

Leaders have sought help from the army and UWA to curb the escalating cases of human-wildlife conflicts in the affected areas.

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

Authorities of Purongo Sub-county in Nwoya District have petitioned the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) to deploy soldiers in the area to help game rangers deal with serious wildlife intrusion.

The leaders want the army to set up three new military detachments in Pabit Parish to help drive away several herds of elephants that have strayed in the area for more than a year, destroying crops, property, and disrupting the lives of residents.

On Monday, Mr Benson Otto, the Purongo Sub-county chairperson, told the *Daily Monitor* that they had sought help from UPDF to curb the persistent raids by marauding elephants and buffaloes in the area.

"We have written to the UPDF 4th Division command to come to our aid and establish several army detachments in the area to support the small number of rangers who cannot do much, especially in Atwomo and Paraa B villages," Mr Otto said.

He added: "We have asked that soldiers be deployed in those areas alongside UWA (Uganda Wildlife Authority) game rangers. This is very important. Since 2024, elephants have terrorised the villages and destroyed hundreds of crop gardens, and currently (dry season), they are raiding homes in the night where they dismantle people's houses and eat stored produce."

After destroying gardens, the elephants now break into houses and eat the stored food. They target maize, rice, millet, groundnuts, sorghum, and other cereals. We have registered many cases at Padyere West, Patira West and Paraa B villages in Pabit Parish," Mr Otto said.

He gave an example of Punu-pa-min-Owot Cooperative Animal Grazing Ground, a community grazing land once used by hundreds of households for animal grazing, that has now been overrun by the elephants and buffalo.

"In Pabit Parish, that grazing ground is now occupied by elephants and buffaloes, who have turned it into their homes. During the day, they take cover in that grazing land and in the night

Purongo locals cry foul as wildlife raid gardens



Locals and UWA personnel examine a garden that was reportedly ravaged by elephants recently. PHOTO/TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The Wildlife Act 2022 provides for compensation when wildlife including elephants, lions, leopards, crocodiles, buffaloes, hyenas, hipopotami, gorillas, chimpanzees, baboons and bush pigs, cause damage.

Earlier, in an interview with this publication, Mr Bashir Hangi, the UWA spokesman, admitted that limited manpower and inflexibility could continue to keep victims of human-wildlife conflicts around national parks and game reserves across the country waiting longer. "We have been able to demonstrate that there are crops that are

palatable and animals will always stray and destroy them, but the final decision is really by the community, not UWA; they are the ones who should agree on how best they can use their land since they are neighbours to the park," he explained.

Mr Bashir added: "We cannot force them, of course, but we can only advise and sensitise and keep sensitising, and we will not get tired of showing them the right thing to do. We cannot force them because this is their land, and we cannot force them on what to do with their land because it will be against their rights."

they begin to storm the villages, under cover of darkness," Mr Otto added. Mr Isaiah Mawa, the youth councillor

for Lungulu Sub-county, expressed concerns that without more deployment, wild animals could frustrate the next

planting season.

"The rains are back and the planting season has begun, but the farming communities will not achieve much unless these wild animals are handled systematically," Mr Mawa said.

In the past two years, UWA has been installing an electric fence along the Murchison Falls National Park boundaries in Nwoya and Oyam districts. Whereas most parts of the boundary on the Oyam side are now complete, huge swathes of the boundary are yet to be fenced off on the Nwoya side. The fence is said to cover only parts of Kochlii, Anaka, and Gotapwoyo sub-counties, but it has yet to reach Purongo.

In December 2025, UWA carried out bush-clearing for the electric fence installation across Purongo Sub-county.

However, Mr Wilson Ocira, a resident of Lagaji Village, said work has not commenced as yet.

"Those people (UWA) cleared the path from Lagaji Village near Wangkwar Gate to Anaka Sub-county, which would have covered the whole corridor in our area where elephants and buffaloes are

terrorising communities, but up to now, no work has started," he said.

"We are not sleeping because when you hear drumming of jerry cans and tins in your neighbourhood, you must wake up to do the same," Mr Ocira stated, adding that the elephants have become the new residents.

Whereas the government recently established several initiatives to support locals whose livelihoods are devastated by wildlife, it is established that the impact is minimal since they are sabotaged by wild animals and funding gaps.

UWA tried to support communities neighbouring the park, in the 2023/2024 financial year. Purongo, Gotapwoyo, and Anaka sub-counties piloted a livelihood support project in which simsim and onion seeds were to be provided to farmers.

Mr Mawa said: "Only onion seeds were delivered; simsim did not come. That support was only a one-off, and the farmers had challenges raising the onion seedlings, although the harvest was good."

However, Mr Christopher Omara, the Nwoya Resident District commissioner, said a lack of political will and the deliberate failure of communities neighbouring the park to embrace alternative land use models are fuelling the persistent human-wildlife conflicts in the area.

"In Purongo, Anaka, and Kochlii sub-counties, we have preached for the growing of horticultural crops like onions, green pepper, chillies, etc., including agroforestry, apiary, among others, but our farmers look at quick-maturing crops like maize, millet, rice, soybeans, etc., that are so palatable to these wild animals," he said.

Meanwhile, Mr Otto said they have gazetted funds they secured from UWA through revenue sharing to procure and install an oil mill to enable farmers to embrace and grow more sunflowers as an alternative cash crop to rice, maize, among others.

"Last year, we introduced sunflower growing since it is not destroyed by wild animals, but the challenge is that prices dropped badly, and farmers lost revenue," Mr Otto said.

A December 12, 2025, security meeting in Kochlii Sub-county headquarters over rampant destruction by wild animals from the park, resolved that a deliberate military deployment be made to tackle the problem. Mobilised by Mr Richard Todwong, the ruling National Resistance Movement party secretary general, and attended by UWA officials and UPDF 4th Division commander Maj Gen Felix Bushizoori, to curb cases of human-wildlife conflicts.