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# BIRD MANS OUTS

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THE SUSPENSION of the Northern Cape's only ornithologist Mark Anderson as well as two senior officials in the Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation has sparked widespread outcry from bird lovers and wildlife societies across the country.

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# Mark Anderson quits

**SANDI KWON HOO**  
STAFF REPORTER

**T**HE SUSPENSION of the Northern Cape's only ornithologist, Mark Anderson, as well as two senior officials in the Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation, has sparked widespread outcry from bird lovers and wildlife societies across the country.

Anderson has quit his job and will be taking up a new position as an executive director at Bird Life South Africa in October, although it is believed that he will still be based in Kimberley.

Staff members at the department yesterday reported that the equipment, laptops and cellphones of Anderson, the Deputy Director of Conservation Julius Koen, and Eric Hermann from Scientific Services, were confiscated and that the locks to their offices were also changed.

Some personnel thought that the suspended officials were marched out of the office like common criminals.

The precautionary suspensions apparently relate to their efforts to protect the threatened flamingos at Kamfers Dam as well as the Save the Flamingo website that has attracted the support of over 6 300 petitioners.

Many concerned bodies believe that high-level politicians are involved in deals to enrich themselves, at the expense of the city's feathered friends.

Northgate developers denied having any involvement with Anderson.

DA MPL Dr Chris Liebenberg wondered whether the suspensions were politically motivated and what promises were made to the developers by politicians.

"Anderson's new position at BirdLife South Africa was known to his superiors before his suspension. As a world renowned ornithologist, he has been involved with the preservation of the flamingos since 1991. He together with others started the Save the Flamingo Campaign with a website and petition," he said.

Liebenberg stated that the website had never objected to the proposed Northgate development in Roodepan.

"Just over 9 000 new chicks have hatched and it would be a crime to see these chicks die because of the poor water quality."

Kamfers Dam landowner Brenda Booth stated that it was ridiculous that specialists were being punished for doing their jobs.

"These are solid scientists who have merely highlighted the plight of the flamingos."

**‘The Northern Cape Legislature can expect a class action against them.’**

*Dr Gerhard Verdoorn*

Vice-president for the South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association and CEO of the Griffon Poison Information Centre, Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, described the suspensions as criminal.

"The actions of the department fly in the face of all conservation principles and also goes against international conventions such as the Convention on Migratory Species.

"The Northern Cape Legislature can expect class action against them and will also be reported to the international arena for their blatant acts against the environment.

"Anderson and the other officials have been trying for years to secure the future of Kamfers Dam due to its international importance as a flamingo site.

"Despite their efforts the Sol Plaatje municipality has allowed

the direct pollution of the dam with raw sewage and has tried to push a housing development through without following the appropriate environmental legislation."

Professor Les Underhill from UCT stated that Anderson had a record of achievements and that he would receive international recognition for his contributions to nature conservation this month at the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement in Madagascar.

"It is totally incongruous that at the same time he achieves this award, he is suspended by the Department of Tourism, Environment and Nature Conservation of the Northern Cape."

Dr Rob Simmons, a flamingo specialist and researcher at the University of Cape Town, said the artificial breeding site at Kamfers Dam was a rare achievement.

"It is unfortunate that this move comes so soon after the successful hatching of 9 000 chicks on the island. It is a tragedy that someone who has conservation at heart, has been suspended."

He added that flamingos bred in ideal water conditions and open spaces.

"Globally lesser flamingos have been classified as a vulnerable species as there are only three other natural breeding sites in Africa - Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania -

and Anderson established the fourth breeding site.

"Any disturbance to this environment can make them vulnerable, as they are extremely sensitive to sounds and movements. The birds may come back to feed and breed at Kamfers Dam even if the water is polluted, although it is uncertain whether hatching will be successful."

He added that if too much raw sewage was pumped into their habitat, it would cause the blue-green algae that the flamingos fed on to become toxic.

## Lesions

"Anderson noticed lesions on chicks' legs, feet and beaks after they had hatched at Kamfers Dam and this could be indicative of a polluted water source."

President of Bird Life SA, Rick Nuttall, believed that it would be a sad loss to the Province as there were not many full-time ornithologists in the country.

"There are many important species in the Northern Cape that also serves as a tourist attraction and creates opportunities for the training of bird guides from local communities.

"Anderson has been extremely committed to his work and has done a sterling job."