



NYIKA

A Guide to
Nyika National Park, Malawi

Sigrid Anna Johnson

Orchid
Disa erubescens

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Revised 2023

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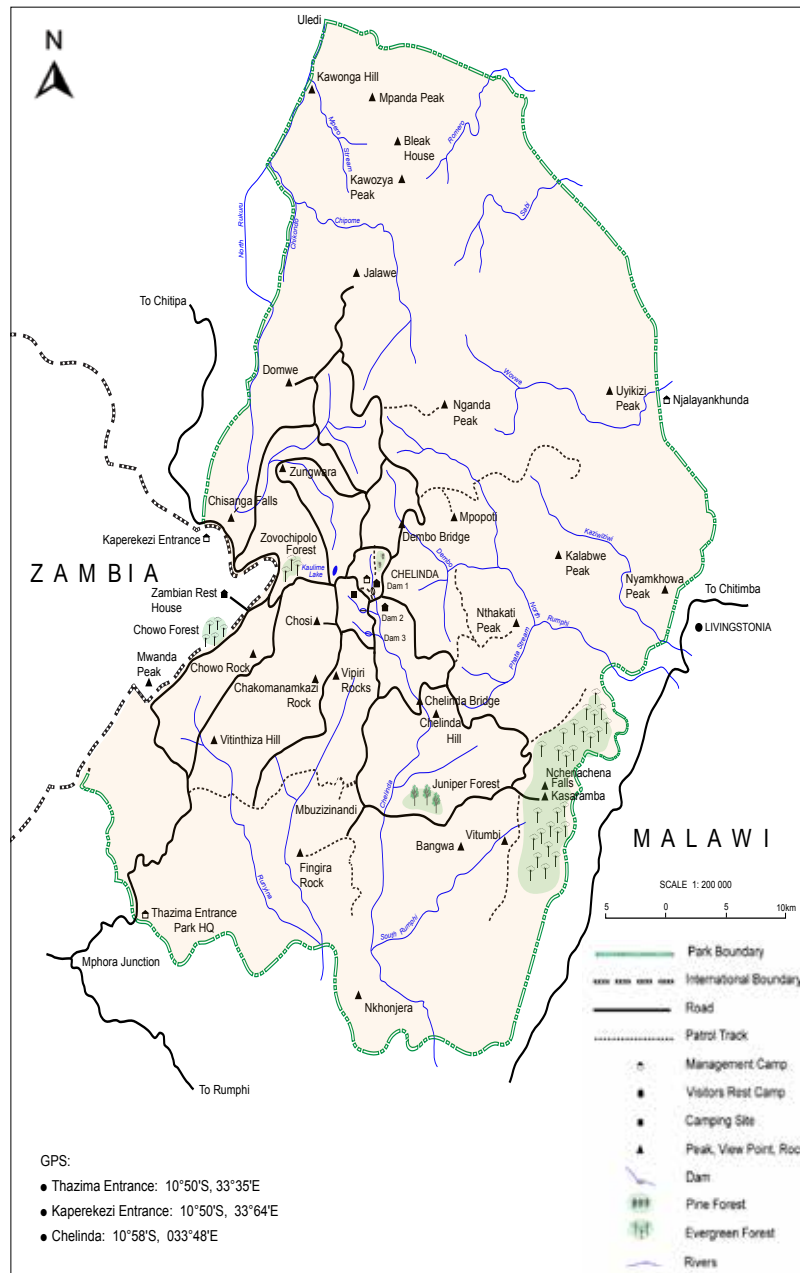
This book is dedicated to

Malawi's environmental educators...

... it is because of your efforts
that new generations
will understand the value of
conserving wild places.

