

# Special airlift for baby flamingos in peril in South Africa

February 1 2019, by Kevin Sutherland

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In this photo taken on Sunday, Jan. 27, 2019 photo, a rescued flamingo chick is fed at a centre after being rescued from a dried out dam, in Kimberley, South Africa. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo)

A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril.

A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. The flamingo eggs are losing their cool, moist protective cover and their inner membranes are hardening, making it difficult for chicks to peck their way out. Predators such as meerkats, dogs and hawks are nearby, waiting for the exhausted chicks to emerge.

The site is littered with the bodies of hundreds of dead chicks. The cheeps of chicks trapped inside overheating eggs can be heard.

Local and national groups, along with environmental authorities, have stepped in for the rescue operation swiftly organized online and by word of mouth. Bird experts and veterinarians have pitched in.

Local diamond mines paid for an emergency flight to carry the first batch of 900 chicks to the capital, Pretoria. Other batches have been flown to Cape Town and other approved locations.

Three thousand flamingo chicks have been moved in all. Another 6,000 to 8,000 young flamingos remain at the reservoir near Kimberley, active but still too young to fly. If the water levels keep dropping, experts said, the parents might abandon the chicks to save themselves.



In this photo taken on Sunday, Jan. 27, 2019, a newly born flamingo chick struggles to walk on a dried out dam in Kimberley, South Africa. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo)

The chicks in new homes face a special diet of baby cereal, sardines, eggs, prawns and vitamin supplements.

To simulate parents, feather dusters are placed in the chicks' boxes. Interaction with humans is restricted beyond feeding to minimize imprinting. Infrared lights give warmth.

Some of the chicks' rescuers are already thinking about next year and what to do if drought occurs again.



In this photo taken on Saturday, Jan. 26, 2019 photo, rescued flamingo chicks have access to water at a centre after being rescued from a dried out dam in Kimberley, South Africa. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo)

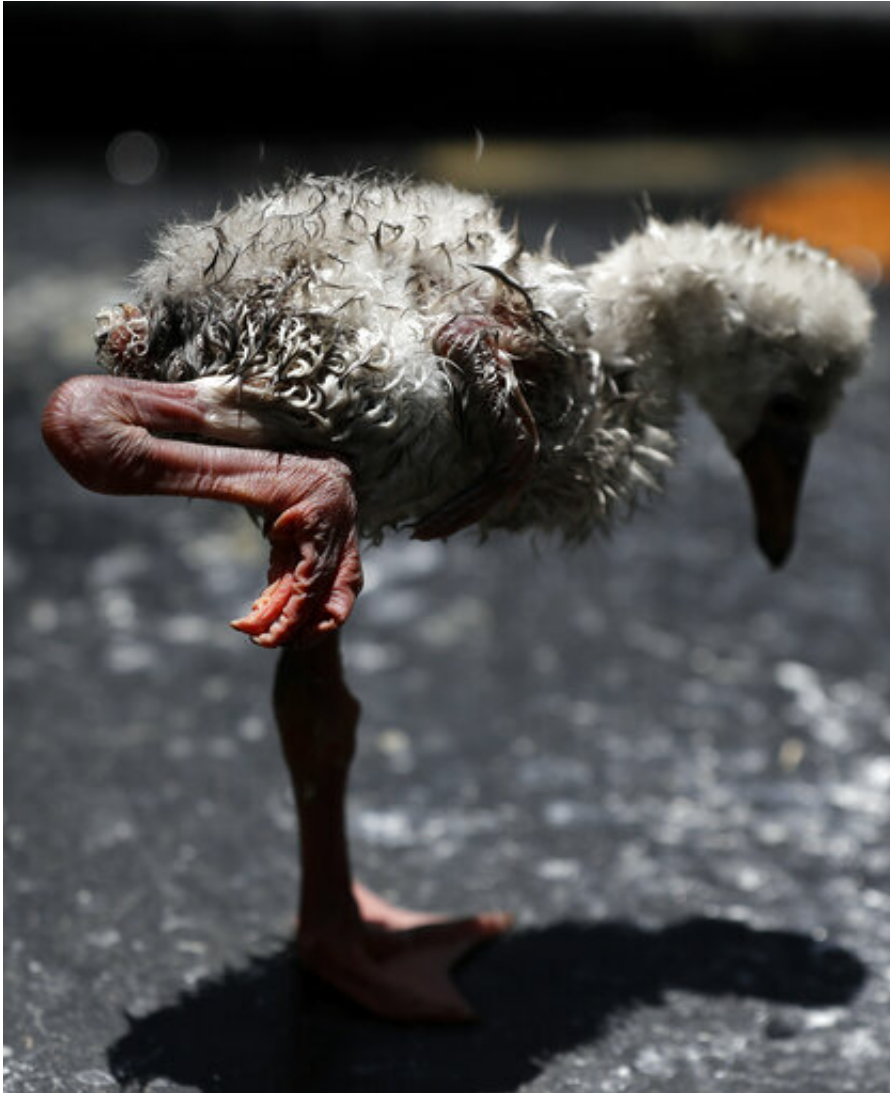


In this Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019 photo, a rescued flamingo chick is fed at a centre in Pretoria, South Africa, after being rescued from a dried out dam in Kimberley. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)





In this Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019 photo, a rescued flamingo chick is dried at a centre in Pretoria, South Africa, after being rescued from a dried out dam in Kimberley. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



In this Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019 photo, a rescued flamingo chick tries to walk at a centre in Pretoria, South Africa, after being rescued from a dried out dam in Kimberley. A special airlift for thousands of baby flamingos is under way in South Africa as drought has put their breeding ground in peril. A reservoir that hosts one of southern Africa's largest flamingo populations is drying up. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)

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