



PhotoMail is an occasional picture newsletter for those with an interest in photography, nature and the environment, travel, Africa, Zambia, Zambian life and current affairs. And especially for those who just like looking at pictures. Send your feedback - PhotoMail is developed in line with what its subscribers want to see. PhotoMail is available for free subscription by emailing me at wildfoto[at]wildfotoafrica.com

The Story Behind the Pictures:

THE KAFUE STORY: Zambia's Lifeline River - Part 1

In this PhotoMail, the life story of Zambia's most important River - the Kafue River.

Zambia's namesake river is of course the Zambezi River - but it is the Zambezi's largest tributary, the Kafue, that is by far the most important in socio-economic terms. The Kafue River is over 1600km long and its catchment area some 155,000 sq. km. - an area larger than the US state of Georgia.



Kafue Headwaters at Chimfunshi

The Kafue is the lifeline for over 50% of Zambia's population; it supplies most of the country's industry, mining and agriculture; and much of the country's hydro-electric power system relies on it. It is the river system by which the waters of the vast number of natural 'dambo' aquifers in the Miombo Woodlands of Zambia's plateau lands, feed slowly into towns and cities, farms and industries, power generating plants and mines, enabling all to survive the region's 6-month long dry season.

We can get some idea of the immense importance of the Kafue River by taking the following trip along its course as it meanders through its huge basin:



Dawn, Kafue Headwaters at Chimfunshi

The Kafue River's source is near Munyashi Swamp, close to the Zambia-Congo border some 120km north west of the Copperbelt mining town of Chingola. It starts as little more than a small stream which meanders south-east, but within 50km it grows to a sizeable river - as can be seen at Chimfunshi (above and below) - where its main channel can become over 100m wide and it's flood plain several kilometres wide.



Kafue River, Chimfunshi

Some major parts of these headwaters, including the Chimfunshi area, are the only fish breeding grounds within the first 250km of the river's course - the next being near Mpongwe, 300km from the source. Large sections of these headwater breeding areas have been severely overfished, using donor aid mosquito nets, chemical poisons and even explosives. These massively destructive fishing methods kill the river - they remove not just small fish and fingerlings but even the fish eggs and much of all other river life. The river becomes over-vegetated, reducing oxygenation and further affecting the river's ability to support life. All natural life up and down the food chain is affected, and ultimately human life too.



Riverside Dambo & Flood Plain, Kafue Headwaters

Fortunately, conservation work has been commenced to control poaching and illegal fishing, including patrolling the river; to encouraging governmental authorities to act to enforce existing laws; and to educate local communities on sustainable fishing techniques. In just a few months there is evidence that more local fishermen have opted for legal methods. If this can be sustained in the longer term, the headwaters of this vital river resource can be expected to recover quite quickly, with return of good fish stocks, abundant birdlife and some wildlife - leading to a healthier outlook for the entire Kafue River and the millions of people who live off it.



Riverside Flood Plain, Kafue Headwaters

The river narrows to no more than 40m as it approaches the highly populated and industrial Copperbelt towns of Chililabombwe, Chingola and Mufulira before turning southwards and passing by the main centre of Kitwe and the mining town of Luanshya.

The Kafue River system provides life-giving water for the very large urban populations of the Copperbelt towns and for the copper mines and support industries located in the area. The river is therefore vital to the Copperbelt mining industry, which provides some 85% of Zambia's export earnings.

However, the Kafue's life-giving generosity to the Copperbelt's population and Zambia's economy is poorly rewarded - as it passes by the big mining towns and their urban areas, the river suffers greatly from high levels of pollution. But, at least for now, the Kafue has its own solution to this - see **Part 2**, of '**The Kafue Story**', in the next **PhotoMail**.

