ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK
celebrating 50 years
ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK
IS 3045 KM² OF UNTAMED AFRICAN WILDERNESS IN SOUTHEASTERN CHAD

Located near the town of Am Timan in the Salamat Region, Zakouma National Park is one of the last remaining intact Sudano-Sahelian ecosystems in Africa. Due to its close proximity to the centre of the Chadian Basin, the terrain of the park is almost exclusively flat with the exception of the beautiful granite inselbergs found in the south-west near Ibir. As one of three national parks in Chad, Zakouma forms an integral part of the conservation of flora and fauna in the region, as well as being the only game viewing destination offering guest accommodation in the country. The Chadian government has been committed to protecting this natural heritage even through many years of conflict. Today Zakouma is one of the most important protected areas in Central and West Africa.

Zakouma is an area of contrasts and like many parts of Africa, the ecosystem has two very distinct seasons, the wet season and the dry season. There are however very few areas where the contrasts between the two seasons are so dramatic, affecting fauna, flora and terrain alike. Between June and November Zakouma receives an average of 850mm of rain resulting in the majority of the park becoming completely inundated with water. It is during this time that the park sees a strong seasonal outward migration of...
many species; mainly the elephant and tiang and to a lesser extent roan antelope and hartebeest, to the drier areas further north. The dry season in comparison, lures the wildlife back to the heart of Zakouma, where pans surrounded by fertile floodplains and pools in the main river systems (Bahr’s Salamat, Korom and Dikere) provide drinking water and grazing throughout the dry months. Large herds of animals as well as thousands of birds congregate at these pools from February to June making for spectacular game viewing. Although the free roaming African elephant is the better known species, the park is an important refuge for numerous other species, many of which are threatened elsewhere within this eco-zone, which stretches as a band across the breadth of Africa to the south of the Sahara Desert. The fauna of the park includes 44 mammal species of which 16 are large mammals. Species such as the Kordofan giraffe, lion, Lelwel’s hartebeest, pale fox and red-fronted gazelle are of continental importance.

Large herds of tiang are abundant on the open grass plains in the dry season.
The buffalo population, reduced to only about 220 animals in 1986, has increased to an incredible 8 000 animals today. Unlike much of Africa, Zakouma still has large herds of up to 1000 orange-tinted buffalo, an intermediate form between the forest and Cape buffalo. Bird watching in Zakouma is an extremely rewarding experience, not only in the number of different species (currently 373) but also in the sheer abundance of birds. Seeing literally thousands of waterbirds against a backdrop of grazing antelope at a pan in the dry season is not uncommon.

The giraffe depicted on the park logo is taken from rock art found at Djoki north-east of Fada on Ennedi Plateau, north-eastern Chad. The giraffe was chosen as the symbol for the logo as it was heavily under threat at the time. Today Zakouma has the largest single population of this subspecies which represents about half of the world population.
The History of Zakouma National Park

The history of Zakouma National Park begins in the 1950s. To ensure the protection of the highly poached giraffe population and in response to declines in other species due to excessive hunting, the Hunting Inspector of the time, Colonel Michel Anna proposed the classification of Zakouma as a Faunal Reserve, which became effective in July 1958. The new reserve was established and anti-poaching patrols commenced using nomad guards. Within a few years of this intervention the density of game reached numbers never before seen in Chad and as a consequence the number of poachers on the reserve’s periphery followed a similar trend. To offer even better protection, Zakouma was declared a national park in 1963 by Presidential Decree (N° 867/ECF of 7 May 1963), offering it the highest form of protection available under the laws of Chad. 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of this continentally important national park.

The park is completely surrounded by the Bahr Salamat Faunal Reserve, an area of about 20,000 km². Overall the ecosystem is healthy however two large mammal species are now extinct in the area, namely the Western black rhino and Lord Derby’s eland. The black rhino, once abundant, went extinct in Zakouma in 1972 with the last photograph of a live animal shown at left. The black rhino was once abundant in much of Chad but like elsewhere in Africa has been killed for its horn. In 1980 an estimated 25 black rhino were still alive in Chad, but by 1990 it was considered extinct in this country. The western black rhino was officially declared extinct in 2006 when the last animal died in Cameroon - there are now no black rhinos left in Africa north of Kenya.
One of the first maps of Zakouma National Park, with many roads still in use today.

The Lord Derby’s eland was common in Manda National Park and was in fact the reason why the park was created. It was also common in the Bahr Salamat and Siniaka-Mania Faunal Reserves in the 1970s but by the mid-1980s, they had apparently disappeared completely from Chad as a result of illegal hunting, rinderpest and drought. Small numbers have been observed seasonally within Chad since 1995 to the south of Zakouma on the Central African Republic border and in Sena-Oura National Park on the Cameroon border. It is the intention of park management to try and reintroduce these two species to restore the ecological integrity of the park. The hippopotamus has also not been seen in Zakouma for many years but it is possible that they will still return one day from Lac Iro.

In 1989 rehabilitation of the park commenced through the involvement of the European Union and this financial assistance continues today.

In the mid-2000s, a wave of elephant poaching hit the country and in particular its flagship protected area, Zakouma National Park. In a 2 year period, between 2006 and 2008, a staggering 2000 elephants were killed in Zakouma and the surrounding areas. With armed groups coming from as far afield as the Darfur region of Sudan, the modus operandi of the horseback poachers has not changed much in

In 2007 President Idriss Déby Itno took part in an ivory burning ceremony to help raise awareness on the significant decline of the Chadian elephant population.
A herd of almost 400 elephants in Zakouma National Park
the past 100 years except that the spear, as depicted in the painting on the right, has been replaced with a semi-automatic rifle. In the past a densely packed elephant herd was an effective defense against horsemen with spears, whose method was to isolate an individual for the killing, today the opposite is the case. With mounted poachers shooting indiscriminately into the densely packed herd, the massacre of elephants is devastating. Up to 30 animals of all ages are killed in a single attack, with many dying later from festering bullet wounds. The trauma of such slaughter is hard to imagine and is best understood by the fact that the Zakouma herds are currently almost devoid of calves under five years of age. With the current population, there should be at least 80 calves in this age group, but at present there are 25 at most.

