

# Verloren Valei Nature Reserve



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Near to the town of Dullstroom, in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa, the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve is a vital ecological area that was declared a Ramsar wetland site in 2003. Not only does the reserve encompass over thirty wetlands but it also provides a habitat for three endangered crane species. Conservation of the region is of vital importance, and visitors to the area will certainly not want to miss out on exploring this place of natural beauty.

Proclaimed a Provincial Nature Reserve in 1983, the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve sits on the Steenkampsberg plateau, covering an area of 5 891 ha. The area consists of grassland and wetlands, which are further divided into permanent freshwater marshes, temporary marshes and a rare section of peatland. Lying on a watershed between the Crocodile and Olifants Rivers' drainage systems, the reserve is of hydrological importance. The wetlands, measuring from 2 to 250 ha, assist in regulating streamflow, as well as maintaining water quality in the rivers' source streams. The Verloren Valei Nature Reserve is also of economic significance, providing water for irrigation downstream.

The Verloren Valei Nature Reserve is home to a variety of

flora and fauna, including various Red Data species. The number of plant species in the reserve totals 379, of which eleven are endemic to South Africa, six are endemic to the Drakensberg Escarpment and five are declared rare or critically endangered. Amongst the flora is 52 orchid species.

Visitors to the reserve will discover that there are over 50 butterfly species, including the endemic and rare Swanepoel's Widow, as well as the Warren's Blue. Also residing in the wetlands of the reserve are five fish species, 36 reptile species and 9 species of amphibian. Seven mammal species in the reserve are listed on the IUCN Red Data list, three of which are endemic, namely the striped weasel, grey Rhebok and blesbok.

A great attraction to the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve is its birdlife, which includes the three crane species – wattled crane (critically endangered), blue crane (critically endangered) and crowned crane (endangered) – and twelve endemic species. In the grassland areas, birders will discover cisticolas, finches, bald ibis, longclaws, larks and red bishops. Along the rocky outcrops are francolin, cape rock thrush, mountain chat, ground woodpecker and buff streaked chat.

There are currently eight wattled cranes in the reserve, including a breeding pair. A facility has been created in the reserve for captive breeding and reintroduction of the wattled crane. Here, workers disguise themselves in wattled crane costumes to care for the chicks. This important program makes the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve a vital location for the survival of this critically endangered species. Why not take a trip to the reserve to discover its wonders for yourself. Tours are strictly by appointment.