

THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK

1. TOTAL AREA:

Lake Nakuru National Park covers an area of 188 km². The lake occupies 40 km² of the park.

2. LOCATION:

The park is located in the Eastern Rift Valley in Kenya. It is 150 km north-west of Nairobi. The park is between latitudes 0° 18'S and 0°30'S and longitudes 36° 03'E and 36° 07'E. To the north-west lies Nakuru Municipality.

3. DESCRIPTION:

- (i) TOPOGRAPHY- The park lies within a zone of complex geology and topography brought about by the tectonic and volcanic forces associated with the formation of the Rift Valley. These forces have altered the initial peneplain to a landform of ridges and troughs consisting of the following topographic features:

Lion Hill - This is situated on the eastern side Lake Nakuru. It runs in the north-south direction:

Western Escarpment - situated at the west shore. It forms part of Mau Escarpment.

The Central Plains - the plains occupy the northern and southern parts of the lake between Lion Hill and Western Escarpment. They are characterised by lacustrine and riverine sediments.

The Tuff Cones - also commonly known as Elmenteita Tuff Cones. They consist of the Honey Moon Hill and Crescent Hill, both located in the northern side of the park.

The Lake - Lake Nakuru, commonly known as the lake of a million flamingos is a shallow saline lake with an average depth of 1m and maximum depth of 4m. The lake sediments consist of fine clay, silt and gravel. During the dry seasons, crusts of trona are formed on the shallow pools and along the shoreline. The lake forms the lowest point in a catchment basin 1800 km² comprising the Mau Escarpment to the west and Bahati Highlands to the east. The catchment area is drained by the following rivers: Njoro, Nderit, Makalia, Larmudiac and Ngosur. The rivers, Njoro, Larmudiac, Makalia and Nderit are seasonal and drain the Mau Escarpment. The Ngosur, a permanent stream drains the Bahati Highlands. It enters the lake as freshwater springs from the north-eastern shore.

(ii) VEGETATION:

Lake Nakuru National Park exhibits a wide diversity of plants. There are over 550 plant species which constitute 305 genera and 85 families. The park vegetation falls into two broad categories: the wetland vegetation and terrestrial vegetation.

WETLAND VEGETATION: The wetland vegetation include the sedge marshes, the flood plain grasses, the swamps and riverine vegetation.

Sedge Marshes - These are mainly waterlogged areas of alluvial deposits found mainly to the north and northeast shores of Lake Nakuru. They are regularly flooded by the lake except during the dry seasons. The vegetation of the marshes is dominated by Cyperus laevigatus, a salt tolerant sedge. Cyperus dichrostachys is also found in this zone.

Flood Plain Grasses - The flood plains are seasonally flooded areas. They are mainly found to the north, west and southern shores of Lake Nakuru. The floodplain is colonized by alkaline grasses such as Sporobolus spicatus and Cynodon dactylon. These grasses are interspersed by sand bars and muddy shoreline with patches of sedges such as Cyperus laevigatus.

Swamps - The swamps are found where freshwater seeps into the lake. Where Nderit River enters the lake, an extensive swamp vegetation is developed to the south-east. Swamp vegetation also occurs around the springs on the northern shore. This is believed to be the mouth outlet of Ngosur River which disappears a few kilometers away from the lake as it drains Bahati Highlands catchment area. Typha domingensis is the dominant swamp plant especially to the south-east end of Lake Nakuru. Other swamp species are mainly sedges such as Cyperus immensus and Cyperus laevigatus.

Riverine Vegetation: The riverine vegetation is found along river banks. This area is flooded during the wet season and supports a rich vegetation with a dense undergrowth. The riverine vegetation is composed of trees such as Acacia xanthophloea, Dombeya burgessiae. The shrubs include Ricinus communis, Maerua triphylla, Rhus natalensis, Grewia similis and many others.

TERRESTRIAL VEGETATION: The terrestrial vegetation of Lake Nakuru National Park falls into the following categories: grasslands, bushlands, woodlands and forests:

Grasslands - The grasses are widely spread in the park particularly on the lake shore, the floodplains in the south and gentle slopes of the Lion Hill to the east. The most common grasses include: Themeda triandria, Digitaria abyssinica, Cynodon nlemfluensis, Chloris gyyana and Sporobolus spicatus:

Bushes - The bushes form the most extensive vegetation of the park with Tarchonanthus camphoratus as the dominant shrub species. Other shrubs include Pluchea bequaertii, Psiadia punctulata and Aspilia mossambicensis. The bushes are also characterised by scattered trees mainly Acacia xanthophloea and Acacia seyal:

Woodlands: These are mainly the Acacia xanthophloea and Acacia seyal woodlands. The A. xanthophloea woodlands encompass the shoreline to the northern and southern shores. The vegetation is characterised by tall (25 m) trees, presence of dense ground cover and clusters of lianas, twiners and climbers. The A. seyal woodland is found on the ridges of Western Mau Escarpment. The vegetation is characterised by lack of shrub layer, closely packed trees and poor ground cover:

Forests: These include the Acacia xanthophloea, Euphorbia candelabrum and Olea africana forests. The A. xanthophloea forest occurs in small patches within the A. xanthophloea woodland. The forest is composed of tall trees (30 m) dense shrub layer and dense clusters of lianas, climbers and twiners. The Euphorbia candelabrum forest displays a unique picturesque of a well preserved natural forest. It occupies the

steep basaltic slopes and ridges: Olea africana forest is part of Kenya Dry Highland forest. It represents a climax vegetation. The forest trees include Teclea simplicifolia, Olea africana, Euclea divinorum and Cussonia holstii.

iii. BIRDS

Lake Nakuru National Park is world famous for its spectacular birdlife. It has an international reputation as "the lake of a million flamingoes" where up to 1,400,000 flamingoes have been recorded.

The common waterfowl include the lesser flamingo (Phoeniconaias minor) the greater flamingo (Phoenicopterus ruber), the pelicans (Pelecanus onocrotalus and Pelecanus rufescens) the cormorants (Phalacrocorax africanus) and the ducks (Aythya erythrophthalma and Aythya fuligula). Other aquatic birds include the little stints (Calidris minuta), herons (Ardea cinerae) egrets (Egretta gazetta), ibis (Hardredashici hagadash and marabou stocks (Leptoptilos crumeniferus). In addition, the park grasslands, escarpments and cliffs provide habitats for terrestrial birds. These include secretary birds (Sagittarius serpentarius), hornbills (Bucorvus leadbeateri), guinea fowls (Numida nitrata), Verreaux's eagle (Aquila verreauxi), swifts (Apus apus and Apus affinis) and kites (Elanus caeruleus).

In the park woodlands, forests and bushlands, the common birds include Augur buzzards (Buteo augur), Hildebrandt's francolin (Francolinus hildebrandti), doves (Streptopelia senegalensis) rollers (Coracias caudata) and starlings (Lamprotornis chalybaeus and L. purpuropterus).

4. LEGAL PROTECTION:

Lake Nakuru National Park was first established as a bird sanctuary in 1961. This bird sanctuary covered about two-thirds of the southern part of the lake. In 1968 the remaining one-third of the lake was included in the park. Thereafter, in 1974, the Kenya Government with help from World Wildlife Fund bought the surrounding farms and expanded the park to its present boundaries. The added land functions as a buffer zone between the lake and the neighbouring farms and the Nakuru Municipality.

5. IS THE WETLAND A NATURAL MONUMENT

Yes.