

Lk. Naivasha Designated "Wetland of Int'l Importance"

On April 10, 1995, Kenya designated Lake Naivasha and the surrounding riparian land a "wetland of international importance" under the Ramsar Convention of 1971.

This permanent freshwater lake in Kenya's Rift Valley is known for its diversity of wetland animals and plants, including the largest number of waterbird species of any wetland in the country and one of the world's tallest stands of papyrus (up to 15 ft.) at this elevation.

About 74,000 acres, including Lake Naivasha itself, some adjacent sodic wetlands, a floodplain, and a delta, were designated under Ramsar. According to documents submitted to the Ramsar bureau by Kenya, the area was designated because of its "special ecological value to the region."

The only other Ramsar site in Kenya is Lake Nakuru, which was designated in June 1990.

Unlike Lake Nakuru, which is part of a national park, Lake Naivasha has no protected status. It is surrounded by private land where most inhabitants are farmers—many of them growing flowers for export.

Members of the Lake Naivasha Riparian Owners Association (LNROA), which supported the Ramsar designation, have drawn up a proposed management plan to govern activities at the site. But on July 28, officials of the Kenyan government abruptly cancelled an LNROA meeting at which members had hoped to adopt the plan as their recommendation for management of the lake. Another meeting is expected to be convened soon.

According to Dr. Geoffrey Howard of the IUCN's Eastern Africa Office, residents of the area will not be restricted from any activities that maintain the ecological integrity of the wetlands. "Water use, food and flower growing, will continue as well as fishing, tourism, livestock rearing, etc.," he said.

Significant numbers of large wild animals reside in and around Lake Naivasha, including hippos, waterbucks, bushbucks, impalas, elands, Thompson's gazelles, giraffes, and Burchell's zebras. Additional species visit the area from Hell's Gate National Park, which adjoins the site to the south.

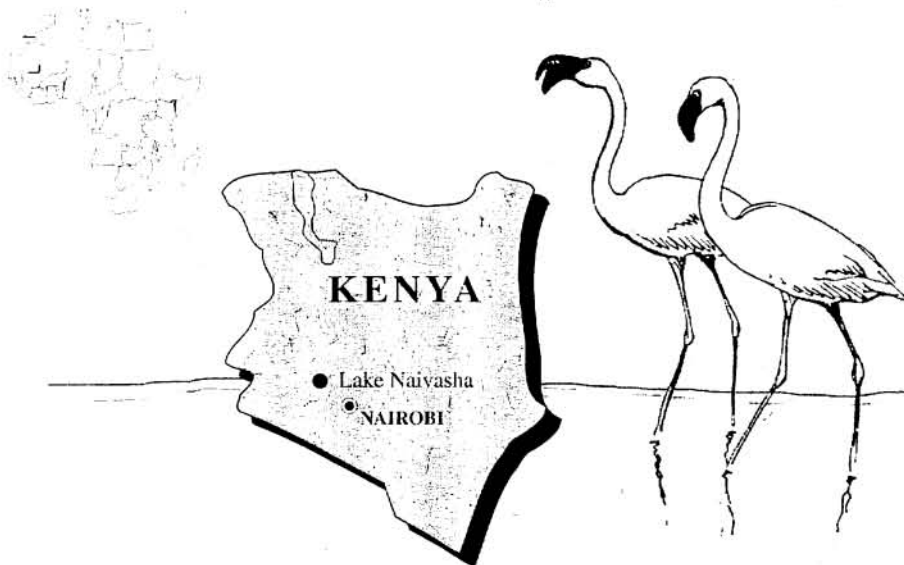
About 350 species of birds have also been recorded at Lake Naivasha.

According to the Kenyan documents, the main threats to the lake include excessive water extraction from the wetland systems, use of agrochemicals, and siltation from soil erosion. Increased intensity of human use (including fishing and tourism, illegal

hunting, overuse of wetland plants, and re-infestation by non-native plants) is also of concern.

The primary purpose of the Ramsar Convention, which entered into force in 1975, is to ensure the conservation of

wetlands. Parties to the Convention (now numbering 90) are obligated to designate at least one wetland to the list of "wetlands of international importance." To date, more than 750 wetlands throughout the world have been so designated.



