

National parks of | ethiopia

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It is the oldest and most developed wildlife reserve in Ethiopia. It is even easy to access, situated 210kms (130miles) east of Addis Ababa.

Awash national park occupies about 830 square kilometers (320sq. miles) of dry savannah in the middle of the rift valley. This hot, arid terrain climbs up to 1, 000masl, with the exception of the peak of Fentale volcano, which reaches 2, 007masl. The park's name comes from the longest river in Ethiopia: the Awash. It marks the southern boundary of the park by means of a deep gorge, then turns north where it reaches the inhospitable Danakil region. In the park's interior, the river forms a waterfall underneath which it is possible to walk and enjoy the exceptional view of a great numbers and variety of birds. The park's habitat features an odd riverine forest and interesting volcanic terrain.

The impressive 3. 5km crater presents a vision of hell, surrounded by remains of lava from the last eruption in 1820. The harar road cuts the park in to two. Hot springs are accessible by road in the northern part of the park. Warm, turquoise waters with a temperature of 360c offer a delightful swim. Among the park's sparse vegetation, the palm oil trees stand out. They are highly valued by the Afar people who live in the surrounding area, because edible oil is obtained from its fruit.

Not far from the main roads, one can see soemmering's Gazelles & even the pale beisa oryx, with straight horns capable of spearing a lion. These animals have adapted to the high temperatures and scarcity of water by developing a physiological mechanism that allows them to increase their interior temperature. Instead of perspiring, they lose heat through radiation. There

are also other mammals inhabited in the national park like: greater kudu, lesser kudu, dik dik, warthogs, Anubis baboon, hamadryas baboon, black & white colobus monkey, vervet monkey and many more. It is not easy to spot predators, but in the park there are lions, leopards, cheetahs, striped and spotted hyenas, golden and black-backed jackals, servals and wild cats. The spotted hyenas, the largest in the family, reach a height of between 65 and 90cm. they have a wide head, short bristly hair, hind quarters lower than the front quarters, and a long, powerful neck.

Their coats are grey or yellow with black patches. About 400 species of birds have been counted, including some endemic species such as the banded barbet, the golden backed woodpecker, the thick billed raven and the wattled ibis. SIMIEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK It is registered as a world heritage site by UNESCO, located in the Simien Mountain, it occupies a surface area of 180km². Simien means " NORTH" in Amharic, an allusion to the position it occupies in the Gondar massif, one of the craggiest in Africa. The park is interesting because of the uniqueness of its endemic animals, the beauty of its flora, and the majesty of its impressive landscape. The park, situated between 4, 620 and 1, 900masl, boasts varied flora with three marked botanical areas. The highest parts have meadows with little vegetation, characteristic of afro alpine zones.

Here one can find the endemic *lobelia rhynchopetalum*, small groups of perpetual flowers, *helichrysum*, and the striking *kniphofia foliosa*. Of particular botanical interest is the *Afrovivella semiensis*, a small fleshy plant with pink flowers in the shape of little bells. This plant has been found only in

the Simien Mountains and nowhere else on earth. There is only one species within its genus. In the park, there are three most colorful endemic mammals in Ethiopia: the walia ibex which lives wild at an altitude of more than 2,500masl, the gelada baboon which inhabits the simian plateau, and the Ethiopian wolf which is also found in great numbers in the Bale mountain national park. In the park, approximately 50 different bird species have been identified, among them a great many scavengers and birds of prey. Birds migrating from Europe and all over Africa also can be seen here.

One of the most striking birds is the large and powerful lammergeyer or bearded vulture. It is a scavenger, often seen on the north face of the park. This bird nests on inaccessible shelves and in hollows on great walls of rock. Unlike other vultures, its head is completely covered in feathers. Underneath its beak, it has a streak of stiff bristles, which accounts for its nick name "bearded vulture". Its wingspan can reach up to 250cm. the lammergeyer feeds on animal remains stripped of meat by other vultures.

It takes the bones, drops them from a great height, and eats the marrow. Bones and marrow comprise 85% of its diet. There are also other birds of prey in the park: buzzard, Egyptian vulture, Ruppel's griffon vultures, eagles, falcons and ravens. Endemic bird species such as the spot-breasted plover, the white-billed starling and the black-headed siskin are easy to spot in the national park during rainy season, as they search for food over the cultivated land of the high plateau. Even if there is a rare chance to see, one can also possibly spot the black-headed forest orioles & golden-backed woodpeckers in the valley. YANGUDI-RASSA NATIONAL PARK Despite the difficulties of

getting this place, the Yangudi-rassa national park is worth visiting. It is the last refuge of the extremely rare and almost extinct African wild Ass.

