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# Wildlife and Fauna of Nigeria

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## Introduction

Nigeria is a land of exceptional natural wealth, celebrated not only for its vibrant cultural heritage but also for its remarkable diversity of wildlife and ecosystems. This rich variety stems from the country's unique geography, stretching from lush Atlantic coastlines and expansive mangrove swamps in the south to arid savannas and the fringes of the Sahara Desert in the north. Within these varied landscapes lie an extraordinary array of habitats—tropical rainforests, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, rivers, and plateaus—that together nurture one of the most diverse assemblages of flora and fauna on the African continent.

This book, "Wildlife and Fauna of Nigeria: A Guide to the Wildlife and Fauna of Nigeria," is designed to provide a comprehensive exploration of the country's natural heritage. The intention is to serve as both an introduction for the general reader and a guide for those engaged in conservation, education, or nature-based tourism. Nigeria is recognized globally as a hotspot for wildlife, hosting over 22,000 species of animals, from mammals and birds to reptiles, amphibians, fish, and insects. Among these are species found nowhere else on Earth, underscoring Nigeria's importance in global conservation efforts.

The Nigerian wilderness is home to iconic African animals such as elephants, lions, leopards, buffaloes, and chimpanzees, as well as lesser-known gems like the Cross River gorilla and Sclater's monkey. The country's avifauna is equally impressive, with more than 860 bird species recorded, including striking endemic birds restricted to narrow ranges. Nigeria's rivers, lakes, and sea coasts harbor a wealth of fish species, some of which are vital both ecologically and economically.

Yet, this biodiversity is under persistent threat. Rapid population growth, habitat destruction, overhunting, poaching, pollution, and the illegal wildlife trade have already led to the local extinction of species once common across the land. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists a significant number of Nigerian species as threatened or endangered, a stark reminder of the challenges ahead. These threats are compounded by climate change and by inadequate enforcement of existing conservation laws.

In response, a dynamic community of conservationists, governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities is working tirelessly to safeguard Nigeria's wildlife resources. This book explores not only the dazzling array of species and habitats but also the ongoing conservation efforts, offering insights into both the wonders of Nigeria's wild places and the urgent actions needed to preserve them.

Ultimately, understanding Nigeria's wildlife and fauna is essential for everyone who values the country's future—not just for the inherent beauty and ecological importance these species possess, but for their ability to inspire hope, resilience, and pride. By delving into the diverse natural legacy of Nigeria, this guide aims to foster appreciation, awareness, and a renewed commitment to protecting the irreplaceable plants and animals that make Nigeria a true haven of African biodiversity.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Nigeria's Geographic and Ecological Diversity

Nigeria, a nation perched on the western edge of Africa, presents a fascinating tapestry of landscapes, a grand stage upon which an astonishing array of life plays out. It's a place where the humid breath of the Atlantic Ocean meets the dry whisper of the Sahara, creating a mosaic of environments that fuel remarkable biodiversity. Spanning a total area of 923,768 square kilometers, with 910,768 square kilometers of land and 13,000 square kilometers of water, Nigeria is the 14th largest country in Africa. Its geographic coordinates sit between 4° and 14° North latitudes and 2° and 15° East longitudes.

The country's borders tell a story of regional connections, sharing land boundaries with the Republic of Benin to the west, Chad and Cameroon to the east, and Niger to the north. To the south lies the Gulf of Guinea, part of the vast Atlantic Ocean, providing a significant coastline of approximately 853 kilometers. This extensive coastline is not uniform; it's a dynamic interface shaped by various geological processes.

Delving into Nigeria's topography reveals a varied terrain that influences everything from climate patterns to the distribution of species. Generally, the landscape consists of plains in the northern and southern regions, punctuated by hills and plateaus in the central part of the country. The lowest point, as one might expect, is at sea level along the Atlantic coast, while the highest point is Chappal Waddi, also known as Gangirwal, reaching an elevation of 2,419 meters (7,936 feet) in the Adamawa mountains.

