

Botswana - Seasonality

Wildlife viewing at our Botswana camps is good all year round, but each season has its own nuance and special charm – there simply is not one ‘perfect time’ to visit.

It is important to remember that while game viewing can never be guaranteed, there are some trends that can be seen when we combine our knowledge of seasons, habitats and water availability with animal distribution, their numbers, and thus where they can be found. The table below gives some insight into these trends.



● Green Season Highlights

- Excellent game concentrations in Central Kalahari
- Time of abundance ... births, babies and breeding (+ predators)
- Summer bird migrants present in breeding plumage
- Excellent photographic opportunities ... great light, colour and subject matter

● Transition Season Highlights

- Moderate climate with a mix of the green and dry seasons including the dynamics of a change in season

● Dry Season Highlights

- Diminished water availability results in high game concentrations and density
- Peak inundation in the Okavango - perfect time for mokoro and boating activities
- Great visibility in leafless woodland
- Cooler and drier time of the year



Green Season – December to March

In summer, Botswana is a productive paradise of vibrant floral displays and a kaleidoscope of colours, a special time in southern Africa. Summer mornings are exceptional. The temperature is perfect for warm pre-dawn starts to the day; like the animals, you can use the hotter midday for a siesta. Light for photography is at its best, while dark afternoon storm clouds often add further mood.

There's an explosion of new life: many species give birth to their young and areas like the Central Kalahari are at their wildlife viewing peak. Predator sightings are frequent as they take full advantage of the abundance of inexperienced younger prey. It's also the best season for birding: several species display splendid breeding plumage and many intra-African and Palearctic migratory species are present.

Okavango Delta: Land Camps

Floodplains exposed by the receding waters are transformed by the rains into a tapestry of green. This couch grass luxuriance draws multiple antelope species and zebra from the woodland of the larger islands onto the plains to give birth, making for thrilling predator-prey interactions. Certain predators like spotted hyaena can also den and breed at this time. Myriad migratory bird species arrive, such as vibrant kingfishers, vocal cuckoos and colourful bee-eaters – an excellent time for bird watchers and photographers alike. Game with young, feeding in these open areas, offers excellent photographic opportunities with rich landscapes and dramatic summer skies. The lower water levels also make it possible to explore the islands and plains either on foot or in a vehicle.

Okavango Delta: Water Camps

A large area of the Delta still has permanent water, so those camps with access to permanent shallow floodplains and channels offer the quintessential Okavango experience – that of quietly gliding through the waterways on mokoro or boat. Specialised mammal species such as sitatunga and red lechwe thrive during this time of year and can be seen on the fringes of, as well as within, these water wonderlands. For birders, heronries and other nesting colonies are active now and at their most impressive in terms of bird numbers. Bird 'specials' like lesser jacana, African pygmy-goose, coppery-tailed coucal, and Pel's fishing-owl remain common sightings. Migrant birds arrive in numbers, from woodland kingfisher to ruff.



Linyanti Region

With the Savute Channel flowing for the first time since 1983, the wildlife dynamic of the Linyanti region has changed – for the better. The famed elephant population that historically dispersed in the summer months now stay in the area in good numbers thanks to the water availability. Expansive floodplains surrounding Zibadianja Lagoon and Savute Channel and the mopane woodland's seasonal pans fill with water at this time of year creating optimal game viewing areas. Between November and December, birthing impala amongst other antelope species cover the landscape in their numbers; this plethora of young animals attracts a variety of predators (lion, leopard, cheetah and wild dog) in their turn. The young of species from zebra to mongoose and warthog make for a wondrous time to observe and photograph the comical and endearing antics of young learning and playing. Phenomenal birding opportunities abound thanks to habitat diversity; the influx of migratory species adds further colour and numbers.

Central Kalahari

With the advent of the summer rains (December to April) the desert truly comes to life. Here, in the ancient fossil riverbeds and associated pans, the brief spring rains create the miracle of endless seas of nutritious grasses that attract large concentrations of gemsbok, springbok and red hartebeest, their newborn calves and lambs, followed inevitably by predators such as lion, cheetah – often seen at this time with cubs – and black-backed jackal. Brief afternoon thunderstorms create a dramatic backdrop for some of the best summer wildlife viewing on the continent, as the landscape is almost instantly altered into several hues of green; fields of wild flowers burst out of the ground taking advantage of the limited moisture on offer. Summer birding opportunities are excellent.



