Batwa get land worth UGX180M

UWA Embarks on Staff Training

Trenches Constructed to Combat Human Wildlife Conflict

Uganda takes chair of UN Gorilla Conventions

Impalas translocated to Pain-Upe Wildlife Reserve
Contents

Trenches Constructed to Combat Human Wildlife Conflict ..........2
UWA Embarks on Staff Training.........................................................3
IFAW Engages Partners to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade ............4
Impalas translocated to Pain-Upe Wildlife Reserve ....................5
Uganda takes chair of UN Gorilla Conventions ............................6
Batwa get land worth UGX180 Million ...........................................7
Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation area disburses over UGX Four Billion to communities .............................................................8
China donates computers to Uganda Wildlife Authority ..............9
Editors appreciate conservation efforts ......................................10
UWA wins Super Cup Tournament .................................................11
Trenches Constructed to Combat Human Wildlife Conflict

As a way of reducing human wildlife conflict, UWA in conjunction with Uganda Conservation Foundation have embarked on digging elephant trenches in areas around Queen Elizabeth and Murchison falls National Park.

In Queen Elizabeth National Park, the elephant trenches have been excavated on the boundary stretching 4 kilometers separating the park from communities of Rubirizi and 03 kilometers from those of Kamdini sub-county in Oyam for Murchison Falls National park respectively. These boundary trenches will deter large mammals such as elephants, buffaloes to raid the neighboring communities that mostly do subsistence farming. The increasing community densities have led to the high competition with wildlife for land and resources despite the same areas being a home to many large mammals like elephants. Another wildlife hot spot that is currently under construction include the 2.5 kilometer stretch being dug in Chepwor village in Kiryandongo district.

The Chief Warden Murchison Falls Mr. Niamanya Edison said that the digging of these trenches has potential benefits to both the communities and wildlife conservation. “The anticipated benefits and outputs include a reduction in elephant, buffalo and other mammal crop raiding. This will lead to reduction in illegal cattle grazing in the protected areas, a reduction in elephant and human deaths associated to crop raiding and improved park-community relations,” he said.

Members of these communities have testified about the numerous benefits of the trenches. Patrick Olara a local community member in Karuma said that these trenches have helped in stopping animal movements into the community land. “Ever since these trenches were put in place, we are no longer worried about our crops getting damaged. We have seen elephants return to the park once they find these trenches. We are glad that their movements have been controlled and can now farm in peace,” he said. Local communities demonstrated their enthusiasm towards the project by digging the first sections of the trench on a voluntary basis one day per week. In one wetland area, the laborers continued excavations despite the trench filling with water at a depth of only 1 meter.

Besides trenches, Uganda Wildlife Authority has put in a place a number of measures to address the human wildlife conflict issues across national parks. A multiplicity of measures have been used that Mauritius thorn hedges, chili to deter elephants, bee hives, tea as buffer zone in Bwindi, wildlife scouts and vuvuzelas. Electric fences have also been set up in some areas in Queen Elizabeth.
UWA Embarks on Staff Training

In March, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) in collaboration with the European Union, through CITES MIKES and the Uganda Conservation Foundation, started training of the staff to strengthen their skills in combating illegal wildlife trade and poaching.

The agency working hard to ensure sustainable management of wildlife, coordinate and supervise activities related to wildlife management which has come under pressure from dealers of illegal wildlife product owing to the lucrative market in this trade.

According to statistics from the UN, illegal wildlife trade is the fourth most lucrative criminal trade business globally estimated to be worth over $23 billion annually. As result, the need to deploy and train update to date rangers is envisaged to yield successful results in enforcement operations in protection of the country’s wildlife.

A total of 430 rangers and wardens recruited from communities neighboring protected areas in the country have undergone intensive leadership training in wildlife protection, interpretive guiding, intelligence gathering and ticket inspection by the British military and the Irish Guards and more than 50 rangers underwent intensive boat operations training.

