



DAY 5 SCHEDULE

START: GWETA

END: ELEPHANT SSANDS ECO CAMP

Morning Activities

1. MEERKATS OF THE GWETA
~ MAKGADIKGADI SALT PANS ~ DRT: 2 HR~
2. WALK ALONG NATA RIVER BANK
WAY POINTS ~ DRT 1HR
3. (OPTIONAL) STOCK UP IN NATA
-20.218292, 26.194830
4. WALK AROUND NATA VILLAGE
DRT 1HR 30 MINUTE

Afternoon Activities

5. LUNCH: NATA BIRD SANCTUARY
45 MIN (27 KM)
6. CYCLE AROUND NATA BIRD
SANCTUARY
DRT 1HR 30
7. ELEPHANTS OF ELEPHANT SANDS
ECO CAMP
190 44'.935 S, 260 04'.265 E ~ GT: 1HR 30MIN
(81.3 KM) ~ LAST STOP

Accommodation – Elephant Sands Eco Camp

Your accommodation for tonight is a very special place. Their motto is **Elephant Sands – where elephants rule**, and this is very apt. Although these are wild animals, they are completely habituated to having human visitors here. The campground is unfenced, and elephants wander through at will. They also wander amongst the chalets; and a low wall is all that separates the elephants at the waterhole from the open-air restaurant, bar and pool immediately beside it. You can walk about the lodge area and the campground freely: you just have to remember to give the elephants right of way. It is an odd experience lying in your tent and having an enormous animal casually walking past a meter or two away; or having an elephant idly watching you wash your dishes. (The dishwashing area is surrounded by a wall, so the elephants can watch but can't join in). Before long sharing space with the elephants starts to feel normal. Staying here is an experience most guests will remember for a lifetime.

ABBREVIATIONS

GT- Getting There

DRT- Duration time of Activity

FEATURES

About the Property

- The short access road is not very good. If you have trouble the staff will come and get you.
- Free parking
- Walking path
- Family Friendly
- Picnic Area
- Buffet breakfast and supper (price not included)
- Swimming pool
- Charging points for devices only in the main lodge.
- The tap water is a little saline, so you should drink bottled water here
- The water is turned off at night to stop the elephants from breaking into the pipes
- Well stocked bar

Camp Site Features

- Bare camp ground
- Shared Ablutions Block
- No electricity at camp ground
- Limited barbecue stands
- No firewood on sale
- There is hardly any shade in the campground

Reservation Details

Name: Graeme Bremner; 1 campsite

Contact

CONTACTS: +26773536473

WEBSITE: www.elephantsands.com



Top left: You can take pictures quite close to the elephants. Top right: Dish washing area. Bottom right: This camper had a midnight visit from an elephant that decided to have the tree next to his tent for a midnight snack!



GUIDENOTES

Page *Meerkats of the Gweta*

4 *Wake up bright and early to go play with the meerkats that live on the edge of the famous Ntweter salt pans. You will be able to get up close and personal with the meerkats. These adorable furry mammals will melt your heart.*

Page *Walk Along Nata Riverbed*

5 *Enjoy a relaxing stroll along the beautiful Nata River Bank. Many intriguing activities can be found here as this is still an important water source for many villagers. The locals will be happy to answer any questions you may have*

Page *Village Walk around Nata*

7 *This ancient village has been around for decades! The friendly locals will also have very interesting stories to tell about their village*

Page *Nata Bird Sanctuary*

17 *The Nata Bird Sanctuary is a lovely tranquil place. This is home to a large variety of birds including flamingos and if you are fortunate, a brown hyena. Visitors are free to walk or cycle any of the tracks in the sanctuary and there are ideal picnic spots in the sanctuary*

DON'T FORGET TO STOCK UP!

If need be, Nata is the best place to stock up on food supplies, especially if you intend on cooking tonight. Fill up on petrol too while you're at it.

MEERKATS OF THE GWETA

This is a must do activity in Gweta. Meerkats (= suricates) are common animals in the drier parts of Botswana but getting close to them is not easy. There is always at least one on sentry duty, and an alarm call from the sentinel will be enough to send the remainder into hiding

But there is a colony of meerkats habituated to human company out on the edge of the Ntwetwe Pan. Gweta Lodge takes tours to see them.