Transition Season – April to May, November

Okavango Delta

The unusual aspect of the Okavango is that it receives its water in Botswana's dry season. Only after summer rainfall has ceased do the floodwaters arrive in the Delta from further north, creating a fertile oasis crammed with life. It can take six months for the waters to filter down from the Panhandle in the north to the outer limits of the Delta. The level of each year's inundation is primarily dependent on rainfall in the catchment areas in Angola as well as over the Delta itself and there is a distinct short- and long-term cycle to the flooding patterns of the Okavango and associated river systems. This phenomenon means that a huge diversity of fauna and flora thrives in April to May. Also at this time, while the water-based camps continue to boast the animals and plants that have adapted to a water-based system (from delicate reed frogs, secretive sitatunga, lily-trotting jacanas and a plethora of other life), the slow movements of the water means that land-based camps can begin to offer a mix of land and water activities. Game drives on islands may happen less often, owing to higher water levels.

In November, the first of the summer bird migrants have begun to appear and African skimmers nest on more exposed sandbank areas such as Xigera Lagoon. As the waters recede, fish of all sizes are caught in the remaining pools and are preyed upon by dramatic concentrations of herons, storks, pelicans, egrets, fish eagles and other piscivorous birds.

Linyanti Region

May is characterised by huge concentrations of game. General game is plentiful with good numbers of zebra, giraffe and buffalo congregating around the Savute Channel and the DumaTau floodplains. Large numbers of elephant also generally settle along the Linyanti River for the winter months and take advantage of the winter browse that this riparian habitat has to offer. Increased water levels attract good numbers of waterbirds.

Meanwhile, in November, the landscape waits in pensive apprehension for the coming rainy season as day temperatures climb. Vegetation is at its driest, making wildlife sightings easy as species congregate along the Savute Channel, Savute Marsh and other water sources.



Central Kalahari

Game densities are still impressive between April and May, including the Kalahari's year-round opportunities to view unique mammal species such as honey badger, reclusive brown hyaena, porcupine, bat-eared and Cape fox, suricates and even leopard.

The heat of summer begins in November, but often, so have the short spring-summer rains, and with these, the advent of the births of thousands of springbok and other plains game. Following these sporadic and limited rains, grass sprouts in the ancient river valleys and fossil pans, providing much-needed sustenance for enormous concentrations of springbok and oryx during their breeding season. These abundant herbivore concentrations are ideal for viewing the attendant predators. Birding is excellent with summer migratory species returning to the area, such as pallid harrier and Caspian plover.

Dry Season – June to October

Okavango Delta

June to August is the height of the annual inundation. This very special occurrence, cyclical in nature, is much-needed in maintaining the spectacular biodiversity of the area. The effects are fantastic, as large grassland areas and floodplains become inundated, and all creatures must adapt to a watery existence. Waterbirds and other predators follow the waters capitalising on opportunities of this changing environment. Game densities on the Delta fringes can rise significantly due to seasonal movements from regions such as the Kalahari. Unique to the Okavango Delta, the catfish run happens each year, starting in early August and ending in November. During this period, the receding water levels concentrate the smaller fish species, causing predatory catfish to gather in their hundreds and work their way upstream as they hunt. In their wake, they attract an eager supporting cast of waterbirds that also congregate in equally impressive numbers to feed on any remaining survivors.

Linyanti Region

Predator sightings are frequent owing to the reduced vegetation cover and the predictive movements of some species along the reduced and more isolated water sources. Nesting flocks of southern carmine bee-eaters arrive – one of Botswana's greatest avian spectacles as they dazzle visitors with colour, numbers and sounds. Elephant and buffalo tend to be found in larger herds. General game species are plentiful with large herds of zebra, kudu, giraffe, waterbuck and impala seen daily. The best time to see wild dog is during the denning season which spans the dry winter months between June and August. This is a good time to possibly view the rare roan and sable antelope.



Central Kalahari

At this time, the Kalahari is typically a dry desert-type system, when game viewing moves into the vegetated dune belt and pan systems surrounding the fossilised valleys: most antelope move into the thickets to feed on small shrubs and tubers. Sightings are good around Kalahari Plains Camp itself, especially springbok, giraffe, gemsbok, red hartebeest and steenbok, as well as predators such as lion, cheetah, leopard, daytime brown hyaena and caracal for the lucky. Small predators still around are black-backed jackal, meerkat (suricates), Cape fox, honey badger and a dozen mongoose species