

Chapter 16

Wetlands of Zimbabwe: Biodiversity, Livelihoods, and Conservation

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Abstract

Zimbabwe despite being a dry country in global terms with a mean annual precipitation of 700 mm is endowed with different wetland types. Wetlands make up 34.96% of Zimbabwe's total surface area, which is approximately 13,659,579 ha. Of the existing wetlands, 17.63% are in a pristine condition, 55.65% moderately degraded, and 26.72% severely degraded. Wetlands in Zimbabwe are classified as dambos, swamps, pans, floodplains, and artificial impoundments. The vegetation type in wetlands varies with the wetland types, ranging from grass to herbaceous plants. Wetlands provide habitat for several bird species including threatened species like the wattled crane and secretary bird. They also provide habitat to small and large mammals including waterbuck, zebra, vervet monkeys, baboons, warthog, spring hares, impalas, squirrels, and jackals. Apart from sustaining agriculture which is the major livelihood option, wetlands also drive the tourism sector as attractants and through provision of water and grazing for wildlife. In a bid to ensure sustainable wetlands use for different livelihood benefits, Zimbabwe has developed a National Wetland Policy and Wetlands Management Guidelines. The chapter proposes sustained longitudinal research to build a database of essential information that informs continual improvement of wetland management decision-making.