

Rapid response turns shrinking Kenyan lake into protected area

- By Jude Fuhnwi

Lake Ol Bolossat is home to thriving hippopotamus families and a wealth of stunning waterbirds. But human activity is drying up this oasis of life. Just in the nick of time, a CEPF-funded campaign persuaded the Kenyan Government to grant formal protection.

Lake Ol Bolossat is a small lake in the Nyandarua County of central Kenya. It lies nestled between the northwestern slopes of Aberdare Mountains and the Dundori Ridge, and serves as the source of the Ewaso Nyiro River and Thomson's falls. The open water, marshes, grassland and forests – not to mention the springs that feed the lake – offer a great variety of habitats. This lake is home to several families of hippopotamus and serves as a vital stop-over site for migrating birds such as the beautiful – but Endangered – Grey Crowned-crane *Balearica regulorum*. Designated as Kenya's 61st [Important Bird and Biodiversity Area \(IBA\)](#), the lake is known to hold important water bird species.



The lake is a key habitat for Endangered birds such as the Grey Crowned-crane © Fabian Haas

As a source of the Ewaso Nyiro River, it also supports the large population of people, livestock and wildlife that live downstream. Fishermen in the area depend on the Lake for their livelihood: catfish are abundant during rainy seasons.

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Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

But until very recently, Lake Ol Bolossat was on the list of [IBAs in danger](#). The lake was facing extinction from unprecedented levels of environmental degradation. Threats from human activities such as quarrying, road construction activities, over-grazing, pollution and illegal settlement on riverside land have reduced the water body significantly. In fact, there are now only 4 km² of open water left.



Local livelihoods depend on the lake © Fabian Haas

And so, following a significant campaign by the [East African Wildlife Society \(EAWLS\)](#) through a project funded by the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#), on January 24 Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Natural Resources, Prof. Judi Wakhungu, endorsed and signed the gazette of Lake Ol Bolossat as a protected area.

"The biodiversity is awesome. I've gazetted this beautiful Lake in order to protect it from encroachment," said Prof. Wakhungu in a tweet on February 04, days after declaring its new protected status.

"The biodiversity is awesome"

The nine-month project, known as "Enhancing Environmental Regulations in Safeguarding Lake Ol Bolossat in Nyandarua County, Kenya", received funding from CEPF through BirdLife International as Regional Implementation Team (RIT)* in the [Eastern Afromontane Hotspot](#) to ensure its ecosystem services are preserved. The project funded the East African Wildlife Society to reduce negative impact on the lake – especially from road construction and agricultural expansion. Their combined efforts with other stakeholders influenced the Kenyan government's decision to formally protect the wetland.

Watch the full story here at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nazssXLZbRo>

"Effective January 24, 2018 Lake Ol Bolossat is a wetland protected area," declared Prof. Wakhungu, on February 02, during an event on the site to observe World Wetlands Day in Kenya, hosted by the EAWLS. "I



Human activity such as quarrying and building has left only 4 km of open water © Fabian Haas

endorsed and signed the gazette. The documents are now with the Attorney General that the effective date of the gazette of Lake Ol Bolossat is January 24, 2018.”

This new protected wetland has joined the Eastern Afromontane’s 142 protected areas. It also adds over 4,000 hectares to the 1.2 million hectares of new Protected Area to the African Protected Area network gained as a result of CEPF-funded projects, often co-financed by other donors.

Reacting to the Cabinet Secretary’s announcement, Jabes Okumu, Wildlife Programme Manager at the East African Wildlife Society, described it as a major achievement that “will provide the institutional and legal framework to guide and coordinate all conservation efforts within and around Lake Ol Bolossat.” “Thanks to CEPF for supporting us to champion this noble course,” he said.

Under the CEPF funded project, the lake was profiled in the media as a top priority within a Joint Action Plan by key stakeholders.

The project's success shows that "seed funding" can have major positive impacts

“Through our ‘rapid response fund’**, we provided US\$10,000 to EAWLS in 2016. EAWLS continued with their activities after the CEPF/BirdLife funded project with funding from the Rufford Foundation and the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation,” said Maaiké Mantén, Team Leader for the RIT. “This shows that limited ‘seed funding’ can have major positive impacts.”

Other projects supported by the rapid response fund under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane Small Grants Programme targeted the protection of Ethiopian wolves in Ethiopia and vultures in Kenya. The programme made a total of 11 rapid response fund grants across the hotspot.

Read more below:

[Volunteer Conservationists draw attention to Lake Bogoria](#)

[New partnership to safeguard Malagarasi River System](#)

[Malagarasi river finds favor with local women](#)

[A first success in Eastern Afromontane Hotspot](#)

* BirdLife International, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) formed the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012 -2017). The investment supported civil

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society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and priority corridors in the region.

** [The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#), through its [Regional Implementation Team in the Eastern Afrotropical biodiversity hotspot](#), started providing 'rapid response fund' grants of maximum USD 10,000 in July 2014. These grants were issued to fund projects that aimed to protect Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) under immediate and urgent threat. The main idea behind these grants was "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 Afrotropical hotspot programme [here](#).



The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, 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 the CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.