

WILDLIFE HABITATS

Mkomazi National Park

Tanzania's New Star in the Safari Sky

In only three decades, the once degraded Mkomazi landscape has rebounded to a beautiful wilderness with ever-increasing populations of various wildlife.

STORY BY JULIAN AXMANN

As part of the Greater Tsavo-Mkomazi ecosystem, Mkomazi National Park has features that appeal to even the most seasoned safari-goer.

Straddled by the Eastern Arc Mountain chains, the Pares and Usambaras, Mkomazi has forested ecosystems rising above this otherwise arid yet very diverse ecosystem. The waterhole at Dindira and its surrounding plains draw wildlife in. The large herds of elephants, elands, and buffaloes, to name a few, roam freely between what is one of the world's foremost trans-frontier protected area complexes. Tanzania and Kenya are exceptional leaders in wildlife conservation. But, the wilderness of Mkomazi cannot be taken for granted.

Mkomazi National Park is a huge conservation success story. In only three decades, the landscape (degraded by overgrazing, bushfires and poaching)



PHOTOS BY KIM AXMANN

TOP

Mkomazi is a birder's paradise, notable for its groundbirds. The Vulturine Guineafowl is often referred to as the "royal guineafowl" because it tends to have the most striking appearance.

BELOW

Mkomazi is a conservation success story with large herds rebounding like these elephants at Dindira who were all but gone a few decades ago.

rebounded to a beautiful wilderness with ever-increasing populations of various wildlife, notably elephants and ungulates.

Tanzania showed real conservation leadership in prioritizing the protection of this ecosystem. Key to this was inviting the late Tony Fitzjohn who, among other fundamental successes for Mkomazi, made reintroducing black rhinos here a life mission. Now, TANAPA (Tanzania National Parks





Authority) runs two rhino sanctuaries, earning Mkomazi NP the title “Home of the Black Rhino” in Tanzania. Having healthy, breeding populations of black rhinos is a success found on both sides of the borders of Tsavo-Mkomazi. According to Mkomazi’s Chief Park Warden, Emmanuel Moirana, what makes Mkomazi’s rhino viewing stand out is how close and personal TANAPA’s guided vehicles can get you with black rhinos. Most rhino viewing destinations are either for the typically less aggressive white rhinos or from viewing platforms.

Mkomazi NP offers night drives (an experience permitted in a few Tanzanian Parks only) to see nocturnal creatures, such as porcupines and elusive wild cats. Walking safaris allow you to get intimate with nature, and experience some of the incredible bird diversity. With over 400 species, Mkomazi is a hotspot for birders, particularly those looking for ground birds and raptors. Cats include lions, leopards, cheetahs, caracal and serval. Wild dogs and striped hyena are highlights. If you are lucky, you can see the big 5 in a single day. The substantive success of TANAPA and Kenya Wildlife Service in protecting key areas

How to Get to Mkomazi Wilderness Retreat
 The main gate, Zange, is only 110km from Taveta border crossing from Kenya which can be driven in about two hours. From the gate, the camp is less than 20km and makes for a pleasant 45-minute game drive. Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA) is about 150km from Zange gate (around 3 hrs). Coming from Mombasa or Tanga, the Uмба gate is 55km from the Lunga Lunga/ Horo Horo border. From Uмба, an adventurous route through the length of the park (165km) leads you to the Retreat. Kamakota is another gate by the West Usambaras and near Lake Jipe a fourth gate, Ndea, will eventually be opened.

Visit mkomaziwilderness.com to learn more and to make a reservation, **email:** mkomazi@kimango.com or **WhatsApp:** +255 659 638 484
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of the Tsavo-Mkomazi Ecosystem is visible in increasing wildlife populations.

Mkomazi means place of little water in the Pare language and so the park’s main water reservoir, Dindira Dam, attracts a plethora of wildlife. On a clear day, your backdrop from Dindira Hill to all the wildlife is Mt Kilimanjaro. And this is where Mkomazi Wilderness Retreat is located. This is an exceptional place to stay a few nights, on which you may hear elephants frolic in the water or lions roar. ●

TOP LEFT

As the southernmost tip of the Sahel, Mkomazi is more arid than other Tanzanian parks. Therefore you can find animals otherwise uncommon like oryx.

BELOW

Reason for hope: The next generation. Giraffe numbers slowly increasing in Mkomazi National Park.



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