Executive Director UWA Mr. Sam Mwandha observes that the trainings are helpful in eliminating all forms of criminal activities in the parks, “the parks had been under incredible pressure by criminal gangs and poaching wildlife which is undermining tourism the strongest contributor to the national and regional economy”, he says.

The trainings are a key factor in combating illegal wildlife trade and poaching because rangers are equipped with better techniques on protecting wildlife in a broader perspective compared to what they could have been doing for example; maintenance of rare species in protected areas such as national parks and sanctuaries. Mr. Mwandha acknowledges the value addition by the trainings, “These trainings add value to the six core enforcement areas that include patrol, monitoring wildlife, combat poaching, local communities engagement, fire management and tourism development”.

As part of the course training, UWA’s Marine Ranger Unit was taken through two intensive courses that were conducted by the Irish Guards, a highly respected British Army infantry regiment. The British army together with UWA facilitated a two weeks junior leadership course in which an ex-police training team from the UK delivered on foundation level of law enforcement. One of the staff, private ranger Bernard Olobo Acire was rewarded the best student of the Junior Leadership course held in Mweya in March. US military has come on board and are conducting Junior Leadership ranger training course in Queen Elizabeth. After the training, the rangers are deployed to different protected areas to enhance the integrity of conservation areas.

UWA Rangers training on how to safely operate a boat by Tony Tester
IFAW Engages Partners to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade

In order to combat illegal wildlife trade and trafficking in Queen Elizabeth and Virunga national parks in Uganda and Democratic Republic Congo respectively, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) facilitating cross borderer training aimed at strengthening efforts to combating illegal wildlife trade. The cross border training for intelligence officers from Uganda and DRC took place in April at Koi Koi cultural center in Fort Portal town.

The training equipped participants in skills such as identification and detection of wildlife species or trophies, wildlife laws in Uganda and DRC, smuggling and concealment techniques used by illegal traders, ethics and integrity in combating wildlife as well as exhibit management.

UWA’s Executive Director was represented by the Deputy Director for Community Conservation Owoyesigire George who appreciated the timeliness of the training for conservation partners. He noted that Uganda is gifted with natural resources that included wildlife thus the relevancy of the training. He said that the major issues that affect wildlife conservation include poaching, destruction of habitats and illegal wildlife trade that has endangered animal population. "We have seen a serious decline in wildlife populations due to poaching and illegal wildlife trade. For instance, elephant population decreased from 30,000 in 1960 to only 2,000 by 1983 and have since increased to 5,808 in 2017; buffalos were 60,000 in 1960 decreased to 25,000 in 1982 but have since increased to 37,054," he said.

The Kabarole Resident District Commissioner Stephen Asiimwe appealed to UWA and other stakeholders to disseminate the relevant laws such as the Wildlife Act and the constitution to the public in order to keep people informed.

The Programme Director of IFAW, Mr Moses Olinga, noted that collaborating with the neighbouring country (DRC) will help in combating illegal wildlife trade easily. "When animals cross from Uganda to DRC, they are killed because it is unknown where they belong. The border between Uganda and DRC has been used by poachers, and they have been killing animals from Uganda and they take them to DRC and vice versa," he said. He explained that pangolins have been the most poached animals because of their medicinal scales which underpins the need for security agencies to get skills on how to identify scales of unique species like pangolins, skins of leopards and cheetahs among others.

Participating institutions include Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Police Force, Uganda Police Defense Force and ICCN Virunga National park.
Impalas translocated to Pain-Upe Wildlife Reserve.

Uganda Wildlife Authority in May translocated 92 impala from Lake Mburo National Park to Pian-Upe Wildlife Reserve. This is one of the ways UWA uses to combat human wildlife conflict and restoring wildlife populations.

Impalas are widely distributed through the Eastern and Southern regions of Africa. The Impala is the sole member of Genus Aepyceros with two sub species, namely: The common impala/East African Impala and the Black-Faced Impala.