The Chadian Government, in concert with the European Union, approached African Parks in 2010 to take on the management responsibility of Zakouma in order to put an end to this ongoing scourge. Within a year, African Parks had entirely halted elephant poaching within the park and had implemented a broader elephant protection programme across a 13 000 km² zone which included protection during the wet season as well. Today the elephant population of Zakouma is on the increase with newborn calves being observed for the first time in many years.
The European Union and Zakouma National Park

The crisis period from the late 1970’s to the mid-1980’s was characterized by a strong increase in poaching, an epidemic of rinderpest and a significant degradation of the environment. Dr. Pfeffer, during a reconnaissance mission in 1986 described the Park as a "cemetery of elephants" studded with skulls and carcasses. Nevertheless, some guards remained in their post, and without any support, managed to protect the core of the Park and its wildlife - with the exception of the black rhino - thus preserving the future of the Park.

Based on the findings of this mission, an effort to rehabilitate the Park was initiated in 1989 with core funding from the European Union. Two other projects followed: CESET (Conservation of the Environment of South-Eastern Chad) from 1993 to 2000; and then CURES (Conservation and Rational Use of the Sudano-Sahelian Ecosystems), which started in 2001. The latter helped not only to reinforce the protection of the Park, but also to increase our understanding of Zakouma's ecosystem and wildlife populations through scientific monitoring activities, to foster awareness in peripheral communities, as well as to develop tourism related activities. An independent evaluation conducted in 2005 reported “remarkable results” and rare in terms of conservation, while stressing the need for yet a new effort to strengthen the sustainability and viability of the only remaining Sudano-Sahelian ecosystem in Central Africa that is virtually intact.

It is in this context that the Public-Private Partnership agreement between the Chadian government and the South African based organization African Parks Network (APN) was initiated.

Chad made an application for Zakouma to be recognized as a World Heritage Site under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 2005. Several visits have been undertaken by inspectors and it is hoped that the few issues still remaining, such as the boundary dispute, can be rectified soon. Zakouma is one of 8 sites in Chad for which application has been made. The ‘Lakes of Ounianga’ in the Sahara Desert was inscribed in 2012.

The wetlands of Zakouma

Our floodplains, rivers, marshes and pans are a valuable stop-over for migrating birds and breeding ground for fish and birds alike. These wetlands form part of the RAMSAR site "Inundation Plains of Bahr Auok and Salamat", one of the largest in the world. The RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands came into force for Chad on 13 October 1990. Chad presently has 6 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with a surface area of 12,405,058 hectares.
Protecting the elephants of Zakouma National Park

The African Elephant is the flagship species of Zakouma. Due to the terrible massacres that happened in the past, the priority of park management was to stop the poaching of elephants completely. Initially a better understanding of the elephants’ movements was needed, and to achieve this, satellite GPS collars were fitted on individuals in different herds.

Today there are 15 collars providing GPS positions of the main elephant herds every few hours. A central radio control room, manned 24/7 by trained operators, monitors the elephant movements and patrol positions throughout the day. The deployment of anti-poaching patrols is activated from this control room, with new positions given to teams in the field based on the location of the elephant herds or information provided on potential threats. An extensive VHF radio system was also put in place to provide communication within the entire elephant range, patrol methods were adjusted and information gathering was improved.

Two aircrafts were deployed for extensive anti-poaching surveillance, aerial monitoring and resupplying of outposts. Additional airstrips were opened up in the extended elephant range to provide support during the wet months when most roads are impassable. Rangers have been provided with better equipment and training, and new rangers employed.

The direct result of these major changes is that no elephants have been poached inside the park since October 2011.
Zakouma has many agricultural villages within the greater ecosystem and has an influx of about 50,000 nomads in these areas during the dry season each year. Although we work closely with the communities the assistance the park can give to over 100 villages in the periphery is limited. Despite this it is however critical for Zakouma to have a good relationship with the local population and a school building programme has commenced in order to assist with education in the region. The biggest asset is the security and stability that the para-military guards bring to the villages while operating in the greater elephant range. Park management is in daily radio communication with certain strategic villages around it. Zakouma National Park is an important provider of jobs in the Salamat and Guera regions, employing 118 persons full time and approximately 15 temporary staff.
**Tinga Camp**

Originally constructed in 1965 and refurbished a few times since then, the most recent rebuild was in 2012 when several changes and improvements were made. The power supply was made more eco-friendly, landscaping done and some of the accommodation units rebuilt to provide a more comfortable and intimate bush experience. The large open dining/lounge area was also improved with the ceiling raised, new lighting and wooden ceiling fans installed. Together with the new furniture manufactured at headquarters, this area continues to provide a comfortable place to relax and enjoy the tranquillity of Zakouma; something that has been enjoyed by visitors for the past 48 years. Tinga is open during dry season, from mid-November to the end of May.

African Parks is a non-profit organisation that takes on direct responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks, in partnership with governments and local communities. By adopting a business approach to conservation, supported by donor funding, we aim to make each park sustainable in the long term, thereby contributing to economic development and poverty alleviation. We currently manage seven parks in six countries - Chad, Congo, DRC, Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia - with a combined area of 4.1 million hectares.
A partnership between the Ministry of Environment and Fishery Resources and African Parks

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