

Fauna of Lesotho

The park contains a diversity of faunal species, many of which occur only in the high altitude regions of the Maloti-Drakensberg mountain complex.

Mammals

Of some 24 mammalian species recorded in the Highlands area, only the ice rat, *Otomys sloggetti*, is endemic. Small to medium sized mammal species present in the park include the ice rat, the clawless otter (*Aonyx capensis*), African wild cat (*Felis lybica*) (there is circumstantial evidence that leopard (*Panthera pardus*) still occurs in a few refuge habitats), black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*), porcupine (*Hystrix africaeaustralis*), caracal (*Felis caracal*), grey rhebuck (*Palea capreolus*), and rock hyrax (*Procavia capensis*). All of these species with the exception of the clawless otter, grey rhebuck and rock hyrax are considered to be endangered in the park area (although not necessarily in the sub-region as a whole).

The only Red Data mammal present, according to the Loxton Venn and Associates (1993) survey, is the white-tailed rat (*Mystromys albicaudatus*). This species is listed as vulnerable.

Although no formal assessments have yet been made of the mammals present in the park, the following list of twelve species has been taken from patrol reports.

Small mammals such the striped field mouse would not normally be reported by field staff.

African wildcat

Baboon (*Papio ursinus*)

Grey rhebuck

Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*)

Smith's red rock rabbit (*Pronolagus rupestris*)

Porcupine (*Hystrix africaeaustralis*)

Rock hyrax

Ice rat

Black backed jackal

Small grey mongoose (*Galerella pulverulenta* Basutica)

Water mongoose (*Atilax paludinosus*)

Striped polecat (zorilla) (*icotonyx striatus*)

Hunting is known to have been taking place within the park in the past. Foot traffic and horse will be a permanent feature on the Holomo pass, and consequently, some illegal hunting must be expected. The good quality access road from Hlotse to the park provides access to the boundary of the park and with this, a similar threat of illegal hunting. Current faunal population levels are probably lower than what is considered to be the natural carrying capacity of the park.

This list will be expanded as further works is undertaken.

Reptiles and amphibian

The six lizard and four snake species recorded in the Highland area are generally widely distributed in South Africa, the exception being Essex's mountain lizard (*Tropidosaura essexi*). This species is known only from the summit slopes of the Drakensberg, the adjacent Free State and the Lesotho highlands.

Seven amphibian species were recorded by Loxton-Venn (*ibid*). of these, two are essentially aquatic (*Xenopus laevis* and *Rana vartebralis*). Of the remainder, three are more or less closely associated with water (*Heleophyrne natalensis*, *Rana dracomontana* and *Strongylopus grayii*) and two are terrestrial toads (*Buforangeri* and *B. gariepensis*).

This list will be expanded as further work is undertaken.

Fish

No information is available on the fish species present in the Tsehlanyane River. There is circumstantial evidence that trout were previously introduced into the river, and that a residual population exists downstream of the park. A weir has been constructed in the lower reaches of the river within the park, and it is considered likely (but not confirmed) that this forms a barrier to fish migration, and that therefore; no trout are present in the park itself. Surveys will be undertaken to sample the river above the weir, to determine the possible existence of both indigenous species such as the Maloti Minnow, as well as exotic fish species, such as trout.