



# Ramsar Sites Information Service

## Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance

# Malawi

2 Ramsar Site(s) covering 286,356 ha

### Elephant Marsh

Site number: 2,308 | Country: Malawi | Administrative region: The Elephant Marsh straddles the administrative districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje.

Area: 61,556 ha | Coordinates: 16°21'29"S 35°00'58"E | Designation dates: 01-07-2017

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

The Site, situated in the lower Shire valley in Southern Malawi, is a mosaic of rooted swamp vegetation, floating flora and open water with grassy margins and reed beds, interspersed with islands containing reeds, shrubs and palm trees. It was named "Elephant Marsh" by the explorer David Livingstone in 1859, who counted as many as 800 elephants in one sighting. Nowadays the elephants are largely gone, but the Site supports over 20,000 waterbirds. Around 26 waterbird species have been found breeding in the area; among them are the threatened Madagascar squacco heron (*Ardeola idae*), wattled crane (*Bugenerus carunculatus*) and grey crowned crane (*Balearica regulorum*). It also supports populations of hippopotamus, and several species of fish and aquatic invertebrates, including the newly identified sub-species of the butterfly *Colotis amata* that breeds exclusively on the lake edge surrounded by the evergreen shrub *Salvadora persica*. Elephant Marsh plays an important role in maintaining the valley's hydrological regime, through flood control, water storage and supply of nutrient-rich sediment. The combination of the different habitat types within the Marsh, and the changes in these over the course of the flood cycle, give rise to the overall productivity of the Site and its importance for the conservation of resident and migratory species. Poaching and the removal of the remaining large trees bordering the Marsh may further impact groups of fauna that rely on these habitats, such as the waterbirds that roost and breed there, and the mammals that take refuge there from the surrounding cultivated and disturbed areas.

### Lake Chilwa

Site number: 869 | Country: Malawi | Administrative region: Zomba District

Area: 224,800 ha | Coordinates: 15°15'S 35°45'E | Designation dates: 14-11-1996

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Lake Chilwa. 14/11/96; Southern Malawi; 224,800 ha; 15°15'S 035°45'E. A shallow, saline lake subject to seasonal variations in water level. Surrounded by dense swamps, neutral to acid marshes, and seasonally inundated grassland floodplains. The lake consists of numerous islands, two of which are permanently inhabited. The lake supports internationally important numbers of 153 species of resident and 30 species of palearctic (migratory) waterbirds. Apart from human settlements, activities include fishing, agriculture (rice and dimba cultivation), and livestock grazing. The fishery annually contributes 25-30% of the total fish production in Malawi. Lake Chilwa is shared with Mozambique. Ramsar site no. 869.