

4. Blesbokspruit

Geographical Coordinates 26°17'S 28°30'E

Area 1,858ha

Location About 3km east of the town of Springs, in the district of Springs, central-southern Transvaal Province, in north-east South Africa.

Date of Ramsar Designation 2 October 1986.

Other International Designations None.

National Designations Bird Sanctuary^P (Marievale, 998ha).

Principal Features A wetland formed during the 1930s by the construction of embankments to carry roads and pipelines across the river Blesbok for the local gold mining industry (disused quarry pits and rubble heaps remain from past mining activities). The embankments caused the flooding of adjacent grassland for a distance of 20km upstream, creating vast areas of open, shallow water, and extending the river width to 0.65km. The townships of Bakerton and Daggafontein are located to the west, and agricultural land lies to the east. Water levels can be controlled via sluice gates, making this one of the few permanent water bodies in the Transvaal region. The emergent vegetation consists mainly of extensive beds of *Phragmites australis* and *Typha latifolia*. The site is seasonally important for locally migrant water birds, including* *Ardea purpurea*, *Mycteria ibis*, *Plegadis falcinellus*, *Platalea alba*, *Phoenicopus ruber roseus*, *P. minor*, *Plectropterus gambensis*, *Anas erythrorhynchos*, *Circus ranivorus* and *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Notable mammals include *Redunca arundinum*. (2b,3b)

Conservation Issues The Bird Sanctuary is wardened and bird observation hides are located within the site. A total of 860ha of the northern part of the site is privately owned and managed as a nature reserve. The area is being degraded by inputs of polluted, industrial waste water, containing high loads of suspended solids, from mining operations further upstream. Sewage is also discharged into the river. Game species have been introduced to the site for hunting, although hunting is now prohibited in the Bird Sanctuary.