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Chimfunshi means "The Place of Water", due to location on the headwaters of the Kafue River - the most important of Zambia's rivers and the country's lifeline

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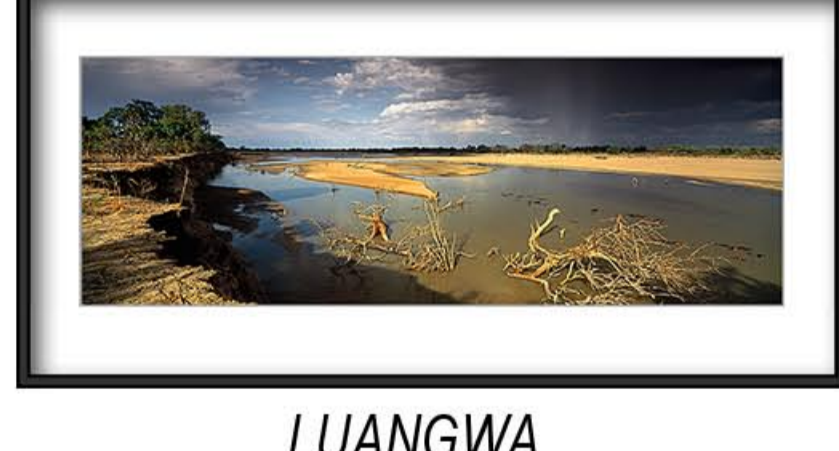
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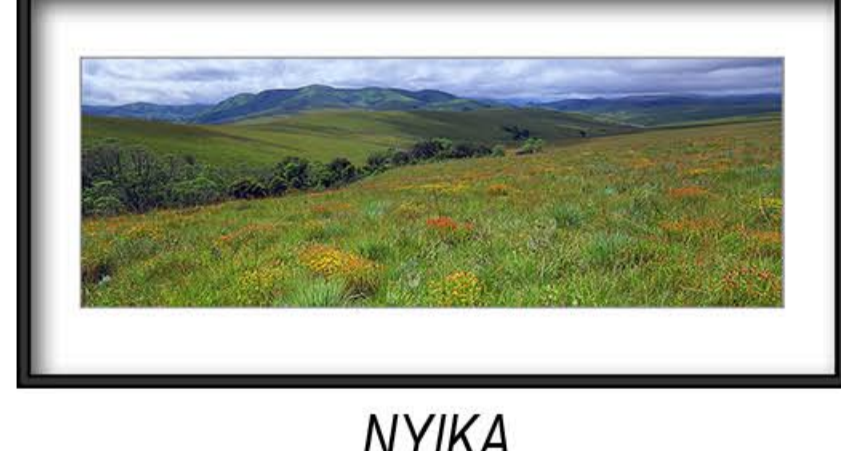
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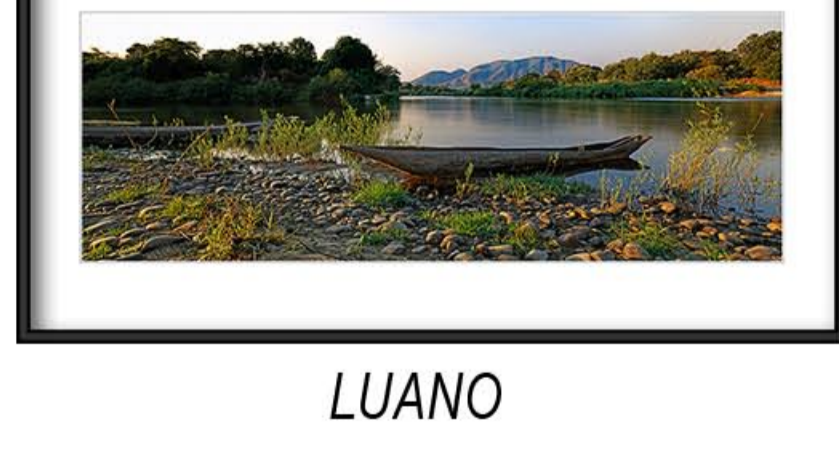
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PHOTOGRAPHER FOR HIRE

Stephen Robinson is a photographer operating from his Zambia base. He undertakes photo assignment work in the corporate, industrial, mining, donor-aid project and environmental fields, including the production of photo based communications, advertising and promotional media. Medium format panoramic photography and aerial work are specialities.

This commercial work supports his nature photography speciality, including landscape, environment, conservation and wildlife work - and including his well-known panoramic photography project and exhibitions on the remote landscape, peoples and environment of Zambia.

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