Found 500kms northeast of the Addis Ababa, the habitat is 4, 371km² of semi desert with vegetation consisting of acacia trees, fleshy grass and scrub. The park protects against the dangers threatening the wild donkey: Somalis and Ethiopian who hunt them for food and medicine, depredation by hyenas, competition with cattle for scarce water, and cross-breeding with domestic donkeys. The sub-species living in Ethiopia, the *Equus africanus somalicus* (YEDUR AHIYA), is down to only a few hundred heads, surviving in a completely wild state. These asses possess excellent climbing abilities and usually inhabit rocky, uneven places. This ability differentiates them from their brother, the domestic donkey. **BALE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK**

Although the access route is difficult to traverse, the Bale Mountains are worth visiting because they contain the richest flora & fauna of the alpine habitat in all of Ethiopia. The park occupies a surface area of 2, 470km² and includes altitudes from 1, 500 up to 4, 400masl.

This provides a unique diversity of landscape, vegetation and fauna. The park is divided by the Hareenna cliff, which runs through it like a fracture from east to west, creating three clearly differentiated areas within the reserve. The northern part is known as Geyessey, named after a small river that crosses it & flows in to the WEYB River near the settlement of Dinsho. The central part, just above the cliff, is the sennete plateau which rises to more than 4, 000masl. The southern part, below the cliff, is a densely forested area known as the Hareenna forest. From there, the land continues to drop

until it reaches the lowlands. In the northern part, geysey area, and around Dinsho, a large variety of animals can be seen.

The vegetation consists of grassy ground, riverside plains, trees and bushes. In the hills, between 2, 500 and 3, 300m, there are meadows and plentiful hygenia abyssinica and juniperous procera trees. Geraniums, lobelias and Allchemilas species create colourful carpets interrupted by thickets of Artemisia afra, kniphofia foliosa flowers and the wild roses of the Rose abyssinica. This part of the park is the best place to see the endemic mountain Nyala, which is a large antelope the size of a Kudu. In the area surrounding Dinsho, one can find the endemic Menelik's bushbuck. The bushbuck prefers plains and mountains up to 4, 000m and feeds mainly on leaves, shoots and fruit. It is a natural swimmer.

As it is a solitary creature, Menelik's bushbuck is rarely found in pairs, except for couples in the mating season or a female with her offspring. In the second part of the park, the senate plateau, just above the hareenna cliff at a height of 4, 000m. It was formed by ancient volcanic rocks. It can be reached by the road connecting Goba to Dolomena, which crosses the eastern part of the park. This road has views of some of the most wonderful natural scenery in the world. Rivers and streams cut gorges across the plateau, form waterfalls in some places and craggy crests rise above the plateau. The most outstanding peak is the second tallest in Ethiopia, TULLU DIMTU (The red mountain) at 4, 477meter.

Mount Batu, at 4, 300m, is also impressive. The shallow depressions of the plateau fill up with water during the rainy season, forming small lakes. A few

large lakes contain water year round, including Garba Buracha (Black Water) and Hora Bachay, which create unique places to observe migratory birds from Europe, that are avoiding the western winter. The plateau of volcanic rock is covered with emerald green moorland and a host of lichens. The area's afroalpine vegetation is displayed in the numerous giant Lobelias and the everlastings represented by different species, among them *H. splendidum* with its yellow flowers and the thorny *H. citrispinum*.

This area is the best place to see the endemic and rare Ethiopian wolf. This mammal can only be found in the high altitude prairies of the Bale and Simien massifs. Its reddish coat is similar to the European Red Fox, but its shape is between a wolf and a jackal. It has long legs, a sharp snout, and a very thick black and white tail. The male and female are identical. Its preferred prey is the endemic giant mole rat, a large, brown, round-bodied rodent. The last part of the park is located to the south, where the land gradually falls away and a belt of heath land gives away to a densely wooded forest, known as the HARENNA FOREST.

Depending the altitude, different species of trees appear in the forests, from Podocarpus, Hagenias, Juniperous, Schefflera and Bamboos, all with bark decorated by the lichens and mosses. In the forest, it is difficult to spot animals but several types of pig have been seen, such as Warthogs, Bushh pigs and Giant Forest hogs. In the Harenna forest, Black & White colobus monkeys jump from tree to tree. Anubis baboons are most common, found in Adeley, Geysey and Harenna forests. Groups of them have been seen at altitudes above 3, 700 meters. Vervet monkeys live at an altitude below 3,

000meter. More than 200 bird species have been counted, of which at least 15 are endemic.

Among the rocky highlands of Bale, the spectacular lammergeyer, one can often find the thick-billed raven feasting on the lammergeyer's leftovers. It is also possible to spot different birds of prey such as Falcons, Eagles, kites, Vultures and Ravens. The best season to visit the park is the dry season, from November to January when there are abundant clear days. The temperature can reach up to 30C during the morning and drop to -7C at night.