This colony has been used for research purposes, and has a relay of local herdsmen that follow them all day. The meerkats have grown up with their human followers and take people so much for granted that the animal on sentry duty will sometimes climb a human for a better view of the surrounding area. The remainder of the mob will be unconcerned by your presence and simply carry on with the business of their day. This is the best chance you will ever have to get so close to a mob of wild meerkats, so don't miss out.

It might take a while to find the meerkat watcher. These animals can cover a lot of ground in a day. The watchman has to follow them from dawn until lunchtime, at which point his relief turns up on a quad bike and he can return to camp. You'll see the watchman keeping his lonely vigil in the photo below.

The tours to see the meerkats also take you to the edge of the Ntwetwe Pan. The Makgadikgadi Pans cover an area the size of Portugal, uninhabited except for occasional groups of tourists and scientists. Take the time to enjoy the solitude.



Top: A brave Meerkat on looking after his family

Right: Two observers looking at the meerkat family.

WALK ALONG NATA RIVERBED

GETTING THERE

The Nata River flows right through the middle of Nata village, where the A3 crosses it by bridge. As you go across the bridge look to the northwest (upstream) to see a weir. This was built in 1941. Even in the dry season there is usually water impounded behind the weir, though this might not be obvious from the A3. The water here is fresh.

At the N end of the bridge is a signpost to the clinic. It is on the right if you are heading N. Follow the signs to the clinic, and when you reach it turn towards the river and find a spot to park.

WHAT TO DO HERE

Below the weir, when the river is not flowing, there will usually be drying salty pools. Above the weir there are walking tracks which extend for many kilometres up both sides of the river. In places these tracks climb over small bluffs which provide excellent views. And the tracks are quite negotiable for a mountain bike. In the dry season it may be possible to walk or cycle up one side of the river, find a dry crossing further up, and return on the opposite bank.



The banks of the Nata River are an excellent spot to see African pythons. These large snakes are often found near water, and here they live under logs along the riverbank. These large snakes are

not poisonous but can inflict a painful bite if you bother them, so watch but don't touch. They are protected animals under the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act (1992).

The Nata River is rather unusual. The headwaters are near Sandown in Zimbabwe (about 50 km from Bulawayo) and the mouth is the delta where the river empties into the Sua Pan inside the Nata Bird Sanctuary. Two thirds of its 330 km length lies inside Zimbabwe.



Left: Mud bricks being constructed on the Nata Riverbed

Bottom Left: Nata river is also a popular spot for animals to graze

It is hard to believe that the average annual flow is 279 million cubic metres because some years it doesn't flow at all. But the flow has been gauged at Nata since 1969 and if anything the 279 million cubic metres per annum is an underestimate. In especially wet years the river bursts its banks and floods a wide area. These floods are hard to gauge accurately. The 2018 flood of the Nata River is described in the newspaper article below.

So, despite the erratic flows this is actually the third largest river in eastern Botswana after the Chobe and the Shashe.

There are other ephemeral rivers in other desert areas which show extreme variations in flow. But what really makes the Nata stand apart is that some sections can flow in either direction. The gradient is extremely flat. Over the whole 110 km of its course in Botswana it drops only

Nata River



river appears dry it can still supply the needs of nearby residents. They will dig down into the sand to access the water trapped beneath.

The Nata River has also been a meeting place of people and cultures. The original people of the river of course were San (= Barsawa). We usually think of the San only as nomadic hunter gatherers, but here they settled along the

46m. When the rains fall on the Zimbabwe plateau they flow swiftly down the river and empty into the Sua Pan. But there have been occasions when heavy rains have fallen only in the Botswana part of the catchment. In this circumstance the flow of part of the river can reverse. And so one local name for the Nata is 'the two way river'. The normal concepts of 'upstream' and 'downstream' don't really apply.

A walk, ride or boating excursion along the Nata River is a trip back into history. The river has always been important for watering livestock, making mud bricks, fishing, wetting the mud floors of huts, and in the stretches below Nata, gathering salt. All of these activities are still going on today. If you want to buy a block of Nata River salt or dried fish you won't find these in the supermarkets in the main street. Ask the street vendors and you will soon have some.