The Niger and Benue rivers are the lifeblood of Nigeria's geography, forming a distinctive Y-shape as they converge at Lokoja before flowing south into the Gulf of Guinea. These river valleys constitute the most expansive topographical region in the country. To the southwest of the Niger lies a region of rugged highlands, while to the southeast of the Benue, hills and mountains extend all the way to the border with Cameroon.

Coastal plains grace both the southwest and southeast. The Niger Delta, a massive arcuate fan-shaped river delta in the southern part of Nigeria, is a significant geographical feature and one of the world's largest. This riverine area is characterized by a coastal belt of swamps bordering the Atlantic.

Beyond the major river systems, other notable geographical features contribute to Nigeria's diverse terrain. These include the Adamawa Plateau, the Mambilla Plateau,

the Jos Plateau, and the Obudu Plateau. The Jos Plateau, in particular, is a significant upland area in east-central Nigeria, with elevations ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 feet and some points reaching up to 5,841 feet. The Mambilla Plateau, located in the eastern part of the country near the Cameroon border, is another high-altitude region with elevations exceeding 1,524 meters (5,000 feet).

The country's climate is predominantly tropical, with variations depending on the region. Generally, Nigeria can be divided into three main climate zones: a tropical monsoon climate in the south, a tropical savannah climate in the central regions, and a Sahelian hot and semi-arid climate in the north. This creates a gradient of decreasing precipitation from the humid south to the drier north.

In the south, the tropical monsoon climate is characterized by high humidity and is seasonally wet. The rainy season here is long, typically lasting from March to November. Annual rainfall can be substantial, often exceeding 2,000 mm and reaching up to 4,000 mm or more in the Niger Delta. This region experiences strong rainfall events during the wet season.

Moving towards the center of the country, a tropical savannah climate prevails, marked by distinct wet and dry seasons. The central regions generally have a single, well-defined rainy season from April to September and a dry season from December to March. The dry season in this part of Nigeria is influenced by the Harmattan wind, which brings dust from the Sahara Desert.

The northern reaches of Nigeria experience a Sahelian hot and semi-arid climate. This region is characterized by low and erratic rainfall, primarily occurring from June to September, with amounts ranging from 500 mm to 750 mm. The rest of the year is hot and dry. This climate makes agriculture particularly challenging in the far north.

Temperature variations are also evident across the country. While seasonal variations are more pronounced in the north, temperature and humidity remain relatively constant throughout the year in the south. Coastal areas tend to have lower mean annual temperatures compared to the interior lowlands. Mean annual temperatures on the Jos Plateau are cooler, ranging between 16 and 25 °C, offering a pleasant respite from the heat experienced in other parts of the country. Temperate conditions can also be found on the highlands along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.

This remarkable geographical and climatic diversity directly influences the types of vegetation and, consequently, the wildlife found in Nigeria. The main vegetation patterns align with the climatic zones, running in broad east-west belts across the country. Along the coast and in the Niger Delta, mangrove and freshwater swamps dominate. Slightly further inland, these swamps transition into dense tropical rainforests. In areas with higher population density, particularly in the southeast, the original forest has given way to open palm bush.

Northward, the vegetation shifts to savannas, characterized by grasslands with scattered trees. Different types of savanna exist, including the Derived Savanna, Guinea Savanna, Sudan Savanna, and Sahel Savanna, each with its own unique characteristics and species composition. The Derived Savanna, located between the humid forest and the Southern Guinea Savanna, is dominated by grasses with some remnants of rainforest trees.

Finally, the mountainous regions, such as the Jos Plateau and the highlands near the Cameroon border, support montane vegetation, a distinct type of ecosystem found at higher elevations. These different ecological zones, shaped by Nigeria's varied geography and climate, provide the foundation for the country's rich and diverse wildlife, which we will explore in the following chapters.

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