



BirdLife
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Together for birds and people

BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat

ICPIE Campus, Kasarani Road, P. O. Box 3502-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254-20-8562490-8562246; Fax: +254-20-8562259; Email: birdlife@birdlife.or.ke; Website: www.birdlife.org

The Greatest Bird Spectacle in the World under Threat by Proposed Development on Lake Natron – A Petition

Date: 15th October, 2007

We, BirdLife Africa Partnership members and associates from 23 countries meeting here in Nairobi for our council meeting, express deepest concerns regarding a proposal by Tata Chemicals and the Tanzania Government to construct a soda ash extraction plant at Lake Natron in Tanzania. Lake Natron is designated by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area and is a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Globally, it is the most important breeding site for the Lesser Flamingo, a bird listed in the IUCN Red List of threatened species. It accounts for 75% of the world's Lesser Flamingos and it's the only site in the region where the flamingoes have bred for the last 45 years. The same flamingos feed in thousands of other Rift Valley lakes, and are the reason that the great American naturalist and artist Roger Tory Peterson called Lake Nakuru "*the world's greatest ornithological spectacle*".

The Partnership is concerned because during breeding, flamingos are very sensitive to disturbance, and the proposed development may lead to breeding failure at this site, fast tracking the species towards extinction. Regional extinction of the Lesser Flamingo will in turn have far reaching impacts on national economies and the tourism industry in the East African region. In Kenya's central rift, for instance, the tourism industry is largely supported by the Rift Valley Lakes and the pink flamingos, whose only breeding site is now under threat. Thousands of jobs and hundreds of businesses may be lost.

Further, the proposed project is planning to establish a soda ash processing plant initially with a capacity of 500 000 metric tonnes per year, which will later expand to 1 million tonnes per year. The infrastructure that will come with the plant include an 11.5 megawatt coal-fired thermal power plant, a tarmac road, a rail road, a complex network of pipes to transport the brine and accommodation of over 1,200 workers. The soda ash production will consume over 106,000 litres of fresh water per hour. Abstraction of such large amounts of fresh water in a water scarce region will create a water crisis, with devastating effects on the livelihoods of local pastoralist communities, their animals and wildlife. An influx of people and heavy machinery, infrastructure, increased air and water pollution will lead to general environmental degradation and permanent loss of the natural condition of the land. This will affect the pastoralist community who largely depend on the lake and the surrounding grassland for their livelihood, and negate great gains made by local communities and national governments on biodiversity conservation in the region.

We are concerned that the Environmental Impact Assessment process has not been participatory enough. The project proponent has not consulted enough with all interested and affected institutions, communities and individuals. Efforts to contact Tata Chemicals and Norconsult (the EIA consultants) to obtain documents related to the study through the Lake Natron Consultative Group, which the BirdLife Partnership is part of, have not been successful. We now have information that the EIA document has been submitted to the National Environmental Council (NEMC) of Tanzania for approval.

There have been media reports that the Tanzanian Government intends to go on with the proposed project. It is therefore against this background and in keeping with the mandate of BirdLife International to *conserve wild birds, their habitats and global biodiversity by working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources* that we call upon all governments, both in Africa and globally, all organizations concerned by this issue, and all people of goodwill who care about biodiversity and the environment and future generations to join hands and **STAND UP!** against the proposed development.

We finally call upon the Tanzanian Government and Tata Chemicals to ensure that due process is followed and/or to reconsider the proposed development, given the potential negative impacts of its implementation.

Signed:

Country	Signature
1. Botswana: BirdLife Botswana	
2. Burkina Faso: NATURAMA	
3. Burundi: Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Oiseaux	
4. Cameroon: Cameroon Biodiversity Conservation Society	
5. Egypt: Nature Conservation Egypt	
6. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society	
7. Ghana: Ghana Wildlife Society	
8. Kenya: Nature Kenya	
9. Liberia: Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia	
10. Nigeria: Nigerian Conservation Foundation	
11. Rwanda: Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda	
12. Seychelles: Nature Seychelles	
13. Sierra Leone: Conservation Society of Sierra Leone	
14. South Africa: BirdLife South Africa	
15. Seychelles: Nature Seychelles	
16. Tunisia: Association "Les Amis des Oiseaux"	
17. Uganda: Nature Uganda	
18. Zambia: Zambian Ornithological Society	
19. Zimbabwe: BirdLife Zimbabwe	
20. Madagascar: Asity	
21. Malawi: Wildlife Environmental Society of Malawi	
22. Ivory coast: SOS Forets	
23. Sao Tome: Associação de Biólogos Santomenses	
24. Morocco: EcoLife Maroc (Bayati Hayati)	

For more information please contact:

Dr. Hazell Shokellu Thompson: Head, BirdLife Africa Secretariat; hazell.thompson@birdlife.or.ke or

Jane Galthuma: Regional policy and advocacy Coordinator: jane.galthuma@birdlife.or.ke