



JOHN MENDELSON is a freelance researcher and writer based in Namibia. Matters concerned with biology, the socio-economics of rural livelihoods, birds, land and information are his principal academic passions. He has a PhD in Zoology from the University of Natal, South Africa, and was born and partially raised in Kenya.

CORNELIS VANDERPOST is an Associate Professor at HOORC in Maun. He is a geographer with a PhD from the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, and has produced many geographic databases of wetlands. The social and ecological dimensions of nature conservation, and the role of conservation in rural development are among his major research interests.

LARS RAMBERG is Professor in Limnology at HOORC, and was the Centre's founding director. He holds a PhD in Limnology from Uppsala University, Sweden, and his research focuses mainly on the interplay between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, functional relations between land use and water use and their effects on hydrology, and chain effects on ecology and ultimate human responses.

MIKE MURRAY-HUDSON grew up in Botswana. His undergraduate degree in Geology and Zoology gave an early indication of his broad interests. After about 20 years of varied environmental work, he obtained a PhD from the University of Florida in systems ecology. He is now at HOORC working on the effects of hydrological change on the Delta's ecosystems.

PIOTR WOLSKI graduated as a hydrogeologist at the Academy of Mining & Metallurgy in Cracow, Poland, and later completed a PhD at ITC, Enschede, The Netherlands. In 2000, he began working as a hydrologist at HOORC on surface water-groundwater interactions, flood dynamics, hydrological change and variability, carbon and water fluxes, and climate change in the Okavango.

KETLHATLOGILE MOSEPOLE is a Senior Research Scholar at HOORC and a PhD candidate in Fisheries Biology and Management at the University of Bergen, having previously obtained an MPhil in Fisheries Biology and Management. Fisheries management; fish ecology and biology; aquatic ecosystem functioning; and natural resource management are his main research interests.



# Okavango Delta: Floods of Life

John Mendelsohn • Cornelis vanderPost • Lars Ramberg •  
Mike Murray-Hudson • Piotr Wolski • Keta Mosepole

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# Okavango Delta: Floods of Life



*Okavango Delta: Floods of Life* describes the origins, functioning, life and people of this remarkable wetland. In combination, no other body of water in Africa is so large, well protected, pristine, economically valuable, and well-known internationally. This blend of values could be unique worldwide.

The Delta brings to mind wildlife and water. But there is much more: it is an interface between wetland and dryland and a rich reservoir of nutrients. It runs on internal processes that shift water from one area to another and keep the water fresh. Pulses of water retreat and then inundate the following season to permit the recycling of nutrients and life to spring from sediments. Each square metre of sediment may contain fifty thousand crustacean eggs, for example, and countless other constituents of life. This is a patchwork of diversity of habitat and life forms; economic opportunities that enable people to move from subsistence to lifestyles that provide cash and food security; and good governance.

Permanent swamps at the head of the Delta filter out most sediments, clays and nutrients from the incoming water. Peat beneath these swamps stores large volumes of nutrients, while fish seek refuge in permanent waters when the flood waters are low.

The Delta's wealth of life is replenished each year downstream in the seasonal swamps when catalytic flood waters from Angola stir the dormant nutrients and eggs into regular production. Drier, occasional floodplains are the centres of biological diversity and provide settings for episodic booms of biological production.

Spike McCarthy, who has contributed much to our knowledge of the Delta, wrote: 'It is almost as if the Okavango is a single organism, with the different communities serving the function of specific organs, and working together to ensure the well-being of the whole – a kind of super-organism. The Okavango has been around a long time and is pretty robust, but it too has its jugular.'

There is a need to understand the jugular and to debate the future, considering the competing challenges and opportunities that depend on this pristine wetland. *Okavango Delta: Floods of Life* provides information and ideas to improve that debate in the hope that this wetland remains one of planet earth's great assets.