The river has also been an important source of water for drinking and washing. Traditionally people have not drunk direct from the pools in the river. Instead they will dig a hole in the sand nearby or a shallow well into the riverbank and let the water seep into this. The practice provides a degree of filtration. Even when the

river and livestock. Some of the villages 'upstream' like Sepako are still dominated by people of this heritage. The Nata area is dominated by Kalanga, the largest of the non-Setswana speaking groups in Botswana. The Kalanga speak Ikalanga, a language related to Shona, one of the two dominant languages across the border in Zimbabwe. The Bangwato, the largest of the Tswana tribes, were comparative latecomers to the Nata area, but in 1904 the river was formally recognized as the northern boundary of the Ngwato tribal territory.

Disputes about the resources of the Nata river were not uncommon in the years between 1850 and 1950, and this led to the arrival of yet another ethnic group in the area. The administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate stationed a force of Basotho policemen alongside the river at the start of the 20th Century. These policemen were not related to any of the groups sharing the river so could maintain law and order with absolute impartiality. Inevitably the policemen married into the local groups and stayed on, taking land near Sepako.

VILLAGE WALK AROUND NATA

Nata is a major village (population about 4500) at the junction of the A3 and the A33 and well signposted. There are several filling stations and a variety of shops. A new shopping complex opened at the southern end of the village in 2018 and houses a well-stocked Choppies supermarket and a liquor store, and there is an ATM beside the now defunct Barcelos fast food restaurant.

Nata has its own on-line village blog: <https://natavillage.typepad.com/>.

And finally, Nata is also the home of the Australian DJ 'Jazzy Pete', who operates JazzySoul Radio Nata. This internet radio station streams the music of Botswana artists to the world. Worth listening to. Find it at <https://onlineradiobox.com/bw/jazzysoul/>.

Go for a walk or a cycle ride through the back streets of the village.

A newspaper article from the Botswana Daily News entitled 'Nata: Village of Contradictions' is attached. The title is apt. Read the article before you explore, or take it with you. Don't be deterred by the mention of a high crime rate: everything is relative and this is Botswana. The people of Nata are just as peaceable as those in other villages. Just don't leave building materials unguarded for too long or they will be used by someone else.

The Daily News article is really about the contrast between three groups: the local population, the passing travelers and the public servants.

For us Nata holds another contradiction. This is a major road junction on a major tourist route. Hundreds of thousands of tourists pass through Nata each year. And

pass through is exactly what most of them do. The local population have done very little to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the tourist traffic and very few tourists stop to visit the real Nata behind the main street. In consequence the villagers are not so accustomed to meeting tourists as one might expect. Despite the passing traffic Nata is still a very traditional village. So if you want to photograph someone's house or family be sure to introduce yourself and ask their permission first.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

It would be easy to assume that Nata has grown up around the road junction. This is far from the truth. This area has been occupied since at least the Middle Stone Age (so perhaps 70,000 years). During this time many foreign groups and ideas have come and been assimilated or adopted. But some very old ideas are still in evidence.

One of these old ideas is a musical instrument called a 'Segaba' which is a one-stringed fiddle. These are easy enough to make but exceedingly difficult to play fluently. Originally the resonator would have been a dried gourd. Nowadays a large, partially flattened tin can or an old 5 litre petrol tin typically serves the same purpose. A stout stick is affixed to the resonator, and a wire string like a banjo string is tied to one end. The string is wound around a tuning peg at the farther end.

The string is played with a bow made from a curved stick perhaps 15 cm long, strung with hairs from the tail of a cow. There will be a lump of resin from the mopane tree attached to the end of the bow, and this can be rubbed on the hairs as required.

Nata is the only village we know of in which you can still come across children with their own segaba. Keep your eyes open as you stroll through the village and you may be lucky enough to see one of these for yourself, and be invited to play a few notes. These instruments are found in other parts of Botswana, but have always been more common in the north.

Another artifact to watch for is a conical fishing basket known locally as a *dumbu*. These are common in northern Botswana. When the Nata is flowing it is usually shallow, and has a muddy bottom. This allows for a timeless fishing technique, in which the fisherwoman stands motionless in the water, and suddenly plunges the basket, open end downward, into the water and down into the mud, trapping the fish inside. There is a hole part way up the side through which the lady can put her hand.

