

## Sperrgebiet National Park



From meteor craters, fossil and archaeological sites to Africa's most important shipwreck discovery, and with some of the most pristine and wild landscapes on the planet, the newly proclaimed Sperrgebiet National Park (SNP) is a jewel in Namibia's protected area network.

The colossal 55m tall Bogenfels rock arch, the modern diamond mine and the mysterious ghost town at Elizabeth Bay, the ghost town of Pomona (which is noteworthy for enduring the highest average wind speeds in southern Africa) and the *Marchental* – the famous 'Fairy Tale Valley', where diamonds were once so

common they could be grabbed in handfuls as they gleamed in the light of the moon are all a part of this fascinating landscape.

Closed to the public following the discovery of a diamond at Kolmanskop near Lüderitz by a railway worker, Zacharias Lewala, in 1908, large parts of the Sperrgebiet were left undisturbed for nearly a century. Although this was done to protect the mineral wealth of the area, it also contributed to safeguarding the Succulent Karoo ecosystem, which has the highest diversity of succulent flora globally.

The Sperrgebiet is one of a 'new era' of protected areas, proclaimed to protect biodiversity while contributing to the local and national economy through tourism development and concessioning.

### FACT FILE

<b>Park size:</b>	22 000 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Proclaimed:</b>	2008
<b>Natural features:</b>	Sandy shores along the coast in the south and rocky headlands and inlets in the north. At least 17 'islands' occur off the coast adjoining the SNP. Sandy and gravel inland plains, sand dunes, mountain ranges and inselbergs and the Orange River valley.
<b>Vegetation:</b>	Succulent Karoo, Namib Desert and Savannah biomes. Vegetation types: Succulent Steppe, Southern Desert, Riverine Woodland. Quiver tree ( <i>Aloe dichotoma</i> ), many-stemmed quiver tree ( <i>Aloe ramosissima</i> ), vygies ( <i>Mesembryanthemum</i> sp), <i>Hoodia</i> and <i>Euphorbia</i> spp. Sweet-thorn ( <i>Acacia karoo</i> ), camel-thorn ( <i>Acacia erioloba</i> ) along riverbeds.
<b>Wildlife:</b>	Brown hyaena, gemsbok, springbok, Cape fur seal, grey rhebok, Heaviside's dolphin, southern right whale. Almost 60 wetland birds along the Orange River and 120 terrestrial bird species recorded. African penguin, Cape gannet, bank cormorant, purple heron, lappet-faced vulture, Karoo korhaan, Ludwig's bustard, Cape francolin. Almost 100 reptile species; 16 frog species and a great number of insects and other invertebrates, probably 90 per cent or more of the invertebrates found in the park have not been described by science.

**Tourism:**

Restricted access. Museum at Kolmanskop Ghost Town open to the public. One concession to Pomona Ghost Town and Bogenfels Rock arch from Lüderitz (day tour).

**Map**



## **Conservation successes**

Sperrgebiet one of the world's top 25 biodiversity hotspots, an honour earned principally by the area's unique and superabundant species of succulents, 234 of which are endemic and 284 of which are Red Data listed. The Sperrgebiet is the most biodiverse region in Namibia and the Succulent Karoo biome, of which it is a part, supports more species of succulents than anywhere else on earth. The horseshoe-shaped inselbergs provide shelter from the wind and are particularly rich.

The Orange River is a designated Ramsar site, and is one of Namibia's three globally important coastal wetlands (the others being Walvis Bay lagoon and the Kunene River mouth). The reed beds and tidal mudflats sustain huge numbers of birds. The estimated number of seabirds and wetland birds in the SNP is close to half a million.

Namibia's first Marine Protected Area runs along the coast of the Sperrgebiet. Off the coast of the Sperrgebiet, 35 species of whales and dolphins have been recorded. The SNP also hosts two seal species. The Southern Elephant seal, which often weighs over a ton, puts in occasional appearances. Roughly half of Namibia's Cape Fur seal population (500,000 or so, although numbers fluctuate) has established colonies in the SNP.

## **Key management issues**

Management and tourism plans for the park are at an advanced stage of development. The park has been zoned in accordance with IUCN guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories. Close ties have been forged with partners and stakeholders such as mining companies and the business community. The MET has established stations adjacent to the park, and patrol camps and radio repeater stations for easier communication between staff members.

## **Future plans**

Tourism concessions have been identified and will be developed. These include desert-experience and ghost-town tours and Orange River boating and kayaking. The concession operators will guide all planned activities. A co-management strategy and forging of joint planning will be explored with the newly proclaimed Marine Protected Area off the coast of the park.