

Endangered Birds of Botswana : Flamingos

Class: Aves | **Order:** Phoenicopteriformes | **Family:** Phoenicopteridae

Out of the six species of flamingos worldwide, Botswana is home to two of the species - the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) and the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*). The Makgadikgadi saltpan complex of northern Botswana, comprises one of the most important habitats in the world for the Lesser Flamingo, which has now been given a global conservation concern status of "Near Threatened" by the World Conservation Union (IUCN).



Greater and Lesser (Conservation Concerns)
The Makgadikgadi Pans is one of only four breeding sites for the Near Threatened Lesser Flamingo in Africa, with Sua Pan, the lowest part of the wetland complex, comprising one of only three sites in the whole of Africa where Lesser Flamingos breed successfully on a regular basis. As such it has been named an "Important Bird and Biodiversity Area" by BirdLife International. In 2010, this became a formal protected area as it was gazetted by the Botswana Government to protect the core breeding areas of the flamingos. The approximately 10 km by 10 km protected area is aptly named Flamingo Sanctuary. The Flamingo Sanctuary joins several other protected bird sanctuaries in the country reaffirming Botswana's commitment to conserving birds and biodiversity.

Greater Flamingo; *Phoenicopterus roseus*

(Nonyane ya Tladi, Lekukara)

Conservation status: Least Concern,

according to the IUCN Red List (waterbird)

The bird is distinguished by a pink bill with black tip. In company with the Lesser Flamingo, appears taller (up to 140 cm) and whiter. In flight, wing coverts are an even scarlet. It is abundant in the Makgadikgadi Pans where it gathers in huge flocks to breed, but it also found elsewhere across wetlands in Botswana, in smaller numbers, during the non-breeding season.

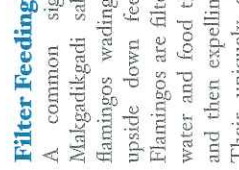
Lesser Flamingo; *Phoeniconaias minor*

(Nonyane ya Tladi, Lekukara)

Conservation status: Near threatened,

according to the IUCN Red List (waterbird)

This species is distinguished by an evenly coloured dark maroon bill that appears black at a distance; it is smaller (at approximately 102 cm in height) and pinker overall than the Greater Flamingo. In flight, the wing coverts are mottled with dark red.



Filter Feeding
A common sight seen at the Makgadikgadi salt pans is that of flamingos wading with their heads upside down feeding under water. Flamingos are filter feeders, taking in water and food through their beaks, and then expelling the excess water. Their uniquely designed beaks are lined with many complex rows of horny plates like those of Baleen Whales, which are used to strain food items from the water. Their tongues allow the food and water to be taken in so that the filtering system can take place, and also act as a pump to pass water through the bill's strainer more efficiently.

This "milk" does not have any calcium or carbohydrates, is not made by mammary glands, nor do young birds suckle to feed. It is a crumbly substance similar in consistency and texture to cottage cheese curds, and contains a variety of substances, including fat, protein, minerals, antioxidants, antibodies, bacteria.

OF INTEREST: Note the drop of crop milk on the beak of the lesser flamingo in our P5.00 stamp!

The Artist

Gwithie Kirby lives, paints, writes and cares for her grandchildren in Mokolodi, Botswana. This is her fourth set of Botswana stamps - Kingfishers (2007), Convolutulus flowers (2011), and Spectacular Birds (2014). She is also the author of a book on the Wildflowers of South East Botswana - in memory of her son Puso - the proceeds of which are donated to Mokolodi Nature Reserve's Boitumelo-mo-Nagang (Joy in the Bush) camps, which support orphans and disadvantaged children.

She wishes to thank Tim and June Liversedge (the Liversedge Collection), Pete Hancock (BirdLife Botswana) and Matthew Kirby (Headmaster, Westwood School) for allowing her to use their beautiful photographs as references for her paintings.

Botswana Post Wishes To Thank:

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