

## Africa's first artificial flamingo breeding island

**K**amfers Dam, the large perennial wetland located just north of Kimberley, Northern Cape Province, is home to the largest permanent population of flamingos in southern Africa. It now has a large artificial island, the first of its kind in Africa and perhaps the third in the world (there are similar structures on Bonaire Island in the Netherlands Antilles, and on the Rhône River delta in the Camargue, France).

It is hoped that Kamfers Dam's island will boost the conservation of southern Africa's flamingos, as the populations of both the Lesser and Greater Flamingo are declining. Although the Lesser Flamingo population in Africa is more numerous, it is threatened by various factors, especially anthropogenic changes to its only three breeding sites in Africa: Sua Pan (Botswana), Etosha Pan (Namibia) and Lake Natron (Tanzania).

Both species of flamingos have attempted to breed at Kamfers Dam, but have never proceeded beyond egg-laying. There are currently three nesting areas, with approximately 2 500 nests located at the south-eastern end of the dam. The reason for breeding failure has been attributed to a rapidly receding water level during early summer, which leaves the nests exposed to disturbance and predation.

The idea of building an island at Kamfers Dam was conceived in 1995,



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*Kamfers Dam's flamingos have accepted their new home and, since early October, about 10 000 Lesser Flamingos have regularly been observed roosting on the island. At night, it is jam-packed with flamingos, and late arrivals have to roost in the shallow waters next to the island.*

but financial constraints resulted in the project taking 11 years to come to fruition. The construction of the island was funded by Ekapa Mining, a Kimberley-based company, with Envirosec conducting the environmental

impact assessment. (See *Africa – Birds & Birding*, April/May 2006.)

A 200-metre causeway had to be constructed to the island site, with this access road being removed once the construction was completed. The island is about 250 x 25 metres, S-shaped and the long axis faces north, into the prevailing wind, thus limiting erosion caused by wind and the resultant wave action. The shape results in there being two sheltered bays, the edges of which were gently sloped to facilitate the flamingos' access to the island. More than 25 000 tons of material, predominantly calcrete, was used to construct the island, and the foundation was topped with a 200-millimetre layer of clay and sand. Four large ponds were built in the centre of the island and, fed from a submerged water pump, these will provide the flamingos with wet mud for the construction of their nests. Volunteers helped to construct 1 000 nest turrets, which will hopefully act as the stimulus that will see the flamingos breeding in the near future.

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