

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2021

Wetlands and life: The Link

February 2nd: the convention on wetlands selected the theme: “Wetlands and Water” as the clarion call for 2021. This year’s theme sheds spotlight on the vital role of wetlands as a natural mechanism in sustaining water resources and flood management. This day also marks 30 years and 3 months since Kenya signed the Convention on wetlands of international importance.

In Kenya, wetlands occupy approximately 3-4% of the land area and play a critical role in sustaining the integrity of the country’s water resources, agricultural productivity, and biodiversity. Wetlands are like a sponge that absorbs water and thus controls floods. And through filtration, they remove pollutants from water. They are nutrient rich and productive most of the year, providing water and quality pasture to local communities and their livestock during dry seasons.

Given the important role of wetlands, the GEF SGP phase VI programme allocated a total of 70 million Kenya shillings to 27 community-based organizations towards wetland conservation and enhancing the socio-ecological resilience of the Lake Bogoria production landscape.

The Pink wetlands of Bogoria.



Flamingos at Lake Bogoria ©James Kimaru

Lake Bogoria, a wetland of international importance is inscribed in the Natural World Heritage Site list and is also globally recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a Ramsar site. Hundreds of thousands of flamingos carpeting the floors of Lake Bogoria is truly a spectacular sight. Flamingos are among the most easily recognizable birds with their long necks and legs and their bodies covered in pink wing feathers. Thousands of local and international visitors make their way to the shores of Lk. Bogoria to marvel at the pink wetland, and to experience the hot steam baths, believed to have medicinal healing powers, due to the sulphur compounds in the steam.

Up until recently, the residents and the Baringo county at large, benefitted from the thriving tourism industry. But thanks to the onset of the Corona pandemic, the area has seen the tourist numbers, and the subsequent inflow of cash, plummet significantly. Visitor numbers in the last 6 months of 2020 totalled 1,064, a dismal number compared to the 33,246 tourists that visited the lake during the same period in the previous year. Another calamity that has befallen Lk. Bogoria is the inordinate rise in water levels, which has triggered extensive flooding. The Bogoria floods, which have been experienced at other Rift Valley lakes, have caused destruction of homes, livelihoods, industry, infrastructure as well as displacement of 252 households and loss of terrestrial wildlife habitat. The socio-economic loss incurred by households and counties has prompted the government to establish an inter-ministerial committee to investigate the cause of the floods, and to propose remedial measures.



Aerial view of a submerged administration block at Lake Bogoria©James Kimaru

The power of working together

Despite the devastating effects of the floods and the Corona pandemic; the communities of the Lk. Bogoria landscape are collaborating with key stakeholders to implement a range of activities that improve their livelihoods while contributing to improved management of natural resources. The UNDP-GEF/SGP funds received by local organizations include strengthening community wildlife conservancy associations, supporting agro-based value chains, such as honey and pasture, rehabilitation of riverine habitats, and promotion of eco-tourism. Initial assessments reveal that the collaborative efforts are paying off. There is a better understanding among local communities of the importance of wetlands and the ecological services it provides. Acquisition of new skills in production, management and value addition of agro-based products has seen a corresponding increase in household income from product sales. Enforcement of better land management practice through prohibiting planting of crops along the riverbanks has promoted the planting of napier grass and fruit trees. There is power in people, partnerships and communities working together for change.



Nasinya Women harvesting grass at their demonstration site- KOAN