



Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

The Tswana word Kgalagadi, meaning 'place of thirst' - a name that captures its spirit completely. The vista is one of washed out greys, bottle greens, browns and golden yellows, contrasted with the vibrant reds and oranges of dune and sun permeating every stretch of horizon. It is a place where mornings bring life, movement and energy, and the aging day brings increasing silence, stillness and scorching heat.

Countries	Botswana, South Africa
Area	35,551km²
Status	Category A: Treaty Signed

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARK

The TFCA is made up of South Africa's Kalahari Gemsbok National Park and Botswana's Gemsbok National Park.

This is the only Transfrontier Park to date that is open in the true sense of the word – here tourists can move freely across the international border within the boundaries of the park. In recognition of a verbal agreement reached in 1948 leading to the de facto existence of the park, no barrier exists along the international border separating the constituting parks.

The sheer vastness of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park requires little extensive management intervention, allowing the nomadic ungulate populations and their predators to maintain balance within the natural system.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kgalagadi is Africa's first Peace Park. A bilateral agreement recognizing the new Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was signed in 1999 between Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks and South African National Parks, and the park was officially opened in May 2000.

The park was established to protect the unique biodiversity in the area. High sensitivity of arid regions to climate change, and the increasing risk of desertification resulted in global recognition of the importance of plants and animals that have adapted to withstand environmental extremes.

3. NATURAL HERITAGE

The park conserves one of the world's most abundant semi-arid biomes. Southern and western areas are composed of mainly Kalahari xeric savanna, with some Kalahari Acacia-Baikiaea woodlands.

As is common in arid regions, the weather can reach extremes. January is midsummer in southern Africa and the daytime temperatures are often in excess of 40 °C. Winter nights are cold, with temperatures below freezing. Extreme temperatures of -11 °C and up to 45 °C have been recorded; precipitation is sparse.



The reserve offers sparse vegetation, including deep-rooted Acacias and other hardy plants. Also endemic to the region are the horned melon, the African horned cucumber and the hedged gourd.

Despite arid conditions, the park is a biotope for fauna, offering excellent game viewing due to arid conditions, concentrating game in the dry riverbeds of the Auob and Nossob Rivers.

With more than 55 mammal species, it is renowned for predator watching, it is home to a range of mammalian predators, including black-maned Kalahari lions, cheetahs, leopards, and hyenas. Their counterparts of migratory herbivores seasonally traverse the park in the hundreds, and include blue wildebeest, springbok, eland, and red hartebeest. Smaller residents include ground squirrel and meerkat, as well as honey badgers, pangolin and bat-eared foxes. It also boasts more than 200 species of birds.



4. PARKS AND COMMUNITIES

The park is an important cultural heritage area for the †Khomani San people. Originally proclaimed a conservation area in 1931, the South African side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, was established to protect migratory gemsbok herds roaming the area. The †Khomani San were resident hunter-gatherers in the arid Kalahari Desert, and fencing of the park resulted in forcible removals and resettlement into villages around the park, precipitating a change in their lifestyles from hunter-gatherers to pastoral herders.

In 1996, the †Khomani San initiated a land claim on this land, and settlement was reached in 2002. A historic agreement was entered into between the †Khomani San and Mier communities, and the South African National Parks, involving leasing of land to the park. Part of the land was set aside for the use of these native peoples, who retain commercial benefits and rights to the land, and use of the land for symbolic and cultural purposes.

There is a high level of poverty in the surrounding areas, with communities building livelihoods primarily based on small-stock herding, craft manufacturing and cultural performances.

5. TFCA MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Biodiversity conservation, tourism and community-based natural resource management, and the implementation of a cultural heritage plan to accommodate the †Khomani San and Mier communities are the key management priorities for the park.

Major biodiversity interests are the managing water resources between biodiversity conservation and tourism interests, and addressing an apparent decline in numbers of nomadic species such as red hartebeest and springbok.

The preservation of the cultural and traditional knowledge of the two indigenous communities (†Khomani San and Mier) while improving their livelihood opportunities is a major human interest of the park, through the !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park. A key objective is to expose Bushman children to their traditional ancestral lifestyles, facilitated through the implementation of the Imbewu programme and its traditional veld school.

6. MAIN CHALLENGES

Distribution of water resources: Water scarcity is an ongoing challenge. The TFCA is engaging in ongoing drought relief and disaster preparedness programmes with neighbouring communities.

Pastoral activities impacting on biodiversity: The main economic activity for bordering communities is agriculture. Water scarcity, impact on biodiversity and a lack of economic diversification are pressure points derived from this activity. Youth grants are currently being offered to incentivize and catalyze economic empowerment projects and stabilize alternative livelihoods in these communities.

Managing people – park relationships: Gaining access to the park for indigenous communities remains a challenge despite their landowner status. Communication challenges continue to impede development of mutually beneficial mechanisms to provide access to cultural and ancestral resources. There is currently no park policy in place to guide divergent needs of communities and conservation managers. However, the !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park does have a joint management board, comprising of representatives from †Khomani San and Mier communities and South African National Parks.

Compounding climate change impacts: Increasing droughts and decreasing rainfall due to climate change are placing further pressure on limited water resources servicing park and communities. The TFCA on the Botswana side is engaged in the construction of additional boreholes and the development of alternative rain harvesting strategies in communities adjacent to

the park in an attempt to alleviate prolonged water shortages. There is growing need for mainstreaming climate change adaptation strategies into the parks' management plans.

7. TOURISM INITIATIVES

Access to Kgalagadi TFCA can be gained through four access facilities in three countries: from Botswana through Two Rivers / Twee Rivieren, Mabuasehube and Kaa; from Namibia through Mata-Mata, and from South Africa through Two Rivers.

Other highlights:

- The Ta Shebube desert circuit is a new tourist destination on the Botswana side, featuring two lodges, at Polentswa and Rooiputs, and promoting high-quality, low-density tourism.
- The !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park continues to be developed with the injection of recent funding.
- !Xaus Lodge, owned by the Khomani San (Bushmen) and Mier communities, in partnership with SANParks is a fully catered luxury lodge in the park, boosting tourism and benefits for the affected communities
- The park also has three tented wilderness camps and a network of 4X4 routes has been developed.

8. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Three exciting developments are underway in the park:

In 2013, a draft integrated development plan, joint operational strategy and standard operating procedure for the movement of people, goods and services in the park were finalized, with a joint management committee to oversee activities. It is hoped that the strategy will improve strategic management of the park significantly in the next few years.

A second promising development is increased interest by landowners on the Namibian side of the border in joining their land to Kgalagadi and becoming part of the ecotourism attraction through the Mata-Mata access facility. Communication around the matter is helpful.

With the injection of funding from multiple international parties, ongoing work in establishing and developing the !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park is also underway, and will open up increasing avenues for cultural tourism, as well as creating a heritage preserve for the local people.

9. CONTACT DETAILS

Botswana: Sennye Neo-Mahupeleng
Principal Wildlife Officer, Department of Wildlife and National Parks
sneo-mahupeleng@gov.bw

South Africa: Ernest Mokganedi
Director: Transfrontier Conservation Areas, Dept. of Environmental Affairs
Emokganedi@environment.gov.za