

Plants and animals of Harare's wetlands

How wetland plants, grasses, animals, birds and myriad little creatures and soils work together in a web of life to provide the City's residents with clean water and fresh air

Biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of life on Earth. This encompasses all species of microbes, plants and animals, their genetic material and the ecosystems in which they occur. There is diversity within species, between species, and within ecosystems, giving rise to three categories of biodiversity: genetic, species and ecosystem or ecological biodiversity. (UNEP, 1993)

Wetlands have been called "biological super systems" because they produce great volumes of food that support a remarkable level of biodiversity. They produce more living things per acre than any other ecosystems, making them one of the most productive ecosystems on Earth. (www.wetlands-initiative.org)

Harare's wetlands are exceptionally rich in biodiversity, and hold an amazing array of plants and animals:

- **36 species of grass** and more than **80 species of other plants** with their trillions of kilometres of invisible roots which remove toxic chemicals and hold the spongy clays together.
- **Over 240 bird species** have been recorded, among them small rare migrants which breed in the pools and squelch zones. Striped Crake and Streaky-breasted Flufftail are two examples.
- Bushpig, Cape Clawless Otter, Large Grey Mongoose, Common Duiker and Giant Rat and Scrub Hare
- **16 reptiles** of which three snakes, the Egyptian Cobra, Olive and Three-striped Grass Snake are the commonest.
- Living in puddles and pools are **7 amphibians** including The Giant Bullfrog (regionally endangered) that eat the numerous insects, tadpoles and fish such as Barbs, Barbel and Catlets.

Monavale Vlei has been restored, conserved, protected and studied very closely. It has been accorded Ramsar Site status. The work achieved on Monavale Vlei provides a model for community based wetland conservation management of other wetlands in Harare. www.monavalevlei.com

Photographs: Philippa Marett (Monavale scenes, flowers, grasses); Jimmy Muropa (birds and reptiles); Nick Hart (birds); John Kelly (giant bullfrog); Yathin S Krishnappa (slender mongoose); Derek Keats (scrub hare); Neil Strickland (reedbuck); Colin M.L. Burnett (bushpig); Masteraah at de.wikipedia (common duiker); Zorba the Geek at Wikimedia Commons (field mouse); The Rambling Man at en.wikipedia (serval)

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