Lake Mburo is considered a stronghold of impalas with a population of over 35,000. The park is surrounded by ranches and a total of 15,000 impalas are believed to be staying outside the park hence the need to translocate them to a more spacious place like Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve.

According to Mr. Kule Asa the Chief Warden of Lake Mburo Conservation Area, the land use patterns around Lake Mburo National Park are changing as ranches are being fenced which reduces the grazing space for wildlife.

Dr Aruho Robert, a Senior Veterinary Doctor of UWA explains that the process of capturing impalas is a tricky exercise because they are fragile. In order to minimise stress, the animals are captured at night using dazzling lights and held physically without drugging them.

Before translocation, inspections are done to assess whether the conditions where the animals will be translocated to, can favour their survival. The animals are screened to establish their health statuses and to ensure that only healthy ones are taken.

Impalas are purely herbivores therefore Pian Upe with fast growing grasslands will favour their survival and multiplication. Historically, impalas used to exist in Central and Southern Uganda but ceased due to urbanisation.

Pain Upe is a very unique wildlife reserve with rare species like roan antelopes, elands, ostriches, and cheetahs therefore it is believed that an addition of impalas will boost its tourism potential.

In March 2018, 91 impalas were translocated to Pian Upe wildlife reserve. In 2013, a small number was translocated to Katonga Wildlife Reserve and have since multiplied to over 300. Other translocations for the previous three years include 36 giraffes from the southern bank to the Northern bank in Murchison Falls National Park 2016 and 2017, 110 kobs to Kidrpo Valley from Murchison Falls National Bank in 2017, 46 Zebras and 31 topis to Katonga Wildlife Reserve from Lake Mburo and later in 2018 14 giraffes taken to Kidepo from Murchison Falls.
Uganda takes chair of UN Gorilla Conventions

The 3rd UN Gorilla meeting of parties hosted in Uganda on 18th – 21st June at Golf Course View Hotel, Entebbe ended with Uganda taking over the chairmanship. The chairmanship of the convention was handed over to Dr. Akakwasa Barirega Commissioner Wildlife in Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities.

The convention was the third Meeting of Parties to the UN Agreement on the conservation of gorillas and their habitats. The meeting brings together representatives from countries where gorillas reside as well as additional international experts. Participant countries included: Uganda, DRC, Rwanda, Cameroon, Central Africa, Gabon, Nigeria, Angola and representatives from the United Nations. This meeting is therefore critical for the implementation of the agreement on the conservation of gorillas and their habitats in Africa.

At the official opening of the convention, Minister of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities Professor Ephraim Kamuntu thanked the Secretariat for the choice to hold the meeting in Uganda. He noted that Uganda plays a key role in the conservation of gorillas and other wildlife species with over 18,783 species of fauna and flora so far recorded.

“We have over 50% of the World’s remaining population of mountain gorillas, 11% of the world’s recorded species of birds constituting 50% of Africa’s bird species richness. We have 7.8% of the Global Mammal Diversity constituting 39% of Africa’s Mammal Richness; Uganda also has 19% of Africa’s amphibian species richness and 14% of Africa’s reptile species richness, 1,249 recorded species of butterflies and 600 species of fish. Uganda is indeed a country gifted by nature,” Prof Kamuntu proudly stated.

Prof. Ephraim noted that Uganda’s success in mountain gorilla conservation was an example of Uganda’s special commitment to conserving flagship species that sometimes cross international borders. “Not only are mountain gorilla numbers increasing, which is the ultimate sign of success, but also our well-managed gorilla tourism supports the conservation of the many other species that Uganda hosts as well. Gorilla tourism alone accounts for about 60% of the total wildlife protected area earnings for Uganda.”

Substantial numbers of species move across our national boundaries, with birds regularly migrating as far as Europe and Asia; Uganda is committed to protecting all. The mountain gorillas of Mgahinga Gorilla National Park range freely in the Virunga massif that is shared between Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This in itself calls for substantial regional and international collaboration, in order to better manage these species that cross borders.

