

Volunteer conservationists draw attention to Lake Bogoria

- By Fred Barasa, Anthony Ochieng and Maaiké Manten



Stunning panoramic of Flamingos at Lake Bogoria © Anthony Ochieng

American industrialist, Henry Ford once said: “coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success.” Volunteer conservationists around Lake Bogoria in Kenya might not have heard him say this, but their passion of working together to care for their local important bird and biodiversity areas fully represent Mr. Ford’s statement.

Friends of Nature Bogoria is a group of passionate volunteers working together around Lake Bogoria to generate and share information with members of their community about the importance of preserving the Lake Bogoria National Reserve. The area is an important bird and biodiversity area and a key biodiversity area found in the [Eastern Afrotropical hotspot](#). Lake Bogoria is popular for hosting the largest number of bird species - 96 species of birds - seen in one hour in Kenya. Its water supports a dense bloom of algae and serves as an important foraging ground for flocks of the Lesser Flamingos bird species. This important wetland is also popular with its hot springs and wide range of mammals that include leopards, greater kudus, klipspringers and caracals.

The lake is a great attraction for tourists who come to see its beautiful scenery and desirable biodiversity. Lake Bogoria also presents opportunities for geothermal energy production, which is clean and renewable energy that emits fewer emissions of carbon dioxide gas. However, geothermal energy can also have negative impacts on the natural environment. It may affect water quality, and can lead to habitat loss for both plants and animals.

In order to ensure that any future development at the Lake Bogoria reserve recognise the need to protect and maintain the natural environment, [Nature Kenya](#) (BirdLife Partner in Kenya), with funds from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's Regional Implementation Team, has engaged local volunteers around the lake to ensure that environmental safeguards are respected and any negative impact from energy extraction is avoided.

"The major challenge is the threat of geothermal energy exploration. This can lead to habitat destruction as we saw in the case of Hell's Gate National Park," said Maaïke Manten, Team Leader of the BirdLife/Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's Regional Implementation Team in the Eastern Afromontane Region.

Nature Kenya worked closely with the Baringo County government to empower people in the community around the lake to monitor and protect their own environment. A team of volunteers known as Friends of Bogoria was engaged as a Site Support Group (SSG) and entrusted to scrutinize the ecological impacts of extracting geothermal energy and other development initiatives on this key biodiversity area. The group has been very active in influencing the application of appropriate safeguard policies and procedures, including environmental impact assessments.



Friends of Nature Bogoria at Lake Bogoria Natural Reserve © Nature Kenya

"We are concerned about the environmental safeguards and do not wish that Lake Bogoria Nature Reserve ends up as the Hell's Gate National Park, where environmental safeguards were not taken into consideration. We are working with the county government to ensure that a geothermal policy brief is prepared with support from Nature Kenya and adhered to," said Raphael Kimosop, a member of the group.

Social and environmental safeguard policies and procedures recognise development, but stress the need for it to guarantee sustainability.

Friends of Bogoria, Nature Kenya and the County government have through their partnership, committed to shine the light on Lake Bogoria and conserve its natural resources. By working to preserve the lake, these volunteers are protecting more than plants and animals. They are protecting communities.

Previously published on the BirdLife International website on 7 April 2017

Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, through its Regional Implementation Team in the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot, started providing 'rapid response fund' grants of maximum USD 10,000 in July 2014. These grants are issued to fund projects that aim to protect Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) under immediate and urgent threat. The main idea behind these grants is "to support the role of civil society organizations in the application of site safeguard policies and procedures in order to avoid or minimize / mitigate ongoing and emerging threats on critical biodiversity habitats".

See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane hotspot programme [here](#).

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.

BirdLife International, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) form the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012-2017). The investment will support civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and priority corridors in the region.