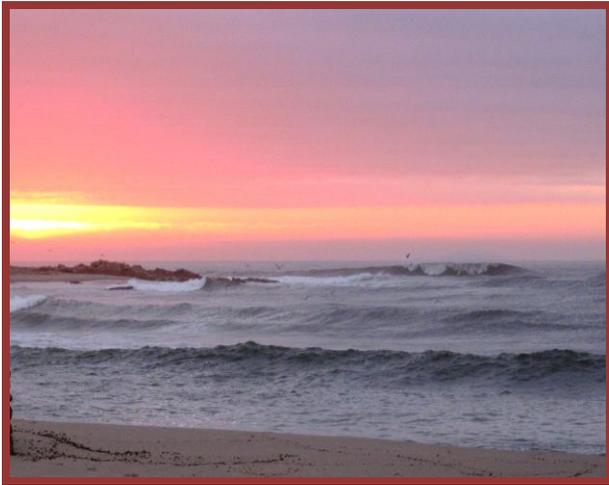


## Skeleton Coast Park



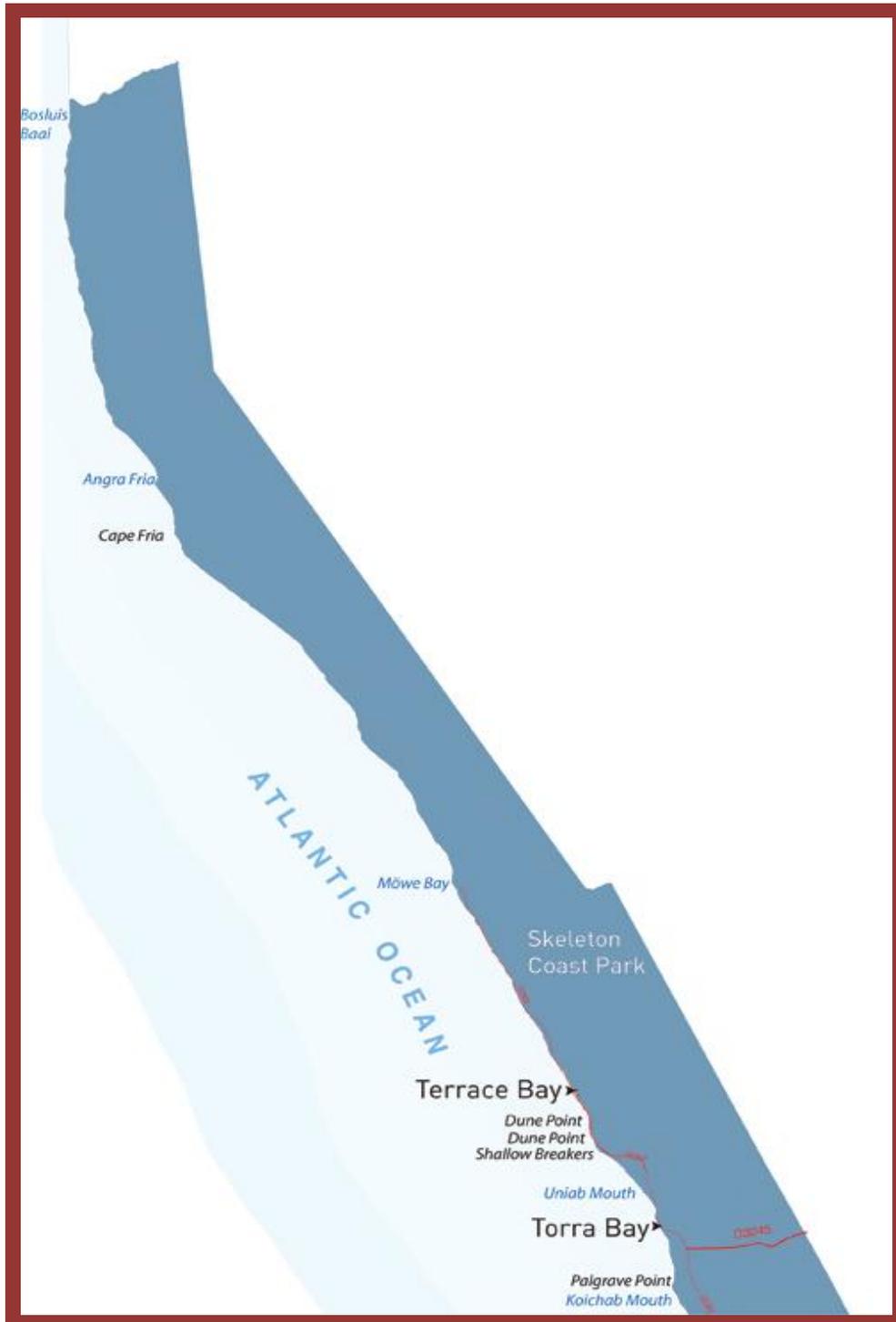
Covering 1.6 million hectares, the Skeleton Coast Park remains one of the world's last great wildernesses. Proclaimed in its present form in 1973, it extends from the Ugab River in the south for 500 km to the Kunene River in the north and about 40 km inland. Dense coastal fogs and cold sea breezes caused by the cold Benguela Current add atmosphere to the windswept beaches that are littered with shipwrecks, bones and other debris.