He singled out the success story to recover the iconic mountain gorilla population of the world. “In 1981, the total mountain gorilla population was estimated at only 254 individuals. It’s now 804 individuals. In 1997, Bwindi Impenetrable population was only 300. So growing the mountain gorilla population from 600 to more than 1000 individuals has been a great success story largely delivered by regional cooperation between Uganda, Rwanda and DRC through the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration Secretariat.

This collaboration, he noted has enabled strong law enforcement, sharing gorilla revenue with communities, mitigating human gorilla conflicts, creating robust research and monitoring systems, and enabling strong community participation have been key to our success.

In Uganda tourism is largely wildlife based with national parks managed under Uganda Wildlife Authority. The tourism that emerges from the protection of these parks contributes about 9% of the country’s GDP. Tourism continues to be the leading foreign exchange earner for Uganda, bringing in US$ 1.45 billion annually. The tourism sector therefore provides 1.173 million jobs in Uganda accounting for 8% of total employment in the country.

The minister thanked everyone for the strong support and successes on gorillas that only emerged through the collaboration and hard work of all participants.
A group of 35 Batwa neighboring Mgahinga Gorilla National Park have every reason to celebrate after the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu handed over two pieces of land measuring 7.5 acres worth UGX 180 Million to a group in April this year. One piece of land is situated in Musana while the other is in Nyagacence all in Kisoro District.

During the handover, Prof. Kamuntu noted that that the purchase of the land for the Batwa is the beginning of interventions that will address their most pressing challenges. “I want to pay tribute to all those partners including Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust who have over the years invested heavily in improving the welfare of the Batwa including the acquisition of this land,” he noted.

The community participation in conservation has been beneficial in and around the protected areas of Uganda and Mgahinga in particular. "Communities participate in a number of activities such as problem animal management, resource access (dry bamboo, firewood, handcraft materials, honey extraction, medicinal herbs), employment both formal and informal, therefore their participation cannot be taken for granted," he said.

The Executive Director UWA Sam Mwandha, explained that the beneficiary group composed of the Batwa who have been working with UWA to give tourists a memorable experience while in the park. These, he noted have been facing a challenge of inadequate land for settlement and cultivation. As a result, it was agreed that UWA buys them land out of the revenue generated from the Batwa trail product.

"The revenue generated from this product is shared equally between UWA and the Batwa. The share for the Batwa is saved on their development account and it is from these accumulated funds that the land was purchased," he said. Mr Mwandha expressed optimism that with acquisition of land, the Batwa community will start engaging in farming and hence alleviate poverty. “It is my hope that the Batwa will use this land for farming projects such as Irish potato growing and livestock rearing. The crops will be used for food and the surplus sold for income to meet other household needs, as well as education of their children," he said.

The Batwa leader Kyakabingi Hagumimana thanked UWA for knowing their problem and solving it. He said that they will use the land to cultivate crops for the market to earn income and educate their children. The beneficiaries of this land are a community of 35 who work on the Batwa Trail product and are registered under Mgahinga Batwa Cultural Development Company Limited. The land belongs to the company and nobody is allowed to sell it.
Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) disbursed cheques worth UGX 4,479,575,644 in April under the revenue sharing scheme to communities surrounding Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Area. The funds were handed over by the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu to the district leaders of Kisoro, Kanungu and Rubanda at the Bwindi Conservation Area head office in Buhoma. While handing over the cheques, Prof. Kamuntu noted that government appreciates the contribution of communities neighbouring protected areas in the conservation of wildlife in Uganda.

