8. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Increased co-operation between Namibia and Angola in developing the Iona-Skeleton Coast Transfrontier Conservation Area may lead to the establishment of a much larger TFCA spanning three countries along the Namib coast. This would be known as the Three Nations Namib Desert Transfrontier Conservation Area (TNND TFCA), and would include the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld TFCA to the south, the proposed Namib-Skeleton Coast National Park (NSNP) in Namibia and Iona in Angola. The NSNP would be the eighth-largest protected area in the world, and the sixth-largest protected area and largest park in Africa, covering 10,754 million hectares. It would consist of the current Sperrgebiet National Park, the Namib-Naukluft Park, the proposed Walvis Bay/Swakopmund conservation area, the National West Coast Recreation Area (upgraded to national park status), and the Skeleton Coast Park. A new Marine Protected Area borders the proposed NSNP and several private game reserves and communal areas would add a further 14 million hectares of conserved land and sea.

#### 9. CONTACT DETAILS

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