

For immediate release:

New book celebrates aquatic life in Africa's Okavango Delta

Gland - IUCN and its partners unveiled a stunning new book this week that features one of the most globally-important and species-rich wetlands, the Okavango Delta, world-renowned for its unique ecological and economic role in southern Africa.

"Okavango Delta: Floods of Life" was released this week at an international symposium in Maun, Botswana, where several hundred wetland scientists have gathered to examine the effects of flood pulsing wetlands on biodiversity and people's livelihoods. Published by IUCN and the Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre (HOORC) of the University of Botswana, with financial support from the European Union and the UK Darwin Initiative, the publication is designed to inspire the region's decision makers to preserve this valuable delta, which provides so many goods and services, in addition to its natural beauty.

"Wetlands are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world and the impacts on them often pass unnoticed until the damage is done. Freshwater species, such as the invertebrates and fishes highlighted in this book, can serve as valuable tools for monitoring these impacts," says **Dr William Darwall, Manager of the Freshwater Unit for IUCN's Species Programme.**

"Right now the Okavango Delta is relatively unscathed," says Dr. Darwall, who managed the book project. *"But Botswana and its neighbouring countries – particularly Angola and Namibia – need to work together to ensure the rivers that feed this delicate ecosystem are monitored and measures are taken to protect the diverse flora and fauna found there. We hope this book will inspire decision makers throughout the region to take the necessary measures to ensure the survival of this delta as one of the world's most beautiful and valuable wetlands."*

As the world's largest inland delta, and one of the largest Ramsar-designated Wetlands of International Importance, the Okavango is an oasis in the Kalahari Desert that is fed by water flowing from the Angolan highlands through Namibia into Botswana. Recent IUCN assessments have confirmed that its seasonal floodplains are home to great numbers of large mammals, including buffalo, elephants, hippos, lions, leopards, and wild dogs, as well as the less well-known lechwe and sitatunga antelope, and an abundance of freshwater invertebrates, amphibians and fishes. It also has about 1,300 different plant species (surpassed only by the Brazilian Pantanal wetland) and more than 400 species of bird.

However, this impressive array of biological diversity is facing increasing pressure from water abstraction, use of pesticides, drainage for development, over-grazing and, potentially, hydropower.

"The plight of wetland species is so often overlooked yet they face many serious threats - in particular due to increasing water use. This book not only provides some wonderful pictures of the highly diverse group of species found in the Okavango Delta, but also helps to raise awareness about the important role they play in this vital ecosystem," says **Dr Simon Stuart, Chair of IUCN's Species Survival Commission.**

For more information or to obtain a copy of the book, please contact Nicki Chadwick, Media Relations Officer, at +41-76-771-4208 or email nicki.chadwick@iucn.org.