Prof Kamuntu appealed to the communities and leaders to support efforts of fighting illegal activities in protected areas. “We are giving this money in recognition of the important role that communities play in our conservation efforts; we believe that we cannot effectively conserve wildlife without the support of the communities. I want to use this opportunity to thank you all for rallying behind UWA in conserving the two gorilla parks. It is my humble appeal to you that you continue with this support to conservation and ensure that all forms of illegal wildlife activities, are eliminated” he said.

The Minister further gave assurances that Uganda is safe for visitors and warned that anyone who tries to endanger tourists who visit the parks to track gorillas and urged them to work closely with the park management by ensuring that wrong elements do not infiltrate to parks so that visitor numbers keep on increasing.

The UWA Executive Director Sam Mwandha described the event as historic and in line with UWA’s mission which emphasizes, among others, benefits to the community from wildlife conservation. “Today is very historic moment when we celebrate another important milestone in our effort for sustainable wildlife conservation. In line with the UWA mission, I am pleased with the release yet another sum of these funds which include 20% park entry fees and $10 per gorilla tracking permit sold in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, this money will improve the livelihoods of communities and alleviate poverty” said Mr. Mwandha. He called for adequate monitoring of the fund so that they are put to good use.

The funds will finance a total of 76 projects: 17 in Kisoro, 24 in Rubanda and 35 projects in Kanungu. Unlike in previous years, this disbursement will finance four community camp sites (in Bujengwe, Mpungu, Ruhija Sub County and Karangara) plus one community Resource Centre in Mukono Parish, Kayonza Sub County. Once completed, the community tourism camp sites will generate more revenue from the increasing tourism business to the community. This will be an additional benefit from Bwindi Impenetrable National Park besides several other benefits which the neighbouring community is already deriving from the park.

On behalf of the Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), the Rubanda RDC Peter Rwakifari observed that wildlife provides sustainable income to communities saying that they will continue to ensure its conservation. The District Chairman of Kanungu Canon Josephine Kasya spoke on behalf of district Chairpersons and pledged to ensure timely accountability of funds disbursed to districts. The Chief Administrative Officer Kisoro Mr. Kasule Sulaiman said that the technical leaders will ensure that projects are implemented as planned. “We will ensure proper implementation of all projects so that our communities improve on their livelihoods” he said.
China donates computers to Uganda Wildlife Authority

Uganda Wildlife Authority in June received a donation of 8 computers (4 laptops and 4 desktops) from the Chinese Embassy in Uganda to boost the organizations conservation efforts. The computers were handed over by the Deputy Ambassador of China to Uganda Mr Chen Huixin to the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu at the Ministry Headquarters.

Mr. Chen said the China appreciates the important role the UWA plays in conserving Uganda’s wildlife resources. He observed that protecting the environment and promoting ecosystem development is a shared responsibility where everyone should play a role. "As people of China, we know the progress you have made in the recovery of wildlife numbers, therefore this donation is our gesture of support towards UWA’s efforts in wildlife conservation in Uganda”.

He revealed that the relationship between China and Uganda is at its best saying that China has supported many government projects in Uganda and the Chinese people have invested in various areas such as manufacturing and construction in order to develop Uganda’s economy.

Mr Chen promised to work even harder to further strengthen the ties between Uganda and China through offering training to Ugandans in wildlife protection and enhancing harmonious living between the people and wildlife.

The Minister of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities Professor Ephraim Kamuntu expressed gratitude to China for donating the computers to UWA saying that they will immensely help UWA in its conservation efforts especially in this digital era.

He said that Uganda’s transformation agenda is fuelled by Chinese support revealing that Uganda’s fight for independence was inspired by the Chinese experience. "We look to China for lessons to develop our own country; we need to learn from the Chinese so that we can get out of poverty like China did”.

He urged UWA to work closely with China describing the People’s Republic of China as a valuable friend of Uganda. He also urged UWA embrace the use of modern technology such as drones and helicopters which can help improve the monitoring of protected areas.

