

Conservation, community benefits and a new Ramsar site: Ten years of conservation in western Madagascar.

Title

Madagascar has recently designated Lake Kinkony as a Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance). Lake Kinkony is a permanent freshwater lake situated within the new Protected Area of the Mahavavy-Kinkony Complex, in western Madagascar, where BirdLife Partner, Asity Madagascar has been undertaking important conservation work for the last ten years. Ramsar designation for the site is a highly significant achievement in terms of international recognition of the ecological, economic, cultural, scientific and recreational importance of the [lake and the wetlands](#).

The Mahavavy-Kinkony Complex consists of marshes, rivers, lakes, coastal zones, mangroves, palm savannah, dry forests and even caves. The site is home to a large number of threatened species including the Critically Endangered Madagascar Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*, the Endangered Sakalava Rail *Amaurornis olivieri*, Madagascar Heron *Ardea humbloti*, Madagascar Pond-heron *Ardeola idea*, and Madagascar Sacred Ibis, *Threskiornis bernieri* as well as the Vulnerable Madagascar Plover *Charadrius thoracicus*; Critically Endangered endemic fish are also present.

The site is also highly important to the Malagasy people for fishing, hunting and agriculture. However, the wetlands' wildlife has been threatened by over-exploitation, habitat loss and sedimentation; forest areas have suffered from illegal timber extraction and unsustainable shifting agriculture. In 2007, the Mahavavy-Kinkony Complex was granted [temporary protection status](#) by the Government of Madagascar. A management plan is now in place; local community based organisations have been created to regulate fishing and agricultural activities, ensure sustainable management and to conserve the complex's resources and biodiversity. Permanent protection should be approved in the near future.

The Ramsar designation is a further demonstration of commitment to conserving the country's wetlands. The established community based management of Lake Kinkony's resources is an example of Asity Madagascar's successful conservation of natural resources through empowering local people to develop the capacity to protect them and benefit from their

sustainable use. Since temporary protection was granted, this has been possible thanks to the invaluable support of the Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondiale (FFEM), Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Conservation International Madagascar, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Programme Germano-Malgache pour l'Environnement), Arcadia Foundation and Fondation pour les Aires Protégées et la Biodiversité de Madagascar.

In Madagascar, national law enables local community associations to acquire rights to control the management of natural resources, ensuring continued benefits for the local people who depend on them. Helping these communities to claim these rights and strengthening the community associations is one of the key conservation strategies of Asity Madagascar. Local laws known as *Dina*, developed and implemented by local people and authorities, complete the process of community empowerment for conservation and resource management. Vony Raminoarisoa, Coordinator of Asity Madagascar said, "Local communities have always known the richness of their environment, but the development of mutual trust and close collaboration between different stakeholders are the foundation for successful conservation in countries like Madagascar, where much of the population depends on natural resources." Finally, because current rates of natural resource use are unsustainable, small income generation projects have also been developed to provide alternatives and strengthen the independence of local communities. Such activities include sustainable fishing, tourism, and rice and honey production. Livestock rearing and beekeeping activities, along with infrastructure development for low impact tourism, are already being implemented. Find out more about BirdLife's [Local Empowerment Programme](#)