8.9 Lesotho

Protected and conserved areas in Lesotho\(^{58}\)

Lesotho has four protected areas covering 80 km\(^2\) of land (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2019j).

One of Lesotho’s parks, the Sehlabathebe National Park is a mixed natural/cultural World Heritage Site and together with the Khaibamba Drakensberg National Park in South Africa forms a transboundary protected area, known as the Maloti Drakensberg Park, a haven for many threatened and endemic species.

In addition to the formally designated protected areas, there are several areas that are either informally designated or proposed for protection in various parts of the country. There are plans to proclaim Letsa-La-Letsie Nature Reserve and Tsatsane as protected areas. In order to meet all the biodiversity targets, 49% of Lesotho Highlands should be under some form of conservation management – possibly a mix of managed resource areas and smaller protected areas. Eight key areas for priority action have been identified by Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project.

Transboundary protected and conserved areas

Lesotho includes part of the Maloti Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site which is inside the Maloti Drakensberg TFCA.

Policy context

A comprehensive report on legislation and policy related to protected area management, governance, and equity was undertaken by the BIOPAMA programme. It identified 17 relevant laws and policies in Lesotho (Tessema, 2019).

Key species\(^{59}\)

Despite its small size, Lesotho has very high levels of plant endemism with at least 54 endemic species. Lesotho is also home to 340 bird species and a number of mammal species, including the endemic ice rat (*Otomys sloggetti*) and white-tailed mouse (*Mystromys albicaudatus*). The chacma baboon (*Papio ursinus*), once abundant, has suffered a precipitous decline.

Lesotho also has high levels of endemism in the reptile and amphibian groups. The 14 recorded fish species include one endemic species.

Pressures and threats\(^{60}\)

One of the main threats to biodiversity in Lesotho is habitat loss and degradation, particularly of wetlands and rangelands. Poor range management practices have resulted in the loss of plant cover and topsoil. Uncontrolled fires are also a threat in the

---

58 The section draws on information contained in Lesotho’s Sixth National Report to the CBD (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2019).
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
**Coverage of protected areas in Lesotho**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of protected area</th>
<th>Area protected or conserved*</th>
<th>Area protected or conserved**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial and inland water</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* WDPA dataset  ** From National Report on Biodiversity

Source: Kingdom of Lesotho (2019); UNEP-WCMC & IUCN (2019j).

**National designations of protected and conserved areas in Lesotho**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National designation</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Park</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 394</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNEP-WCMC & IUCN (2019j).

**Protected and conserved areas in Lesotho in IUCN Governance Types**

- Not Reported (No. 1)
- IV. Habitat/Species Management (No. 1)
- Not Reported (No. 2)

Source: UNEP-WCMC & IUCN (2019j).

**Protected and conserved areas designated as global sites of importance in Lesotho**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global designation</th>
<th>No. of sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO World Heritage Sites</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Natural or Mixed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetlands of International Importance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ramsar sites)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ramsar (2019); UNESCO (2019a, 2019b).

**Priority areas for conservation**

- 6 sites
  - Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas

Source: BirdLife International (2019c).
rangelands. Initiatives for economic development, such as mining, can also represent threats to habitats in Lesotho. With increasing climate uncertainty, subsistence agriculture is increasingly encroaching into remaining habitats. Invasive species represent a major threat in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. In addition, climate change is increasing climate uncertainty.

Figure 8.18 Lesotho protected areas

![Lesotho protected areas map](image-url)