The fish themselves, if surplus to immediate requirements, may be fried, dried, and sold in the main street or traded with others in the village. A talk to some of the ladies selling their wares in the street can be very rewarding. Some are international business people in their own right, trading salt, fish and veld products into Zambia, and importing sweet potatoes and other fresh produce into Botswana from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Life at a major transport junction brings many opportunities as well as some problems.

And as you stroll through the village, note the many and varied housing styles. Past archaeologists have often argued that major and seemingly abrupt changes in material culture (that is to say the things that people make) reflect invasion and usually

subsequent displacement of the original inhabitants by the invading group who brought the new ideas.

This argument has often been made with respect to the major southward movement of peoples in Africa known as the Bantu expansion. The Bantu were a group from West Africa who lived by herding cattle, and who had mastered iron smelting perhaps as early as 2000 BC. They had also mastered the growing of cereal crops. They are the ancestors of both the Kalanga and the Ngwato people in Nata. Their technology allowed the Bantu to expand all over sub Saharan Africa. It has been argued that *Pastoralism is a coherent strategy that requires specific social relations between people and animals*. The suggestion is that the Bantu arrived bringing their livestock with them. The earlier inhabitants, hunter gatherers unable to adapt to a pastoral lifestyle would be driven from the land or quickly assimilated.

Here in southern Africa the facts support an alternative view. Ideas diffuse faster than people migrate and humans are very adaptable. In the case of livestock herding, radiocarbon dating shows that sheep farming reached the southern tip of Africa in the first Century AD, some hundreds of years before the Bantu reached the Cape Province.

And as you walk around Nata you can see a major change in material culture underway right now. The picturesque traditional huts are being replaced with rectangular houses, some built of concrete blocks. There is a plant making these blocks on the riverbank below the village clinic. Some houses are equipped with satellite dishes.

In the future archaeological record this will appear as a major and abrupt change in material culture. But there has been no major influx of new people: the occupants of the rectangular houses and the users of the satellite dishes are the families that previously occupied huts in the same yard. Some of the families will be of Kalanga or Ngwato heritage; some will have intermarried; and a few (like the public servants) will be recent arrivals. But the

majority of the people in the villages along the Nata River can trace their ancestry back to the San hunter-gatherer groups that have been in the area for millennia. Nata has been a junction and a place of admixture of peoples and ideas for a very long time.

Nata: Village of contradictions

Some of the most revered tourist attractions are found in Nata, about 200 kilometres from Francistown on the way to Kasane or Maun.

Nata also boasts celebrated lodges that are known worldwide for the exquisite experience that they offer.

Take for instance, the Nata Lodge. A must see for any affable bird watcher. It is found next to the Nata Sanctuary on the edge of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, the largest salt pans in the world and the remains of Africa's largest inland sea. Surrounding the lodge are tall palm trees.

Though prone to flooding during the rainy seasons, the lodge has not ceased to be a huge hit with tourists of all persuasions. Nearby, the Nata River forms a delta which feeds the sanctuary's Sua Pan.

This provides a fertile breeding ground for large numbers of water birds such as flamingos and pelicans. Word has it that over 165 bird species have been recorded in the sanctuary.

Also, this village houses the North Gate Lodge which is also set in a picturesque location within an array of shops and restaurants such as Wimpy and Barcelos. Many visitors to the country's prime tourism destinations of Chobe and the Okavango Delta stopover in this lodge for overnight rest or come here on their way to the sanctuary, Makgadikgadi Pans, Kubu Island and the fossilised dunes.

Also, some visit the two famous baobab trees, Chapman's Baobab and Green's Baobab which are said to have been landmarks in the era of famous traders and explorers

It is important to mention that the Nata Sanctuary is a community project, managed by a board of trustees from the nearby four villages of Nata, Sepako, Maposa and Manxotae. Other small bed and breakfast establishments also abound in this village, such as Nata Guest Inn and Maya Guest House.

Recently, they has been a new addition in tourism establishments with the opening of the Pelican Lodge which is situated close to the entrance of the Nata Sanctuary.

