

**Wetlands and Lakes of Southern Africa**

● Wetland & World Heritage Site  
RAMSAR site (area in square km)

- 0 to 500
- 500 to 1 000
- 1 000 to 1 500
- 1 500 to 2 000
- bigger than 2 000

- Main Perennial River
- ▭ Transfrontier Conservation Area
- ▭ National Park

**Lake and Wetland type**

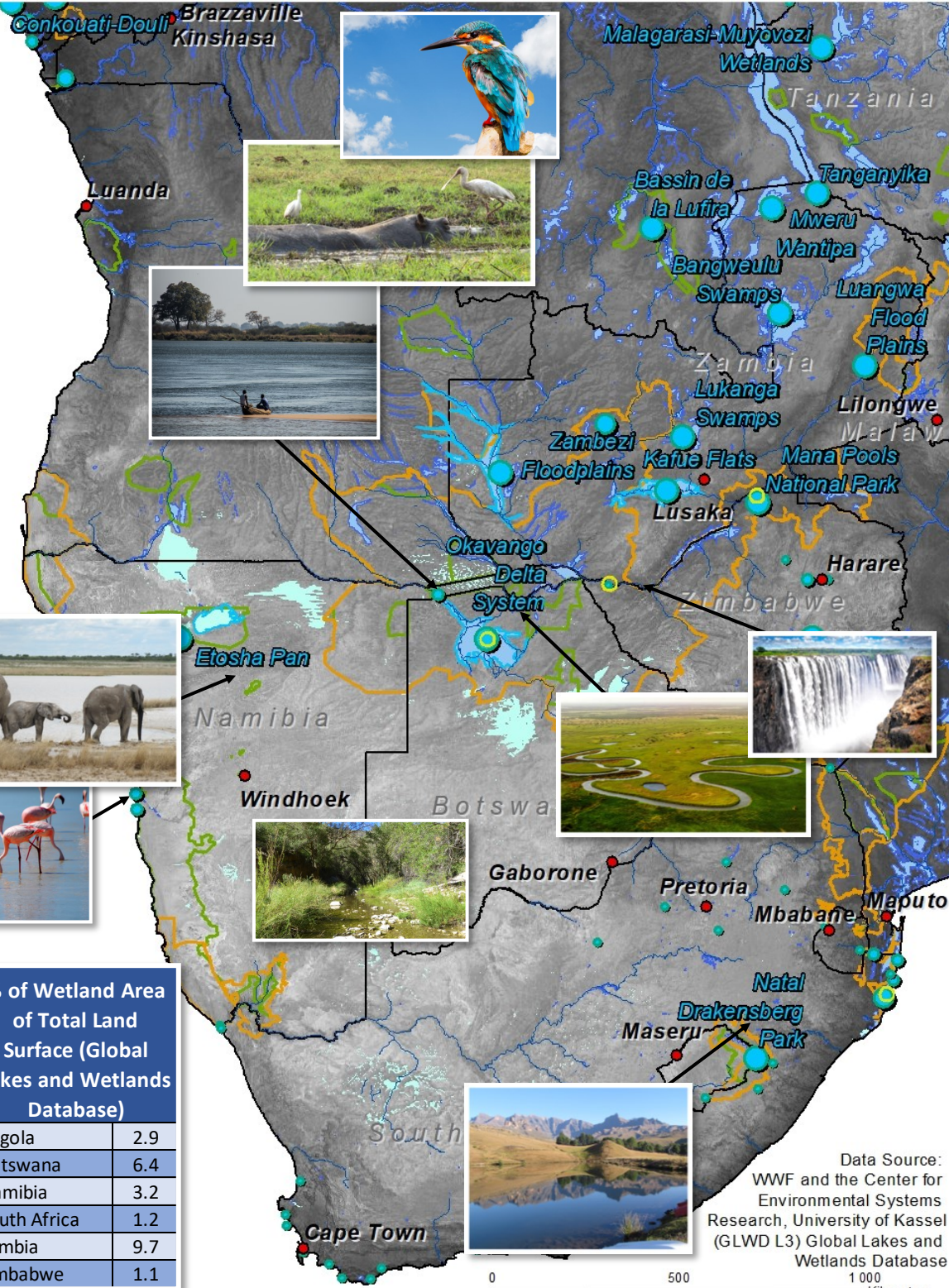
- Coastal, brackish, saline or intermittent
- Freshwater

**Largest Ramsar Sites in southern Africa**

Ramsar Site	Country	Ramsar Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
Okavango Delta System	Botswana	55 374
Bangweulu Swamps	Zambia	11 000
Zambezi Floodplains	Zambia	9 000
Kafue Flats	Zambia	6 005
Etosha Pan	Namibia	6 000

**% of Wetland Area of Total Land Surface (Global Lakes and Wetlands Database)**

Angola	2.9
Botswana	6.4
Namibia	3.2
South Africa	1.2
Zambia	9.7
Zimbabwe	1.1



Data Source:  
WWF and the Center for  
Environmental Systems  
Research, University of Kassel  
(GLWD L3) Global Lakes and  
Wetlands Database

0 500 1 000 Kilometers

**SASSCAL Info Map**

**Lakes and Wetlands of southern Africa**

The highly productive ecosystems of wetlands sustain biological diversity, fulfil flood control functions, and provide essential ecosystem services to the communities residing in and around the wetlands.

Since different definitions of wetlands and wetland types are implemented on national and regional basis, the exact surface area of wetlands in southern Africa remains unknown (FAO 2001). According to the Ramsar Convention of Wetlands of 1971, wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life (Ramsar 2007).

While the Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, legal and policy frameworks are often lacking at national level (Ramsar 2019). Some Ramsar sites do however benefit from conservation status through either National Park status or Transfrontier Conservation Area status.

One of Africa's largest wetlands is the Okavango Delta, a designated Ramsar Site and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Okavango Delta also falls in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KaZa). The Delta does not flow into the ocean and reaches its maximum flooding during the dry winter season in Botswana (MEWT 2013).

SASSCAL, July 2020

**References**

1. FAO. 2001. Wetland Development And Management In SADC Countries.
2. Ramsar. 2007. Ramsar Information Paper No 1.
3. Ramsar. 2019. Urgent challenges to the wise use of wetlands to receive enhanced attention.
4. Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism (MEWT). 2013. Okavango Delta World Heritage Nomination Dossier.