The park also contains rich lichen fields (more than 100 species have been recorded), is a sanctuary for desert-dwelling elephants, rhino and lion and the Kunene River mouth is a vital wetland.

### FACT FILE

<b>Park size:</b>	16 390 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Proclaimed:</b>	1971
<b>Natural features:</b>	The Atlantic Ocean, with sandy and pebble beaches, sand dunes, ephemeral riverbeds and canyons to rugged canyons with walls of richly coloured volcanic rock and extensive mountain ranges.
<b>Vegetation:</b>	Namib Desert Biome. Vegetation type: Northern Desert, Central Desert, North-Western Escarpment and Inselbergs. Lichens, dollar bush ( <i>Zygophyllum stapfii</i> ), narra plant ( <i>Acanthosicyos horridus</i> ), vygies ( <i>Mesembryanthemum</i> sp) on plains. In dry riverbeds makalani palm ( <i>Hyphaene petersiana</i> ), wild tamarisk ( <i>Tamarix usneoides</i> ) and mopane trees ( <i>Colophospermum mopane</i> ).
<b>Wildlife:</b>	Desert-dwelling elephant, lion and black rhino. Cheetah, crocodile, springbok, Hartmann's zebra, gemsbok, Heaviside's dolphin, green turtle. The 306 bird species recorded here include greater flamingo, lesser flamingo, lappet-faced vulture, Rüppell's korhaan and Gray's lark.
<b>Tourism:</b>	Photography. Game viewing. Angling. A fishing licence must be obtained before entering the Skeleton Coast Park. Double rooms and one beach chalet, restaurant, bar and freezing facilities at Terrace Bay. Entrance only with a booking. Camping at Terrace Bay is permitted only during December and January. Booking essential. An exclusive fly-in tourism concession for the northern section of the park is currently under review.

## Map



The Skeleton Coast Park is located in northwestern Namibia. The nearest towns are Khorixas to the east and Henties Bay to the south.

## **Conservation successes**

The Skeleton Coast Park has no fences, no artificial waterholes, and no active ecological management programmes. The 'hands-off approach' is considered best, but it mustn't be confused the lack of priority given to this important park.

The Skeleton Coast Park not only provides an essential link north for the new Namib-Skeleton Coast National Park, it is also important for ancient wildlife migration routes east to the Etosha National Park.

Many wildlife species, including desert dwelling elephants and lions, rely upon the numerous west flowing rivers (known as 'linear oases') that thread through the park for survival. While rivers rarely flow, underground water and springs in the river beds nourish vegetation, riparian forest, and provide water, food, breeding grounds and shelter.

The Skeleton Coast Park is also home to roaring and fossilised dunes, ancient lava flows and castles of clay. There are over 100 lichen species with more still to be discovered and their role is essential to the park ecology.

The northern border of the park is the Kunene River which rises in the remote Angolan highlands and is one of Namibia's few perennial rivers and one of the country's only two permanent estuaries. Historically it supported large numbers of game species but these have largely been hunted out. In terms of bird species diversity it is richer than any other Namibian wetland.

## **Key management issues**

There are several mining concessions in the park and monitoring of activities by concession holders is problematic. Off-road driving leaves scars that can remain for centuries. Uncontrolled access into the park for angling is sometimes a problem.

## **Future plans**

Much of the area was previously under the old borders of the Etosha National Park. Advanced negotiations are underway with neighbouring communal area conservancies and tourism concessions to form a larger conservation area that will link the Skeleton Coast Park with the Etosha National Park.