

Lake Natron, Tanzania

Title

Status: Important Bird Area (IBA), a Ramsar site

Campaign Period: February 2007 and ongoing

Background

Lake Natron is found in the Northern part of Tanzania; nearest towns to Lake Natron are Arusha in Tanzania and Magadi in Kenya. It is the most important breeding site for Lesser Flamingos in the world. East Africa has 1.5-2.5 million Lesser Flamingos, representing three-quarters of the world population and most of them are hatched at Lake Natron. Food is plentiful, nesting sites abound – and above all, the lake is isolated and undisturbed. The lake and its ecosystem provides a source of livelihoods to the local communities.

Why it is important

It is the only significant and regular breeding site in East Africa for three quarters of lesser flamingos in the world. The lesser flamingo is classified as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List 2004. It is listed on Appendix II of CITES and on Appendix II of the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species.

The ecosystem supports the pastoral livelihoods of the local communities and is an important habitat for other wildlife species – elephant, buffalo, hyena, lion, Oryx among others.

The flamingos are a source of income through tourism for Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya. With an income of half a million US dollars at Lake Natron alone, the community livelihoods would be negatively affected if a soda ash plant would be constructed near the lake.

Threat

Tata Chemicals Ltd in Collaboration with the Government of Tanzania had put forward proposals to build a large-scale industrial plant worth \$450 million to extract soda ash from Lake Natron's water, via a network of pipes across the surface of the lake. A new road and rail infrastructure would be built to serve the soda ash plant. The project would use brine from the Lake to make sodium bicarbonate which is used for various industrial purposes.

As a result from pressure, Tata Chemicals Ltd withdrew from the project in May 2008. The government of Tanzania however continues to maintain a keen interest in the soda ash project. The National

Concerns BirdLife International and the Lake Natron Consultative Group (a coalition of 56 institutions) led the campaign to reject the Tata proposal at Lake Natron. They were concerned that building of a soda ash factory at Lake Natron would destroy the breeding site, potentially Campaign Strategies

- Intensive awareness & publicity
- Input into key processes – e.g ESIA
- Lobbying of key entities
- Reaching out to the local community
- Reaching out to the International Community

Campaign outcomes

- After the intense campaign, Tata Chemicals Ltd withdrew from the project in May 2008.
- Establishment of the [Think Pink webpage](#)
- The work was recognized by A.V Jensen Charity Foundation and funds granted to implement a community livelihoods project

Documents

Press [Read here all the news about Lake Natron](#)

Links [Species factsheet; lesser flamingo Lake Natron](#) on State of the World's Birds IBA factsheet