All these developments offer the village a cosmopolitan outlook, especially when one looks from the main road and this makes Nata the envy of many villages around the country, especially those with better infrastructural developments. Indeed, these are notable

developments especially when they are found in a rural setting where attracting investments is a hard sell. However, Nata is a village of contrasting fortunes for its residents, the business community and visitors who pass by on their way up north.

Indeed, it is a land of contradictions, the searing heat that one feels upon visiting the village is a cause for concern for new arrivals, goats and cattle traverse the village especially along the banks of the Nata River that divides the village into two halves.

This is not surprising as the people here are agriculturalists. There is plenty of pasture around the village which also makes it prone to veld fires that ravage the village pastures during summer months.

Along the road are exclusive restaurants some of which are found in towns. On the other side of the river, a different story unravels as run down mud huts are a characteristic feature of the village, many of these resemble the architecture of the past.

This is a far cry from the picture one gets at the stop over and refuelling station in the middle of the village before one passes through to Maun or Kasane.

Indeed, the village looks uniquely successful from a distance as here and there many modern day dwellings with tiled roofs obscure one from catching a glimpse of the real Nata, the heart and soul of the village where people toil under the searing heat to eke a living on a daily basis. Many cannot even afford three meals a day and with the harsh climatic conditions produce from the fields has been lean in recent years and this means that many rely on the government's Ipelegeng programme.

Some earn a living as herdsmen in the neighbouring cattle posts and in the recent past years many were employed as casual labourers during the construction of roads which connect villages such as Maposa and Sepako and the senior secondary school.

The residents are grateful for the restaurants and many lodges that have provided employment to some of their kinsmen but want more than this. Owing to their economic status, many residents can only wish to dine and wine in the exclusive restaurants and taste modern culinary dishes served in the lodges.

This in sharp contrast to the clientele in the village's lodges and restaurants who they admire as they alight from their cars looking elegant and cosmopolitan as they grab a thing or two to wet their appetite at eateries such as Barcelos and Wimpy.

While Nata has a sizeable community of civil servants, including teachers from the local primary, junior secondary and senior secondary school, council, parastatals and those of private companies, few of the residents can afford some of these luxuries because of limited economic opportunities. Though they are proud of their village and its developments, they are tired of admiring passers-by, especially long distance travellers from as far as Maun, Kasane, Lusaka and Gaborone and truck drivers from Zambia, South Africa, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Equally pleased and worried by this state of affairs is Nata deputy chief, Kgosi Rebagamang Rancholo, who though happy with the developments that continue to sprout everywhere within the village, is alive to the negative consequences of these developments. As Nata grows economically, he notes that jobs are created though not as many as had been expected. However, the traditional leader is also quick to mention that with developments comes increasing crime levels.

“The bottom line is that our village will continue to grow because it is the gateway to the tourist destinations of Chobe and Okavango Delta,” he quipped. As has become customary in many areas around the country, residents believe that if jobs are created in their villages, locals should be given priority when businesses hire. This, according to Kgosi Rancholo is a red herring in Nata as employers, especially those who have established lodges, continue to bring unskilled people from far away places, which causes resentment from the local populace.

These, he highlighted, include security guards, a practice he said was contrary to government efforts of encouraging local development. What irks him the most, he said, is security companies that hire people and disappear without paying them. This is further compounded by the fact that the labour office is far away in Sowa, which makes lodging cases extremely difficult for some residents.

The policy to hire locals for unskilled jobs, he highlighted is not discriminatory as some people think but rather is meant to ensure that local people don't become spectators in the local economic boom. Some lodges, he said, have hired locals but others somersault when they start operating.

“During environmental impact assessment consultations before they start their businesses, Kgosi Rancholo notes that most of them speak glowingly about how they would create employment for locals but once they are given the go ahead they bring people from elsewhere.

The construction of the modern senior secondary school in the village, he highlighted, was a good omen as poor people are no longer forced to send their children to faraway places such as Francistown.

Even those people in Kasane, he notes, now send their children to Nata which is closer.

Despite this entire boom in the local economy of the village and an increase in the population, the traditional leader notes that the developments have come with challenges such as indiscipline by students who cut the fence at night and escape from school to drinking spots. However, he applauded the police and security in the village for being up to the task. During the construction phase of the school, he says that they mostly dealt with cases of theft of construction materials from the site.

