Abstract

The Lesser Flamingo Phoeniconaias minor is the only algivore in the saline lakes of Kenya occurring in spectacular assemblages that form the tourism base. The flamingos show unpredictable, spontaneous, “nomadic” movements between the saline lakes whose precipitating ecological factors were not well established. Food, conductivity, breeding, predation and fresh water availability were regarded as the primary factors in spite of their global coverage in explaining animal movements. Evidence is emerging that food, especially algal species composition, density, and lake levels are the primary driving factors for these inter-lake movements, with other factors being consequences of these. Algal species composition and lake levels are subject to limnological processes in the lakes, climatic conditions and human activities in the catchment of the saline lakes. Environmental degradation is now a critical factor influencing the limnology of these fragile ecosystems with far ranging consequences on lake levels, algal species composition and succession. These changes determine flamingo utilization patterns within and between the lakes. This calls for a review of the conservation status and management of the saline lakes, home to a few but highly specialised species.