

## **Urgent: BirdLife South Africa and Ekapa Mining statement**

**Start**

### **Mass rescue of Lesser Flamingo chicks anticipated!**

1. It is the unfortunate responsibility of BirdLife South Africa and Ekapa Mining, following their intensive work at Kamfers Dam during the past month, to announce that **a mass rescue of over 5000 Lesser Flamingo chicks will very likely be necessary in the next two weeks.**
2. Despite a recent increase in the flow of sewage effluent into Kamfers Dam, the water level of the dam is dropping rapidly and it is highly probable that the dam will dry up completely in the next two weeks.
3. Further compounding this problem, BirdLife South Africa has been monitoring the productivity of blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) in the dam using remote sensing methods and in consultation with specialists. We predict that a rapid drop in the density of algae in the dam is imminent – possibly within a week if there is no rain. Blue-green algae are the primary food source for flamingos at Kamfers Dam so the delicately balanced system that supports the Lesser Flamingo population may well collapse before the dam dries up completely.
4. Our most recent counts indicate that 5250 Lesser Flamingo chicks are currently present in the crèche at Kamfers Dam. The age of these birds varies from about 20-60 days old. We estimate that conditions at the dam – both water levels and algal densities – would have to remain favourable for at least another two months for all these youngsters to develop to the point that they can fly with the adults to alternative feeding sites.
5. A concerted effort has been made during the past few weeks to address the effluent reticulation problems that have so drastically reduced the flow of water into Kamfers Dam. Despite limited initial success, current inflows are not sufficient to stem very rapid evaporation rates.
6. Storms in the area during the first half of February were encouraging but associated rainfall was not sufficient to fill the dam. Unfortunately, there is no significant rainfall forecast for the next two weeks, while temperatures are predicted to be high.
7. The details of the current situation (and the possible, imminent need for a mass rescue operation) has been reported to Les Abrahams, the Acting Head of Department of the Northern Cape Department of Environment & Nature Conservation, and to the Department of Environmental Affairs. We have suggested that an urgent meeting be held in Kimberley, with all relevant role-players present. The main aim of this gathering will be to discuss and assess options for the immediate future of the flamingos at Kamfers Dam, which probably include the need to capture, house and care for >5000 Lesser Flamingo chicks. The details of this meeting will be announced on Monday 25 February.

8. It should be noted that Kamfers Dam is at the current time no longer suitable for the release of the c. 1000 flamingo chicks held in facilities in Gauteng, Cape Town and Durban.
9. Should it be required, the rescue of more than 5000 flamingo chicks would be an intervention of unprecedented scale and complexity. It will present massive logistical, veterinary, husbandry, rehabilitation and financial challenges, and will have to involve expert biologists, zoo-keepers and veterinarians, supported by a large number of dedicated volunteer carers, and coordinated with military precision to stand any chance of success.

**End**

Notes:

1. BirdLife South Africa has conducted constant, on-the-ground monitoring of the Kamfers Dam's flamingos, and especially of the breeding colony, for the last four weeks. The aims of this monitoring effort have been (a) to determine signs of nest or chick abandonment in the breeding colony and advise on the need for further rescue operations, (b) to try to minimise disturbance of the colony, and (c) to monitor water levels, algal productivity and overall flamingo numbers. We have also liaised closely with Ekapa Mining on ways to source additional water for Kamfers Dam, in collaboration the Sol Plaatje Municipality.
2. BirdLife South Africa and Ekapa Mining have developed a sophisticated, remote method of counting the flamingo chicks in the crèche(s).
3. Deep machine algorithm learning methods were used to analyse the high-resolution images taken from a drone that has flown over Kamfers Dam at high level, thus ensuring no disturbance of the dam's flamingos. These drone flights have been done with the approval of the Civil Aviation Authority, and have yielded an accurate count of 5250 Lesser Flamingo chicks currently present on the dam.
4. Over the past few weeks the Sol Plaatje Municipality and Ekapa Mining have worked hard to address the effluent reticulation issues affecting water levels in the dam. A gravitational feed from Galeshewe to the Homevale Waste Water Treatment Works was repaired which resulted in an initial inflow of about 24 megalitres/day, but unfortunately this has now declined to and stabilised at about 14 megalitres/day. The current evaporation rate is estimated at about 22 megalitres/day. Further repairs to the reticulation system, including the pipelines and pump stations, will take several months, and no additional inflow of effluent is anticipated before early-May 2019. The Homevale Waste Water Treatment Works remains non-functional.
5. BirdLife South Africa and Ekapa Mining remain extremely concerned that in excess of 20 megalitres/day of raw sewerage effluent is flowing into the veld at Platfontein farm, just west of Kimberley.
6. BirdLife South Africa (including its CEO, Mark Anderson), the Save the Flamingo Association, Ekapa Mining and/or the Department of Environment & Nature Conservation have, in one way or another, been involved in the study, monitoring and conservation of Lesser Flamingos at Kamfers Dam since the early-1990s. During the past 13 years this work has largely been to address the threats to Kamfers Dam and its flamingo population, and especially to address ongoing problems with the quality and quantity of water supplying the dam.
7. The on-site monitoring during the past month has been conducted by BirdLife South Africa staff, contractors and volunteers, especially Dr Andrew Jenkins, Tania Anderson and Robin Colyn, and with assistance from Ekapa Mining's Jahn Hohne, Peter Hohne, Howard Marsden, and Greg Watcham.

8. BirdLife South Africa commends the various facilities in Gauteng, Cape Town and Durban, and their staff and volunteers who have worked exceptionally hard over the last four weeks to rear the chicks rescued from Kamfers Dam since 24 January.
9. BirdLife South Africa acknowledges the people and organisations who have supported its on-site work during the past month, especially Ekapa Mining and the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust. Several organisations, bird clubs and private individuals have generously donated money to support our work at Kamfers Dam. We are also grateful for the support received from Herbert and Brenda Booth, Kamfers Dam's landowners.
10. For further information about Kamfers Dam's flamingos, please contact Mark Anderson (CEO of BirdLife South Africa) at [ceo@birdlife.org.za](mailto:ceo@birdlife.org.za).