However, he applauded students at Nata Senior Secondary School, explaining that unlike what they hear from other parts of the country, they have not engaged in any vandalism of school property because of briefings they have with both students and their parents when they register. Consequently, he said, that the results at the senior school have not been impressive but said they are improvements from last year's results. He says that even though students need to take their studies seriously, there is also a concern that some teachers might be contributing to this state of affairs as they are normally seen in large numbers at various beer drinking spots during odd hours even midweek.

Another challenge they face is trucks which stopover in the village overnight on their way to countries in the north. "We are not against trucks as we know that they carry goods between countries thereby facilitating trade, however the conduct of some truck drivers is a cause for concern," said Kgosi Rancholo.

Their crimes range from not taking care of the environment by spilling oils everywhere, improper disposal of used condoms, reckless manner in which they park their trucks some of which carry dangerous chemicals. He also mentions that some even cook under the trucks and this has resulted in some trucks catching fire which is hazardous to the residents on Nata.

From his observation, Nata is no longer a rest place for long distance truck drivers as some of them actually arrive on Friday and spend the weekend only leaving on Monday. "It is now evident that they are now stopping over to have fun," he argued. He also said that some Batswana have been given land to build truck stopovers but these have proven difficult to develop as they are expensive. Even if they were stopovers, Kgosi Rancholo says that they would serve little purpose as the law does not oblige truck drivers to use them.

Some of these truck drivers, he maintains are engaged in criminal activities such as stealing and selling fuel from trucks, prostitution which leads to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/Aids. At night the commercial centre which houses many restaurants and bars becomes a beehive as the sex trade reaches its peak, attracting even young girls who are young enough to be still at school. These are attracted to the clientele made up of truck drivers who sleepover in the village. The police, he said, have in some instances, confiscated fuel which had been siphoned out of the trucks and those responsible admit guilt and pay fines. ENDS

- **Source :** BOPA
- **Author :** Puso Kedidimetse
- **Location :** FRANCISTOWN
- **Event :** Village profile
- **Date :** Jun 12 Thu,2014

Nata/Gweta ravaged by floods again

CHAKALISA DUBE, Mmegi, Thursday, March 01, 2018

The recent heavy rains around the country have left behind a trail of destruction in the Nata/Gweta constituency once again.

In recent days, the constituency has been inundated by a near-storm surge of several centimetres above normal.

Yesterday Michael Chilimba the deputy district commissioner for the Tutume sub-district said that just like last year the rains have damaged some houses and uprooted trees in major parts of the constituency.

Homes in Gweta and Zoroga villages are completely submerged in the water.

“A notable number of homesteads (in Gweta and Zoroga) are situated in low-level areas. Because of that (being situated in low level areas) they are submerged in water, which is why those occupying them had to be evacuated,” he said.

Chilimba said that the flooding is likely to worsen as a result of the overflowing Nata River. The headwaters of the Nata River come from as far as Zimbabwe and drains into the Makgadikgadi Pans where the constituency lies.

Last year’s floods following cyclone Dineo, Edwin Mosimanyana, a hydrologist who is also a researcher at the University of Botswana’s Okavango Research Institute said that Gweta-Zoroga is a serious flood zone.

In an article published by *Mmegi* Mosimanyana explained that the flooding is worsened by headwaters spilling into Makgadikgadi.

“Too much water from Makgadikgadi may have activated ancient river pathways that stopped flooding for ages something which would have been responsible for flooding Gweta and Zoroga,” he said then.

In Gweta village Chilimba said that 112 households have been affected by the recent floods. “Those who reside in those households have been offered refuge at the village brigade. Gweta is the most affected area,” he said.

He further said that in Zoroga people living in 59 households have been evacuated and are currently housed at a primary school in the village.

At the time of going to press Gweta councillor, Galebaitse Serara said that figures of individuals from Gweta who have been given temporary shelter at the village brigade stood at 169.

Figures of the number of the affected individuals in Zoroga were yet to be quantified at press time.

Nine large tents have been availed to assist the people in Gweta.

