

# Floods drown chicks, wreck homes

Saturday Star 7/1/69

SHEREE BEGA

SEVERAL hundred Lesser flamingo chicks are believed to have drowned, or eggs washed away, after heavy rains at Kimberley's already swollen Kamfers Dam, a world-famous breeding spot for the species.

And hundreds of residents have lost their homes in some of the heaviest downpours that the city has seen in recent years, with emergency response teams stretched to their limit this week.

Last week, the Saturday Star reported on concerns from the Save the Flamingo Association that the internationally renowned artificial breeding island could be submerged.

Their worst fears were confirmed this week as 65mm of rain fell on Tuesday, much of the runoff gushing into Kamfers Dam.

It's the third breeding event at

the dam, which started a month ago. As many as 13 000 chicks were born on the island, one of only six breeding sites for Lesser flamingoes globally.

But the same success looks unlikely to be repeated this year as large parts of the island are now under water. Conservationist Tania Anderson, of the association, watched in horror as the drama unfolded on the association's webcam this week.

"It's sad what's happening. I haven't seen any chick bodies, but I assume small chicks that get cold and too wet and can't be cared for by their parents might still die.

"Others on the tops of nests might still be swept off if the wind blows hard," she added.

"We can only guess how many died. We didn't do counts before the tragedy as breeding has only just begun."

The water levels had risen by at least 20cm, she explained. "We're busy discussing what we can do about the situation now, but the water can't be pumped away quickly."

The association has been battling the local Sol Plaatje municipality to resolve the deteriorating water quality and rising water levels. It is also fighting the controversial Northgate development opposite the Kamfers Dam.

Sello Matsie, the spokesman for the municipality, said more than 100 homes had been flooded or washed away. "We've never experienced this kind of rain before. Our emergency services are stretched to the limit."

"We'll continue to fight this battle as this internationally important Lesser flamingo breeding site deserves to be protected," said BirdLife SA director Mark Anderson, who devised the project.