

## **Saving a Dying Hope**



**Report on World Wetlands Day 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006.  
Lake Ol Bollossat Wetlands  
Central Province Kenya**

**Report by  
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## **Saving Lake Ol Bolossat and its wetlands**

Lake Ol Bolossat wetland area, in Central Province of Kenya, was one of the venues in which this year's World Wetlands Day was commemorated. The main aim of the event was not only to popularize the Ramsar Convention and its ideals, but also to highlight the current conservation status of the lake and its wetland resources with a view of generating more interest among the local residents to participate in actions to reverse the negative trends.

Lake Ol Bolossat is a freshwater lake situated on a very flat plain in Nyandarua district of Central province Kenya. It is the only lake found in the entire Central Province of Kenya. It happens 2340 metres above sea level and is approximately 43km<sup>2</sup>. On its eastern edge, there is a 36km-long escarpment that rises to 2,500m.a.s.l creating a spectacular scenery. It is rich in biodiversity and is habitat for numerous species of water birds some of which are rated as rare or threatened. The lake's catchment and basin are important for local and national socio-economic development. The lake serves as the catchment for Ewaso Nyiro River which supports important functions and lifestyles of communities living in the arid and semi arid parts of north, north-eastern and rift valley provinces. The thriving tourism industry in Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo springs national reserves is made possible by the flow of the Ewaso Nyiro river.

But over the years, the important attributes, values, ecological integrity of the lake and potential benefits that can be derived from the lake ecosystem on a sustainable basis are being threatened by anthropogenic disturbances such as catchment degradation, siltation, overgrazing, introduction of alien species, fires, encroachment on the riparian land, and pollution from the burgeoning agricultural activities around the lake and (excessive) water abstraction, mainly as a result of increasing human population and limited survival livelihood maintaining systems. But despite the gloom that this scenario presents, there hopes that the issues can be addressed jointly with the participation of the relevant stakeholders. To prove this, a management plan has been developed which identifies the areas that need intervention and there is demonstrated evidence of commitment to address these.

The East African Wild Life Society through the Kenya Wetlands Forum, in conjunction with Kenya Wildlife Service, Nyahururu League for Environmental Awareness and Education and Thompson Falls Sport Camp therefore used the occasion of the World Wetlands Day to further highlight the deteriorating conditions of the lake and its wetlands and shore up more support for its conservation.

The event witnessed one of the largest turnouts in the history of the WWD activities in Kenya. The participants, numbering in their hundreds were from;

- members of the public,
- community groups,
- schools (both primary and secondary)
- private enterprises (Suera Flowers)
- the Provincial Administration - area Chiefs, Dos and DC
- police department
- the local Nyandarua County Council

- the Kenya Wildlife Service/Kenya Wetlands Forum
- East African Wild Life Society
- The National Environment Management Authority

Representatives from the various mentioned groups were in agreement on the destruction and continued degradation of the lake and on the need for collective actions to save the lake from further negative impacts.

One important resolution from the WWD commemoration at Lake Ol Bolossat was the announcement by the Director General of the National Environment Management Authority (DG-NEMA), who graced the occasion, to gazette Lake Ol Bolossat, giving it some protection status and therefore conservation and management priorities.

From now on, intense discussions and negotiations are therefore going to be carried out to determine the best gazettement status, delineate the boundaries of the wetlands permanently and the various management and use alternatives of the lake and its wetlands resources.

We at the East African Wild Life Society and the Kenya Wetlands Forum hope this initiative bears the anticipated results in the shortest time possible.

## Images from the event.

The WWD events started with a procession along the main Nyahururu-Nairobi highway, to raise the necessary awareness on what was going on;



Banners were additionally put in strategic points in Nyahururu town and its environs o further make people aware of the concerns over the lake, even on mobile vehicles;







Commemorative trees were then planted in the nearby school, Kiangata Primary, to underscore the need to restore the vegetation cover in the area;



*The DG-NEMA waters his tree (above) followed by representatives of other institutions present (below)*



The participants then made a brief to parts of the wetlands under stress;



After the brief visit to parts of the wetlands, children from schools near the wetlands entertained those present with poems and song, urging everybody to save their hope for the future;