“We are only providing shelter because the flood victims have brought their own food. If there is need for us to provide food we will do so. We are assessing the situation,” Chilimba said.

Chilimba noted that only a few houses in Gweta and Zoroga have collapsed. According to him, the majority are just submerged in water.

Yesterday one of the flood victims, 37-year-old Gaodirelwe Morena said that their two (family) rooms have collapsed as a result of the floods. She added that the remaining two rooms are totally soaked in water.

Gaodirelwe along with eight members are among those who have been given temporary shelter at Gweta brigade. She said that the floods have destroyed most of the things the family had inside the two rooms that have collapsed.

“We were evacuated on Monday and since then our children have not been able to go to school as we are still trying to recover some of our assets in the two destroyed rooms. In addition, we have just moved things out of the remaining rooms (that were not destroyed) to save them from destruction. We are also trying to emotionally recover from the recent incidents.”

She added: “Our daily lives have been disrupted because we depend on farming and menial jobs for survival”.

“We cannot do anything because of the floods,” Gaodirelwe bemoaned.

She emphasised that the government should find a permanent solution for the recurring floods.

“They have disrupted our lives over the years,” she said.

Lere Machilidza, 34, also suffered a near similar fate as Morena. Machilidza whose family (including extended family) is made up of 13 members said that the children have also missed school in recent days as a result of the floods.

She said their family home is not accessible as it is extremely soaked up in the water. The Machilidza family is also housed at Gweta brigade.

“We depend much on various farming activities. As a result of the rains we have not been able to do anything.”

“We have not even fully recovered from last year’s floods, which destroyed most of our properties. Government should urgently find ways to prevent flooding in the area. If the government does not act swiftly and address the floods they will lead to loss of life,” she said, adding that the flooding in the Gweta area can be mitigated by a proper drainage system and very sound infrastructure such as roads.

Chilimba said that villages in the Nata/Gweta area such as Sepako and Mosetse have been affected, but not in the same magnitude as Gweta and Zoroga villages.

In the Tshwane-Malelejwe settlement near Sowa Town a sizeable number of households have been evacuated to the latter (Sowa Town Kgotla) as a result of the floods.

“Some of the people we have evacuated are pregnant women, as well as school-going children. We wanted them to be able to access school and medication, which they get from Sowa,” Nata/Gweta Member of Parliament (MP), Polson Majaga said.

Majaga also said that there is still no indication that the flooding situation in Tshwane-Malelejwe will subside.

Still in Nata/Gweta close to 90 goats have died in Lepashe village as a result of the flooding. Majaga said that the floods have also destroyed properties in Lepashe village but no one has been evacuated.

“I will be engaging various leaders in my constituency soon so that we can lobby the government to urgently start working on finding and implementing a lasting solution to the flooding situation in Nata/Gweta. The area has been troubled by floods for many years,” he said.

Early this week a South-bound Botswana Railways train carrying Soda Ash from BOTASH derailed near Lepashe as a result of the heavy rains and flooding in the area.

No one was injured in the incident, but Botswana Railway acting chief executive officer (CEO), Letlhogonolo Bantsi told Botswana Television that the cost of repairing damages associated with the incident would amount to millions of Pula that were yet to be quantified.

Another worrying factor is that the people of Nata/Gweta constituency would have to live with the fear of a possible Malaria outbreak because of stagnant water in their area.

“At the moment we have not recorded any case of Malaria, but we are ready to deal with any eventuality,” Chilimba said.

Last year several malaria cases were recorded as a result of the floods.

To make matters worse, the A3 road - one of the busiest roads in the country that passes through Francistown, Nata, Zoroga, Gweta to Maun -is the gateway to the country’s pristine tourism sites and is still closed. The road was closed last year after it was ravaged by cyclone Dineo.

Since around March last year people have been using alternative routes when travelling to Maun or nearby areas.

Meanwhile, two children aged between three and five have died after they fell inside a pit that was full of water in Mathangwane village. Mathangwane falls under the Tutume sub-district though the area is not prone to floods.

“The pit is in a home that is currently under construction and does not have occupants. The pit was designed for the construction of a septic tank. It was filled with water as a result of the recent heavy rains.

“The two children were playing inside the yard and accidentally fell inside the pit and eventually died,” Chilimba, who is also part of the disaster committee in the district, said.

