

A Home Alone...

...but for how long?

URGENT appeal to save the Lesser Flamingos

OWEN NEWMAN



JAMES WARWICK



Think Pink! – Save Africa’s Flamingos

Dear Friend

We all know that species survival, including our very own, is inextricably linked to the conservation of habitats. None more so than in East Africa where three quarters of the world population of Lesser Flamingos live and breed. Half a million pairs depend on Tanzania’s Lake Natron as their breeding site. Yes, Natron is one of the world’s great remaining wilderness areas.

Yet this African paradise is under threat from a proposal to build a large scale industrial plant to extract soda ash from the water. This would involve a gigantic network of pipes running across the lake surface and in the surrounding area, the building of new roads and a railway line.

It takes very little disturbance to cause these iconic and elegant birds to abandon their nesting sites. Whilst BirdLife does not wish to stand in the way of development, and indeed our conservation work aims to benefit to the poorest of communities around the world, the risk to the survival of the Lesser Flamingo from the proposed soda ash plant at this unique site is unacceptably high.

The soda ash proposal is not just opposed by conservationists, but also by the indigenous pastoralist communities, who see no benefit for them from the development plan, and are worried about the impact on the local habitat and wildlife, upon which they directly depend for their livelihoods.

Other neighbouring countries are also worried as the Flamingos breeding in Lake Natron disperse across the other Rift valley lakes and represent a major eco-tourist attraction, iconic and spectacular.

BirdLife International and its Partners along with several other institutions are spearheading a campaign to save the Lesser Flamingos and protect Lake Natron through our “Think Pink” campaign. Together, we’ve been successful in persuading Lake Natron Resources Limited, to withdraw their plans to go ahead with the proposed soda ash plant. **This is an outstanding success for conservation but I am afraid it is likely to be short lived.**

We know that new studies have been commissioned in the hope that the outcomes will lead to a revised Environmental and Social Impact Assessment. This could give the seal of approval for another company with revised plans, to set up a soda ash plant at the flamingos home.

The threat is increased with the recent news that a Chinese company is building a new port facility in neighbouring Kenya which could make it easier to export soda ash by rail and sea from Lake Natron.

If a soda ash plant goes ahead, it will be an environmental catastrophe for East Africa. It is now time to re-launch our campaign and engage deeply with the Tanzanian Government. We want to accelerate a new proposal to improve the protection status of the lake and scale up conservation work in the region involving local communities.

Much of this work involves providing support to the BirdLife Partner in Tanzania (The Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania) in lobbying government at local and national level, mobilising the local communities and the Tanzanian public in favour of a Lake Natron conservation plan.

We also need to provide the technical expertise and collate the scientific information that will help us to argue against the case being made for mining the lake. This will include highlighting the impact on the lake’s ecology and the flamingos. It is also critical, that we alert the international community to this ongoing threat and gather their support. BirdLife’s decentralised structure of national conservation NGO’s is perfectly suited to support an international campaign like this one, and our early success is a clear demonstration of this.

We are confident we can oppose new attempts to develop the lake shores, but we need your generous support more than ever, as campaigns like this are extremely difficult to fund.

Your support to us is crucial if we are to secure, once and for all, a safe and sustainable future for Lake Natron’s Lesser Flamingos, and the people living nearby.

Dr Marco Lambertini
Chief Executive
BirdLife International

PS. The future of vast flocks of shimmering pink flamingos will be assured if we take action now.