

Giraffes get new home

NWOYA

By Benedict Okethwengu
and Gerald Tenywa

It was a case of keeping all your eggs in one basket. The giraffe population in Murchison Falls National Park, estimated to be more than 1,000, was living only in the northern part of the park, located in Nwoya district. They could not cross River Nile to move to the southern part of the park in Buliisa, Masindi and Kiryandongo districts.

With most of the oil being discovered in the northern part of Murchison Falls National Park, threats to wildlife, such as oil spills, have become real. This has made it necessary to relocate part of the giraffe population to the southern part of the park.

Josy Muhangi, the community relations officer at the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), said with the production of oil due to start in the northern parts of Murchison Falls National Park, some tourists may choose to remain in the southern sector.

He explained that the open northern grasslands of the Murchison Falls National Park have many giraffes, while the woodlands of the southern part are sparsely populated. The grasslands in the southern part of the park are growing into thick woodland and the giraffes



A giraffe being relocated to Buliisa on Monday. Photo by Benedict Okethwengu

will help to stop it from growing into a forest, by feeding on the leaves of some of the trees.

Last year, UWA, together with the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), Makerere University and the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, translocated 18 giraffes from the northern part to the southern sector.

Julian Fennessy, the director of the Giraffes Conservation Foundation, said they are

committed to working with UWA to effectively conserve the giraffes.

The team has camped at Murchison and has constructed a boma (enclosure), where they are keeping captured giraffes to prepare them for the subsequent movement.

The two-week operation is expected to end on August 26.

The team relocated 10 giraffes that were captured last week. They crossed on a ferry across

the Nile from Nwoya to Buliisa, their new home.

On June 15, 2015, 15 giraffes were moved from the Murchison Falls National Park to Lake Mburo National Park. Last year, two giraffes were shifted to UWEC.

In captivity, a giraffe can live for up to 50 years, but in the wild, they can live for 25 years. The difference in life expectancy is mainly due to the presence of predators like lions.