

The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area



(Left) Victoria Falls, on the Zambia-Zimbabwe border, was one of the gems contained within the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), which was inaugurated in March. (Above) Zebras and other wildlife had free movement across national boundaries within the transborder KAZA.

by Richard Pallardy

The largest of the so-called peace parks, the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area in southern Africa, was officially inaugurated in March 2012. Increasing recognition of the impediments created by man-made boundaries—along with greater understanding of the extent to which the health of adjacent ecosystems is interdependent—has catalyzed the formation of a number of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs), in Africa and elsewhere around the world. Such parks aim to relegate the inscription of national borders in key wildlife areas to the abstract.

KAZA, as the area is known, sprawls for 444,000 sq km (171,000 sq mi) across the borders of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Centred on the Okavango and Zambezi river basins, it encompasses some 36 protected regions, including more than a dozen national parks, as well as a variety of other reserves and wildlife-management areas. It contains within its boundaries several of the gems of the

African continent: Victoria Falls, a World Heritage site, and the Okavango delta, the largest site covered by the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Big Coup for the Big Five. Extending as it does across a massive swath of southern Africa, KAZA is home to unprecedented ecological diversity: salt pans and arid grassland, woodland and scrubland, seasonal wetlands and permanent marshes, among other biomes, are all found within its borders. Those areas support some 3,000 species of plants.

A host of wildlife inhabits this variegated terrain, with some species adapted only to one particular region and others moving between them as the seasons demand. The species are wide-ranging: more than 100 of fish, roughly 50 of amphibians, over 100 of reptiles, some 600 of birds, and nearly 200 of mammals can be found there. Of the latter class, all of the iconic “big five” on tourists’ must-see lists are present: African elephants, critically endangered black rhinos, Cape buffalo, leopards, and lions. The vaunted status of these “charismatic megafauna,” combined

with the fantastic diversity of their lesser-known brethren, is thought to have the potential to draw up to eight million tourists annually.

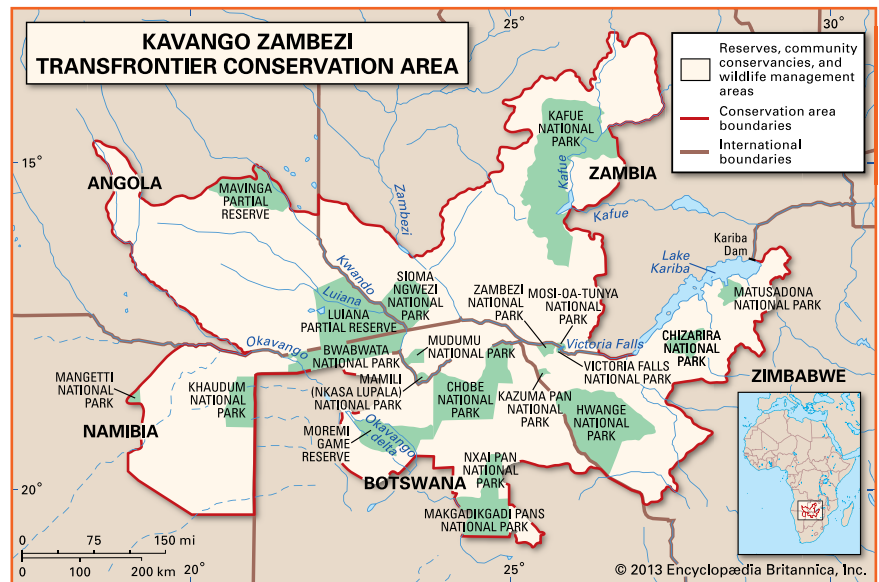
The expansive new confines are expected to be of particular benefit to African elephants: almost 50% of the total remaining wild population, some 325,000 animals, resides in northern Botswana, western Zimbabwe, and eastern Namibia. Particularly in Botswana, where culling was suspended in the 1990s, the population is unsustainable at its current size. The hope is that—with the removal of barriers along the elephants’ ancestral migration routes, which stretched from eastern Angola into western Zimbabwe—the population, which is concentrated in Botswana’s Chobe National Park, will disperse into Zambia’s Kafue National Park and Angola’s Luiana National Park, where there are far fewer of the leathery giants. Many elephants have already returned to Angola following the end in 2002 of the Angolan civil war, during which an estimated 100,000 of the pachyderms

were slaughtered for ivory to fund the conflict.