The floods are also said to have affected areas such as Boteti and the Central district among others. Now boats and government vehicles have been roped in to transport students to school.

NATA BIRD SANCTUARY

ABOUT THE SANCTUARY

Nata Bird Sanctuary is a community-based conservation project: a joint venture between the villages of Nata, Sepako, Maposa and Manxotae. Establishing the 230 square km sanctuary involved the relocation of about 3500 cattle. The Nata Sanctuary is rightly famous for bird life, and especially for the huge flocks of flamingo that gather to breed when there is water in the Sua Pan. The Sanctuary provides 2x4 access to the shoreline, and is one of the few places where this is available.

GETTING THERE

The sanctuary itself is 16 km south of Nata, immediately beside the A3, and well signposted. You can't miss it!

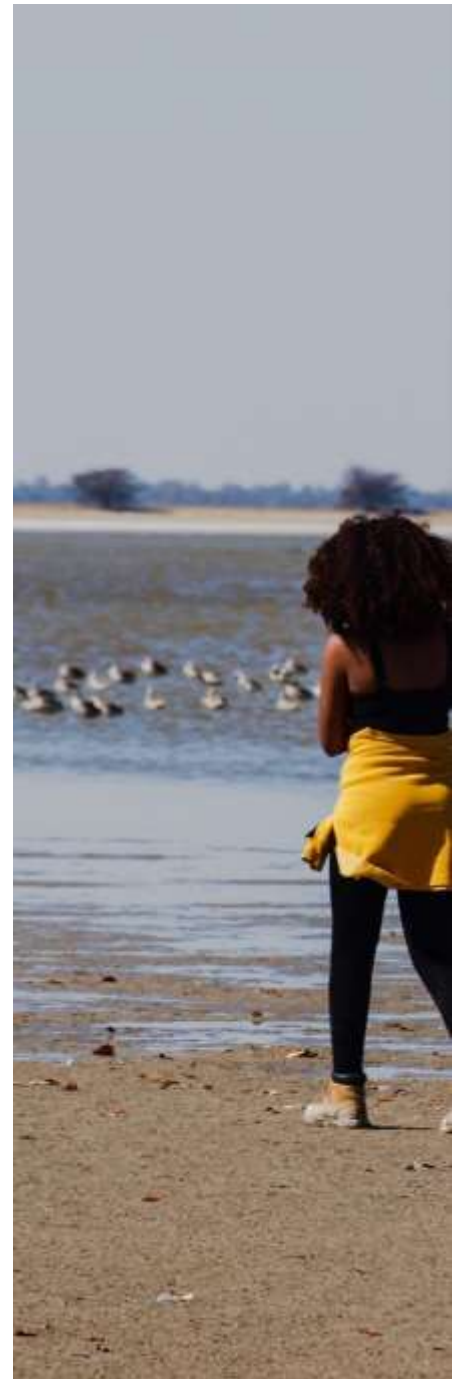
THINGS TO DO

The Nata Sanctuary offers a great deal more than birdlife: visitors are free to walk or cycle any of the tracks in the sanctuary and anyone exploring the area in the early morning or towards evening has a chance of encountering one of the typical desert animals and if especially fortunate a brown hyaena.

If you want to know more about the birds we recommend joining one of the guided bird tours of the Sanctuary offered by Nata Lodge, about 6 km to the north up the A3. You will have to visit the reception at Nata Lodge to organize this in advance.

Lee shores are patrolled nightly by scavengers hoping for a bird carcass to wash ashore; and the area supports a population of jackals which are always hopeful of finding a flamingo chick or a lost egg.

Wildebeest bulls patrol their own lonely territories, and afternoon dust devils dance across the salt flats. This is a magical place: take the time to explore it and experience the subtleties. Sit at the edge of the pan, and reflect on the fact that the area of the pans is about the same as the area of Portugal. This is an untamed and largely uninhabited wilderness. And take the time to talk to the staff. They are proud of what their villages have achieved, and they can tell you a great deal about the history of the Sanctuary and about life in the wider area.



Far Right: Bird Watching on the Sua Pan
Right: A wondering Wildebeest inside the Bird Sanctuary