Prof. Kamuntu further expressed the need to protect Uganda’s natural resources against illicit trade, encroach-ment and pressure to de-gazette protected areas. “Uganda is exceptionally endowed with natural assets and they should be conserved. We must protect these resources by training our staff, sensitization of stakeholders and involving neighbouring communities in the management of the parks”.

The UWA Executive Director Sam Mwandha expressed appreciation to the Chinese Embassy in Uganda for the donation saying that the donation comes in handy to facilitate UWA’s digitization process since the organization already has a deficit of computers. He said that China last year offered training to UWA staff in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) management and that more will be going for training. He also revealed that a Chinese company is interested in investing in Murchison Falls National Park and start marketing Uganda in China.

Deputy Ambassador of China to Uganda Mr Chen Huixin hands over computers to Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu
Editors appreciate conservation efforts

UWA invited a number of editors from different media houses for an excursion to Queen Elizabeth National Park from 16th to 19th April 2019 as a way of implementing the communication strategy of establishing working relationships with media houses.

The trip was intended to give editors an on ground experience of the conservation activities undertaken by UWA in the park with a view of making them understand what happens in the parks so that they are able to relate their experiences while editing stories about tourism and human wildlife conflicts interventions.

Mr Hangi Bashir the Communications Manager of UWA implored editors to continually have their country at heart and be conscious of the impact of their stories as they edit news without compromising their editorial independence. “One small story can cost the country’s tourism sector, it is therefore important to look at the bigger implication of not only the headlines but the detailed story and where it is placed.”

In addition, Mr Hangi said UWA is mandated to ensure recovery of wildlife populations, restore and maintain healthy eco systems by managing invasive species, manage human wildlife conflicts arising majorly from problem animals, media relations, achieve financial sustainability and improve infrastructure and equipment and combating wildlife trafficking.

He further highlighted on how UWA works hand in hand with Uganda Revenue Authority, the canine unit at Entebbe Airport and also conducts ranger patrols in order to curb wildlife trafficking. Patrols in 2018 resulted into 1611 arrests. 90% were convicted with a total of 1333.37kg of ivory, 88.2kgs of pangolin scales, 405.24kg of hippo teeth, 75 ostrich eggs and assorted wildlife skin.

Edward Asalu, the Chief Warden of Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area (QECA) briefed the editors about the challenge of invasive species and efforts put in place to manage invasives and ensure habitat restoration. These invasives include unwanted plants and trees that grow in the park affecting the soils and habitats for animals. These have mainly come about as a result of climate change. Therefore UWA has to incur extra costs to uproot the trees and burn them.

By the end of the trip, the editors had a broader understanding of wildlife management, appreciated all efforts and pledged to have a positive outlook for conservation.
UWA wins Super Cup Tournament

UWA darts club emerged overall winner of this year’s darts super cup tournament after knocking out Nwoya darts club in the final stages at a ratio of 19:1 points at God’s Mercy Guest House in Anaka, Nwoya District in May.

The Chest thumping UWA coach Augustine Ndgedawa was not surprised by the win “I expected UWA to win because we performed so well in the national playoffs”, said. I also hope for the best in the upcoming games, he added. Uganda will be hosting the East and Central Africa tournament in September 2019.

The darts Super cup is an annual tournament organised by Uganda Darts Association. The tournament is used to select a team to represent Uganda in the Clubs Champions tournament which involves participants from all over the world.

Sports is continuously taking shape as one of UWA’s corporate activities used to pass on wildlife conservation messages to the public. The UWA sports patron Chemonges Sabilla says sports have been embedded in the mainstream activities of UWA in order to promote conservation through sports. UWA participated in the annual National Cross Country games where Kiplimo Jacob was the winner for the 10km race which was the longest of all.

Masagala Ronald won the 2km mixed race and Rashid Etiau was second runners up. In the 6km race Chelengati Sarah and Chesang Annet emerged as winner and first runners up respectively. In football, Simba FC participated in the Uganda Cup games. The team only managed to play two rounds and was eliminated by K iwanga FC.
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