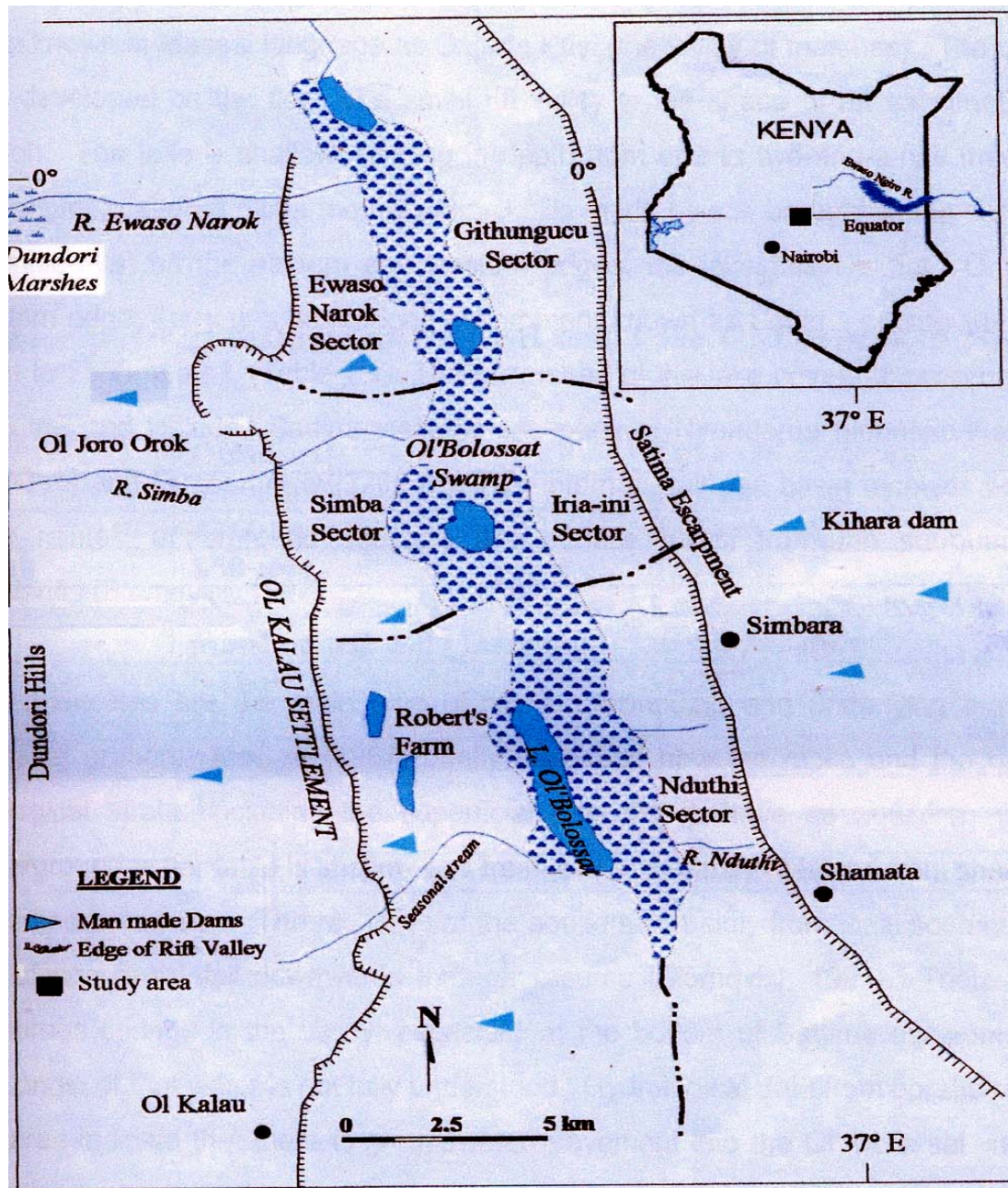




And then there were speeches;



# General position of Lake Ol Bolossat and its wetlands





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# New move to save dying lake

## Central Province landmark is now to be gazetted as a protected area

By MOSES MWATHI

The only lake in Central province is to be gazetted as a protected area. The aim of the National Environment Management Authority (Nema) is to save Lake Ol Bolossal from extinction.

The move, according to Nema, will allow expansion and improve conservation management.

The saline lake in Vindadana District, now on the verge of drying up, has a water mass of 43 square kilometres. Encroachment by human activity and siltation have over the years threatened its existence.

The lake must be gazetted immediately or else it will be a thing of the past," Nema director-general Ratuero Mithika said during the celebrations to mark the World Wetlands Day at Kangila primary school, near the lake, on Thursday.

### Wetlands convention

The Convention on Wetlands was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the shores of Caspian Sea, on February 2, 1971.

"Although the lake still survives, it is under serious threat from heavy siltation resulting from farming activities around it," Prof Mithika said.

"It's unfortunate that the Government only lays emphasis on policy formation and not tackling critical issues unfolding on the ground."

Nema, he added, would take steps to protect the lake as an important wildlife habitat from further exploitation. Stern action would be taken against people flooding environmental rules.

The shallow lake, a breeding ground for more than 200 bird species, is under serious threat from human settlement.

Prof Mithika accused the ministry of Lands of allowing the settlement and said: "It was very wrong to designate the riparian land. Those occupying the land around it should be evicted. More than 10,000 families are inhabiting the lake's wetland with an area of 5,000 hectares.

### Over 10,000 families

River Usao Nyro, whose source is Lake Ol Bolossal, is the water lifeline for North-Eastern and Rift Valley provinces, and a major tourism attraction in Samburu, Shaba and Buffalo Springs.

"If the Government takes over the lake as any other national park, it will be developed as a sport fishing and bird shooting and viewing site," local hotelier Joseph Mbugua said at the fete.

### Sh1.7m lost as gang raids shop

By SUNDAY NATION Correspondent

Four armed gangsters yesterday morning raided a Thika, wholesale shop and robbed the owner of more than Sh1.7 million.

Thika police division boss James Ringera said the gang pounced on Ms Joyce Wambui Githitu as she opened the shop at 9am.

They forced her in and led her to where the money was kept, making the police suspect that it was an inside job.

Mr Ringera said the robbers even argued among themselves over the exact spot the money was kept. Ms Githitu was hit in the head with a gun butt and injured when she refused to tell the assailants where more money was hidden.

The gangsters fired several shots into the air as they escaped.

Several people were injured as they scrambled for safety, while the business premises were hurriedly closed. But they were reopened several hours later.

### Kenya leads Africa in a record tourism growth



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