

With drought over, Dallas Zoo helps release flamingo chicks back into wild in South Africa

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After months of helping rehabilitate a group of lesser flamingo chicks abandoned in South Africa, the Dallas Zoo has released dozens of the birds back into the wild.

For the last four months, the zoo has been helping lead an effort to care for more than 1,800 chicks that were left behind by adult flamingos that abandoned their nests because of [severe drought](#) at the Kamfers Dam. The drought has since ended, the zoo said.

The dam in Kimberley, the capital of South Africa's Northern Cape Province, is one of four breeding grounds for the species in Africa and one of five worldwide.

Recently, 49 of the chicks were released at the dam. It was the first release of the rescued birds.

"It's been incredible to release our first flock and see them walk toward the other 20,000 wild adult flamingos at Kamfers Dam, and just fit right in," said Harrison Edell, the Dallas Zoo's executive vice president of animal care and conservation, said in a prepared statement.

The zoo expects that hundreds of other birds will be released in the coming weeks.

Edell said the rescue, care and release of the chicks has been a "massive undertaking" and credited the zoo community for stepping up to keep the orphaned birds alive.

"We're feeling intense relief right now, knowing a release of this magnitude has never been done before," Edell said.

For months, staff members have been helping to feed and care for the birds, but as the flamingos

have grown, the caretakers had to make sure the animals don't confuse humans with their parents.

Edell said it has been a "delicate balance" to ensure the birds are only interested in other [birds](#).

Before they were released, the flamingos were examined to check their physical health and were given a leg band and microchip.

Not all of the chicks will go back into the wild. Those that aren't fit to survive will become species ambassadors at Pan African association zoos. Several others, including a blind chick and some with wing injuries, will stay in human care, the zoo said.

More than 30 lesser [flamingo](#) chicks call the Dallas Zoo home. The chicks are listed as near-threatened by the International Union for the Conservation of Species and face threats of habitat destruction and [climate change](#), the zoo said.

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