

KENYA

# The strange case of Lake Turkana

(2012/2023)

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Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - Modern fusion for young morans (warriors) from the El Molo ethnic group. In the last century the El Molo were known as the smallest tribe in Africa and numbered a few hundred individuals. Since then, thanks to a series of mixed marriages with Samburu shepherds, their numbers have increased and they have adopted the Samburu language and hairstyle.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Palm trees half-submerged by the lake's rising water, on the shores where the El Molo fishing village of Komote has partly moved.

## **Drought and rising water at lake Turkana: an anomaly for shepherds and fishermen?**

In spite of many statements, including those made by experts, predicting a gradual drying up of Lake Turkana due to prolonged droughts and the large dams built by the Ethiopian government on the lake's main tributary, the Omo River, the lake's water level is in actual fact rising.

According to a 2021 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, parts of the coastline and some villages are submerged, while inland there is dry river flooding. All this is happening during a severe drought. The combination of drought, flooding, and rising water levels around Lake Turkana is also puzzling for experts, who are trying to understand the reasons.

Even a tentative explanation must take into consideration historical weather patterns, volcanic activity, climate change, and the alteration of the landscape by humans.

There are two types of flooding around Lake Turkana: a) the lake's rising water flooding the plains near the coast; and b) flash floods from dry river beds (a phenomenon known as "lugga").

Heavy rains in the eastern parts of Africa in 2019 destroyed hand-dug wells (thereby reducing outfalls) and compacted alluvial soil in dry river beds, which temporarily feed Lake Turkana. With no outlet, groundwater can encounter rising lake levels, which become a countervailing force, resulting in explosive flash floods.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - The El Molo village of Komote was once connected to the mainland. Due to rising water, today it is located on an island.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - The El Molo village of Komote was once connected to the mainland by an isthmus that today has been completely submerged by the lake's rising water.

Due to the volcanic activity in the area (the Great Rift Valley), there are numerous volcanic springs within the lake itself, including the Loyangalani spring, where fresh, potable water gushes out at a temperature of 60°C. The output of these submerged springs can vary immensely and this is one of the possible causes of the lake's rising water level. In 2020, 779.6 square kilometers of land around the lake was flooded (according to the UNDP). Permanent settlements have been affected, as have people living off a submerged economy of fishing and farming. In 2015, a strip of land with a road connected the fishing village El Molo in Komote: today the road is completely submerged and the village is located on an island.

And what about climate change? All ecological problems – as well as several socio-economic problems – are now blamed on global warming. But from

the perspective of the shepherds on the ground, climate change is creating a growing sense of confusion and increased uncertainty rather than being seen as an imminent threat. In 2018 in North Horr, Wario, a 67-year-old Gabra elder from Boru Magado, said, "Climate conditions? Everything is calm." He went on to say: "Something strange is happening: camels are still feeding on the baddan trees (*Balanites aegyptiaca*), but their leaves are not as nutritious as they used to be."

In his 2019 paper "When Things Fall Apart: Global Weirding, Postnormal Times, and Complexity Limits," Christopher Burr Jones talked about a transition characterized by complexity, chaos, and contradiction" in which scientific analysis and local perceptions collide and lose meaning. Like all of us, the Lake Turkana shepherds are moving toward Terra incognita, uncharted territory.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Mark Gitonga, a Consolata missionary, baptising Turkana babies in the village church in Moite. The Turkana, like the other people around the lake, have partly converted to Christianity in recent years.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A young Turkana woman cleans fish caught in the lake by her husband. The Turkana, traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.





Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A portrait of a young Turkana man who attended high school hanging in one of the few brick houses in the village of Loyangalani. Few young people can afford to complete higher studies away from their villages, and many still do not even attend elementary school.

Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - An El Molo fisherman pulls in the nets that were set the previous day. He's sitting on one of the traditional rafts made of palm wood that are still used today. The El Molo people were an ethnic group of hunters and traditionally fishing was also done by casting harpoons, while standing on rafts.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - El Molo fishermen from the village of Layeni after having completed their fishing for the day. The El Molo were an ethnic group of hunters who also fished by throwing harpoons while standing on rafts.





Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 – An overview of the huts in a Turkana village along the track to Loyangalani. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - A red ochre hairstyle for a young El Molo bride. In the last century the El Molo were known as the smallest tribe in Africa and numbered a few hundred individuals. Since then, thanks to a series of mixed marriages with Samburu shepherds, their numbers have increased and they have adopted the Samburu language and hairstyle.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A Turkana woman from the village of Sepo, pulls ashore the nets that were set the previous day. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A Turkana shepherd on the shores of the lake. The Turkana, traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - A young El Molo woman thatching a new hut for some newly weds in the village of Komote.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - An El Molo fisherman from the village of Komote washes the fish he has caught. The El Molo were an ethnic group of hunters who also fished by throwing harpoons while standing on rafts.





Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 – A close-up of a young Turkana woman. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 – A close-up of a Turkana girl in the village of Moite. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Turkana shepherds taking their flocks back up to the village of Moite which they left several months earlier in search of pasture. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Turkana women collect water from a well dug inside a wadi - a generally dry river - near the village of Moite. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A Turkana lady emerges from her home in Loyangalani. Very few Turkana women have abandoned the traditional, voluminous beaded necklaces that make them stand out.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A young Turkana woman reads gospel passages during a mass in the village of Loyangalani. The Turkana, like the other people around the lake, have partly converted to Christianity in recent years.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Seagulls flying over a Turkana woman drying fish, in the small village of Yomo. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Turkana women taking wood to the El Molo fishing village of Komote. Due to rising waters, the village, which was once on the mainland, is now on an island.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 – An aerial view of the Suguta Valley's volcanic terrain at the southern end of Lake Turkana.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - A worker with the Pope John XXIII religious association weighs a Turkana child suffering from malnutrition. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - An El Molo fisherman heads out with his raft, which is made of palm wood, to lay nets. Behind him is a building that has been partially submerged by the lake's rising water.





Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - A young El Molo morani (warrior) getting made up for a wedding party. In the last century the El Molo were known as the smallest tribe in Africa and numbered a few hundred individuals. Since then, thanks to a series of mixed marriages with Samburu herders, their numbers have increased and they have adopted the Samburu language and hairstyle.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Turkana children on their way to school in the village of Moite. Schools are a recent acquisition and are present only in the larger villages, and many boys and girls who have to follow the flocks during transhumance cannot attend.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Turkana shepherds taking their flocks back up to the village of Moite which they left several months earlier in search of pasture. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2023 - Women return to their village, Neiwatorong, from the wells where they have filled up their water canisters. It is a strenuous daily task.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - A procession of El Molo women, who have converted to Christianity, carry a statue of Our Lady from their village, Layeni, to the church in Loyangalani.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - The El Molo village of Layeni. Unlike the other village of Komote, which is now on an island because of the rising water level, Layeni can still be reached by land, even though the village huts are now far closer to the lake.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - Dancing during the course of a Turkana wedding near the large village of Loyangalani. Warriors and elders are adorned with ostrich feathers. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - The sacrifice of a cow during a Turkana wedding ceremony near the large village of Loyangalani. Warriors and elders are adorned with ostrich feathers. The Turkana, who were traditionally nomadic shepherds, have partly switched to fishing on account of the drought that has decimated their herds and flocks.



Lake Turkana (Kenya) - 2012 - A young Turkana shepherd in front of the small lake surrounded by the lava flow that lies at the southern end of Lake Turkana.



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