



DEBBIE SMITH

The 2019–2020 breeding season for the Lesser Flamingos at Kamfers Dam outside Kimberley in the Northern Cape appeared to be a non-starter. Usually when conditions are favourable and the flock size is at least 50 000 strong, the flamingos begin breeding from October.

In October 2019, after plenty of marching and courtship displays, a small flock of Lesser Flamingos started repairing and building nests. However, the dam's water level then began to drop and the birds abandoned their nest-building efforts.

Fortunately, 75 millimetres of rain fell in January and this stimulated the birds to continue with construction; by the end of February there were some 5000 structures. Some of the birds laid, but in March rainfall of 170 millimetres resulted in a rapid rise in the water level and some nests were flooded. It seemed that the flamingos would not have a successful breeding season as they had done the previous two years (and in the four summers from 2007 to 2011, when they bred on the purpose-built island).

But they were in fact breeding in the same area they had used in the previous two years. It is the third consecutive year they have nested on the



ESTER VAN DER WESTHUIZEN-COETZER

south-western shore, even in the face of threats, including disturbance by people and dogs.

A small team of flamingo monitors and the landowners have been unobtrusively checking on the flock. No doubt, the strict lockdown as a result of Covid-19 has afforded the flamingos a measure of peaceful feeding and breeding without human disturbance.

The latest algal monitoring data provided by BirdLife South Africa's Robin Colyn is reassuring; there are enough algae to feed the huge flock of 70 000 adults and 2000 growing chicks well into winter.

Thanks to Debbie Smith, Ester van der Westhuizen-Coetzer, the Booth

top After a successful breeding season, a flock of some 70 000 Lesser Flamingo adults and 2000 chicks line the Kamfers Dam shoreline.

above Fluffy grey chicks rest together in a large crèche after a morning's feeding. The smaller chicks rely on their parents to provide most of their daily nutrition through regurgitation.

family, Doug Harebottle and Donovan Smith for their commendable efforts to monitor and conserve Kamfers Dam's flamingos. Conservation action at the dam is supported by many generous sponsors, including Kimberley Ekapa Mining JV and the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust.

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