White Rhinos Re-introduced To Etosha

Ten white rhinos have been released in Namibia's Etosha National Park, the first free-ranging white rhinos in the park this century, according to a press release from Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

White rhinos were extirpated in Namibia before 1900. Prior to the Etosha release, which occurred on July 21, white rhinos had been re-established in Waterberg Plateau Park and on several Namibian game farms.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism said "the reintroduction of these animals to areas where they previously occurred is in line with [our] policy to restore biodiversity where possible."

The ten new arrivals in Etosha were part of an exchange of wildlife between the

northern Namibian park and Kruger National Park in South Africa. Kruger received 30 giraffes from Etosha about four years ago, but unfavorable climatic conditions and threats from wildlife diseases delayed the conclusion of the transaction until this year.

In a separate transaction involving Etosha, eight black rhinos from the park were recently sold to a South African game-farming consortium for about \$25,000 each. The purchaser and exact destination were not disclosed by the Ministry for "security reasons."

Namibia has the second largest rhino population in Africa. The most recent estimates from the African Rhino Specialist Group (May 1994) are 98 white rhinos and 583 black rhinos.

Welcome To African Wildlife Update

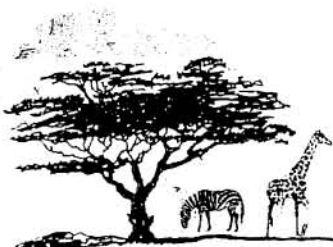
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Mali's Last Elephants to be Focus of New Study

Scientists will soon begin the first comprehensive survey of the desert elephants of Mali's Gourma region following the approval on September 7 of a \$50,000 U.S. government grant.

Estimated to number about 600, the Gourma elephants are the only elephants known to inhabit the Sahel and the last remaining in Mali. Scientists consider these herds the northernmost viable population on the African continent (see map).

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service approved the \$50,000 grant under the African Elephant Conservation Fund, which was created in 1988 when Congress passed the African Elephant Conservation Act. More than 46 separate projects in 16 African countries have been financed by the United States since the creation of the fund. This will be the first project funded in Mali.

The project will be a joint effort of the U.S. Embassy in Bamako, Mali's Water and Forests Department, and a private Malian organization known as "Elwan," which means "elephant" in the language of the Tuareg, the majority tribe in the area. Technical assistance is expected to be



Mali's Gourma elephants co-exist with cattle. (Photo by Ambassador Robert Pringle)

provided by the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

The Water and Forests Department will be responsible for counting the elephants and mapping their migration patterns, and Elwan will organize an outreach program to educate local villagers.

The \$50,000 will be used to purchase communications and camping equipment, develop educational materials, and cover operating expenses for the vehicles and airplanes used in the study. Motorcycles may also be purchased with the funds.

According to Carolee Heileman, Charge d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Mali, the project has the potential to provide important information as the population pressure on the land increases and competition for scarce resources becomes more intense.

Although the Gourma elephants have never been studied in any depth, scientists believe they migrate farther than any other elephants, nearly 500 miles a year. They have not been heavily poached (their tusks are naturally short, apparently from dietary deficiencies) and have long been viewed in a positive light by the Tuareg.

Nevertheless, the Gourma elephants face a number of serious long-term challenges, including desertification, a limited water supply, and competition for

space with humans and their livestock. According to a recent article by former U.S. Ambassador to Mali Robert Pringle, the Gourma elephants share the region's "forbidding terrain" with about 100,000 humans and 350,000 cattle, goats, camels, and donkeys.

Although water is the primary limiting factor for the elephants, "humans and elephants compete intensely for

water only during the month of May," according to the U.S. Embassy in Mali. "At that time, humans wait in line at watering holes behind their large mammalian neighbors."

Ambassador Pringle, whose writing has been instrumental in highlighting the uniqueness of these elephants, has noted that a portion of the Gourma region was classified a reserve as long ago as 1959, but "nothing was ever done to implement this move." He advocates the creation of a "real park" with employees from the local population.

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