

Rakai residents threaten to kill stray hippos destroying crops

RAKAI

By Davis Buyondo

Herds of hippopotami have invaded over 15 villages in Kagamba, Kacheera and Dwaniro sub-counties in Rakai destroying several plantations.

The failed intervention by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) officials to address the concern has prompted bitter reactions from the affected residents.

They have vowed to kill the hippos in order to protect their gardens and plantations.

Like other herbivores, the hippos have ravaged several acres of maize, beans, groundnuts, cassava, sweet potato fields and banana plantations, plunging the communities into food scarcity.

Affected communities are mainly those around the shores of Lake Kijjanebarola, L. Kacheera and L. Mburo

National Park.

They include Kanagisa, Kibizi, Kanoni and Baale (Kagamba sub-county Kamengo-Nsonso, Buyamba, Byembogo, Kaleere, Kanamuzinzi, Kyebumba and Kitwekyanjovu (Dwaniro S/c).

Others are Katanjovu, Katoogo, Kateete, Mukokote, Lwebiriba, Katatenga, Kalumba, Lwenanga, Lyakisana and Lwanga (Kacheera sub-county).

Now, residents are in a dilemma as a result of the invasion. And given the impending festive season, different households may fail to get enough food to eat.

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Hippos are among the world's biggest mammals coming third after elephants and rhinos. Within the same period, the hippos have also harassed and injured three

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- In 2009, a herd of hippos from Lake Mburo National Park displaced dozens of residents in Mukogote, Lyakisaana, Lwanga, Buyoza, Kabumba and Kakyera villages.
- According to the 2014 Uganda Bureau of Statistics report, there are more than 5,838 hippos in Uganda.

FACTS AND FIGURES

people in Kachera.

Pastor Beda, one of the victims, was attacked by a male hippo weighing over 160kg while in his garden.

Afsa Namiro, a councillor of Kagamba sub-county, said the hippos often move in families of two and three, especially at night. "They stray from Lake Kijjanebarola to raid plantations," Namiro said.

Affected farmers

Ronald Byakatonda, Pamela Tugabirwe and Meeme

Nabyonga are prominent maize and sweet potato growers in Byembogo village, Dwaniro sub-county. Each of them claims to have lost at least one acre of potato.

"The hippos like sweet potatoes and the leaves. They can smell it from as far as 1km," Byakatonda said.

However, he said wildlife authorities warned against the killing of the animals to preserve them for tourist attraction.

Nabyonga says her potato

garden near the lakeshores was destroyed and she has nothing to feed her family on.

In Kacheera sub-county, local authorities said the hippo population has increased in the past seven years.

Julius Byabikyengire, the area councillor, said subsistence farmers often sleep outside protecting their fields from destruction. However, some are attacked and killed and several others badly injured by the hippos.

In his explanation, residents were told to leave space of more than 100 metres from the lake, wetlands and other habitats where hippos live.

Godfrey Mucunguzi, the deputy resident district commissioner, said they informed UWA officials about the problem.

This is not the first time the hippos are raiding communities in this district.

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from Lake Mburo National Park displaced dozens of residents in Mukogote, Lyakisaana, Lwanga, Buyoza, Kabumba and Kakyera villages.

Similar attacks

In 2013, hippos killed five people in Lyantonde district. The deceased included three children and two adults of Rwamawungu village in Kabula county.

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Tourism in Uganda is a major driver of employment, investment and foreign exchange. It is indicated in the 7th Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report that tourism contributed nearly sh7.3b to gross domestic product in the financial year 2015/2016. This was an increase from sh6.3b in 2014/15 financial year.