Crowd Control. The success of the KAZA endeavour rests in large part on coordination with the communities residing within its borders. The area is home to an estimated 2.5 million people; less than a quarter of KAZA is completely devoid of human habitation. The KAZA organizers' approach emulated Namibia's community conservancy model, which had been established in the 1990s. Efforts in that country created thousands of stewardship jobs for residents, which served both to alleviate widespread poverty and to integrate the interests of conservation with those of the local population. Thus, decreases in poaching and more-sustainable harvesting of natural resources ensued as an influx of tourism dollars made clear the value of preserving the environment. KAZA organizers hoped to build on extant conservancies in Namibia and several other member countries in establishing wildlife corridors through community-owned land.

Some observers, though, worried that enforcing new regulations and monitoring community programs would prove too unwieldy to manage. Although some Namibean parks had successfully recruited poachers and illegal land users to conservation efforts, critics cited poaching incidents—in which park rangers participated or were complicit—in Zimbabwean national parks as indicative of the challenges faced in winning locals to the cause. Spotty infrastructure in some areas of KAZA led others to wonder if community efforts would even be able to

The critically endangered black rhino was among the “big five” species that were expected to draw tourists to the newly inaugurated KAZA.



draw the tourist dollars necessary to make them sustainable.

Without Borders. The first formalized effort to establish transborder parks in Africa was the 1933 London Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in Their Natural State. Though that document exhorted its signatories to cooperate in instances in which conservation areas abutted one another, few efforts were actually made. Probably the first actual transfrontier park in Africa was formed in 1929, when colonial power Belgium officially established Albert National Park, which straddled the borders of its possessions Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Ruanda-Urundi (later split into Rwanda and Burundi). When those countries were granted independence in the 1960s and the park was split in two, cross-border cooperation evaporated in the face of civil strife.

More successful was an informal agreement made in 1948 between the rangers of South Africa's Kalahari Gemsbok National Park and Botswana's Gemsbok National Park. Decades of co-operation culminated in the 2000 opening of the first peace park in Africa, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. As of 2012, 2 additional transfrontier parks had been formally established in southern Africa, and 10 more were in various phases of conceptualization.

Origins of KAZA. The conservation area that became KAZA was discussed as early as 1993 by the Development Bank of Southern Africa, which in 1999 formalized the project, calling it the Okavango Upper Zambezi International Tourism Initiative. Promoters of the project cited wording in, among other documents, the 1999 Southern African

Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement in supplying the project with a mandate. (The protocol specifically cited an obligation to “promote the conservation of shared wildlife resources through the establishment of TFCAs.”) Two years later the project was adopted by the SADC—to which all five countries belonged—but lack of progress led SADC tourism ministers to relaunch it in July 2003 under its current name.

A December 2006 memorandum of understanding mapped out rough parameters for the conception of such a park. The president of each country signed a treaty formalizing the arrangement in August 2011 at the SADC summit in Luanda, Angola, and the area was formally inaugurated in 2012 at Katima Mulilo, Namibia. A main secretariat was instituted in Kasane, Bots., and satellite offices were established in each member country.

Though the participating countries were responsible for generating a significant portion of the funding required for getting the massive initiative off the ground and for maintaining KAZA, a June 2007 donor conference generated substantial contributions from other countries and from nongovernmental organizations. KfW Bankengruppe, the German development bank, donated a quarter of a billion dollars, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, USAID, and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) also contributed significant moneys. The Peace Parks Foundation, in South Africa, provided financing as well as oversight.

Richard Pallardy is a Research Editor at Encyclopædia Britannica.