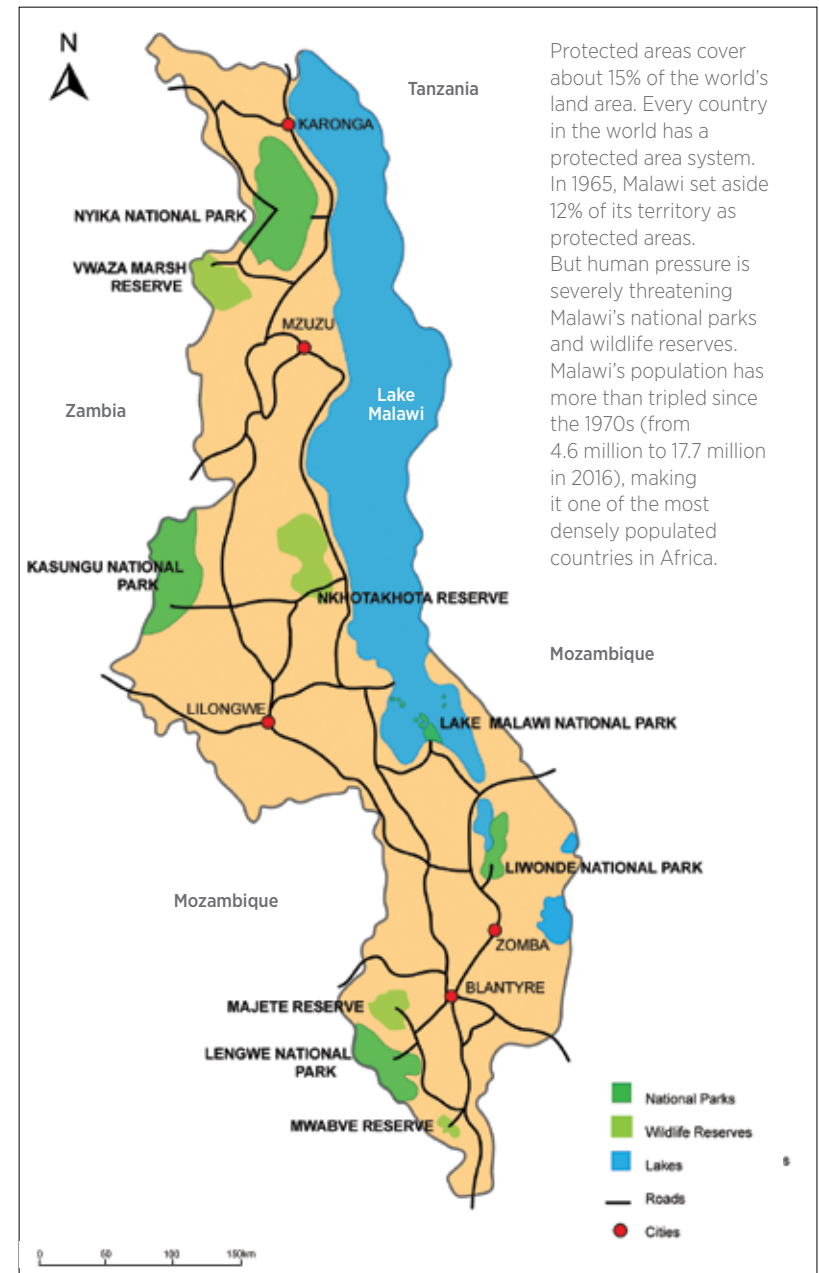
Nyika National Park

The park is centred on the 2,600 m high Nyika Plateau. The park can be accessed only from the south at Thazima Gate and the west at Kaperekezi Gate



Malawi's National Parks and Wildlife Reserves

Nyika was Malawi's first national park. It is the largest and highest of Malawi's parks, covering an area of over 3,000 sq. km, reaching over 2,600 m in elevation



Protected areas cover about 15% of the world's land area. Every country in the world has a protected area system. In 1965, Malawi set aside 12% of its territory as protected areas. But human pressure is severely threatening Malawi's national parks and wildlife reserves. Malawi's population has more than tripled since the 1970s (from 4.6 million to 17.7 million in 2016), making it one of the most densely populated countries in Africa.



Greater Double-collared Sunbird
Nectarinia afra

Overleaf:
Kasaramba
Viewpoint

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Welcome to Nyika National Park

Nyika National Park is the largest of Malawi's five national parks. The central feature of the park, the Nyika Plateau, was formally declared Malawi's first national park in 1965. The park was expanded in 1978 and covers an area of 3,134 km² in northern Malawi. It is centred on 10°33'S and 33°50'E and lies astride the Chitipa, Karonga and Rumphi Districts of the Northern Region. Part of its western boundary is the Malawi-Zambia border, adjoining a section of the Zambian Nyika National Park.

Description

Nyika is one of the most beautiful montane plateaux to be found in Central Africa. Rolling grassland interspersed with small streams and valleys harbour patches of tropical montane evergreen forest in sheltered hollows; plateau escarpments are covered with broad-leaved woodland, the characteristic savannah woodland of Central Africa. On the wetter eastern escarpment are large areas of sub-montane evergreen forest. Waterfalls cascade hundreds of metres over the plateau edge.

The atmosphere of the plateau offers complete contrast to the protected areas of Malawi's lowlands. Mosquitoes are minimal and the climate is cool; temperatures rarely exceed 26°C, even during the warmest months from September to December. Frosts can occur between June and August.

From the edge of the plateau there are extraordinary views: north and east over Lake Malawi to Tanzania; south to Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve and the Viphya Plateau; and west to the hills of Zambia.

Wildlife

The park contains a diverse array of mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish and butterflies. Several species and sub-species are endemic, found nowhere else in the

Jane Mtumbuka,
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of National Parks
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long-time Nyika
DNPW Ranger

world. Common large mammals are zebra, eland, roan, reedbuck, warthog, bushbuck, common duiker and leopard. Wildlife viewing is excellent on the short grassland.

Nyika is home to more than 430 bird species. This can be attributed to the wide range of habitats within the park. Throughout this book, the first time a plant or animal with a common name is mentioned, the Latin name is included as well. Thereafter, only the common name is used.

Wildflowers

Nyika is renowned for its spectacular wildflowers. After the grasslands burn during the dry season, the Nyika Plateau erupts into a profusion of colour that lasts through the rainy season. More than 200 terrestrial and epiphytic orchid species have been identified, seven of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Historic sites

The park has numerous sites of spiritual and cultural importance to Malawians, including prehistoric rock paintings. Evidence of the Iron Age is present in the form of pit mines and smelting kilns. Traditional beliefs suggest that an enormous serpent with spiritual powers lives in the only naturally occurring lake on the plateau.

Outdoor activities

Rainbow trout in several rivers and dams on the plateau can provide interesting sport fishing. Visitors can walk, overnight hike and bike safely in the park, accompanied by a guide. Certain times of the year are best for different activities:

Walking - May through November

Birding - October through March

Wildlife Viewing - October through March

Wildflowers - October through March

Views - November through May

Knowledgeable guides can be organised through the DNPW office at Chelinda, or through the various tourist accommodation facilities, to take visitors to sites of interest.

Full species lists for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, butterflies, fish and orchids are included as appendices

The first time a plant or animal with a common name is mentioned, the Latin name is included as well. Thereafter, only the common name is used

Roan Antelope in the Nyika grasslands. Roan Antelope are one of the largest species of antelope, found in woodland and grassland savanna

