

Relief as stray elephant is captured



End of road. UWA staff and police officers prepare to load the captured stray elephant on to a truck before transporting it back to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Kasere District on Friday. PHOTOS BY MORIS MUMBERE

Nightmare. The wild beast had since November 3 been cited strolling through people's gardens

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KASESE. It was all jubilation in Kasere Town last Friday after an elusive elephant that was terrorising farmers in Kihara ward in Kasere Municipality was finally captured and returned to Queen Elizabeth National Park.

For more than a month, the gigantic animal has been roaming Kihara ward destroying people's crops and causing fear among residents.

The three-hour operation that culminated into the capture of the animal was commanded by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and police led by the chief warden of Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area, Mr Edward Esalu after the team cordoned off a maize garden off the Kihara road, west of Kasere District headquarters at Rukooki.

The stray elephant had since November 3 been cited strolling through people's gardens, especially in tall maize fields, making it difficult for farmers to attend to their gardens to harvest their crops.

UWA staff had made several attempts to drive back the wild animal to the park but to no avail.

In an attempt to drive the largest land mammal back to the park, UWA officials fired in the air to scare it but instead two residents were injured by stray bullets.

How the elephant was captured
The Rwenzori Mountains National Park Conservation manager, Mr James Okware, narrates: "I shot the elephant with a tranquiliser, which immobilised it and put it to sleep before we captured it."

Later, UWA used a crane to lift the animal onto a truck that drove the elephant back to Queen Elizabeth

National Park.

As the wild animal was being driven through Kasere Town, residents jubilated and thanked UWA for saving them from the menace.

Some demanded that the animal be given to them as a Christmas gift to feast on to compensate them for the various crops it had destroyed.

Ms Juliet Masika, 32, a mother of seven, said she did not know where to start after the animal devastated her only acre of crops in Kyondo village.

Kihara Road village chairman, Mr Jostus Sunday, said the affected residents in his area had already started seeking legal redress to have them compensated for their lost crops.

Describing the whole debacle as "horrible", Ms Night Mbambu, a resident, said she had lost her job as a casual labourer because she could no longer access people's gardens where she had been providing labour to earn a living.

Ms Grace Kabugho, one of the farmers whose garden was destroyed by the elephant, said they had abandoned their gardens for fear for their lives.

"We lost our crops to the elephant that strayed into our gardens since last month. We feared to come to the



Captured. UWA staff after load the elephant onto a truck before taking it back to the park last Friday.

gardens since the elephant is dangerous and could harm or kill us," she said.

Mr Marahi Muhindo, a cotton farmer in the affected village, said: "We have lost our crops to wild animals for a long time but nothing has ever been done. We want the President to solve the problem or else we devise other means"

Mr Kisuki Saidi, the Nyamwamba

Division chairperson, said many people in the area have lost their crops to wild animals.

However, UWA spokesperson Simplicious Gessa regretted the inconveniences caused in the area in an attempt to drive the wild animal back to its habitat.

Compiled by Moris Mumbere, End
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FARMERS ABANDON HOMES TO GUARD THEIR GARDENS

The elephant has been taken back to the park, but the misery in other areas continues as the human-wildlife conflict goes on.

Most farmers along Muhokya-Kinyamaseke-Bwera road sleep out in the cold guarding their gardens from wild animals from Queen Elizabeth National Park, which they say destroy their farms during night hours.

Mr Happy Muhindo, a commercial farmer at Kaleberyo in Muhokya Sub-county, said: "Most families have shifted from their homes to camp in their gardens to guard against wild animals by lighting fire to scare them away."

Mr Muhindo said the act has largely

affected the education of the young children.

"Education of young ones in such areas has been affected due to the night operations that the children go through".

He urged UWA to address the matter immediately.

The most affected areas are Muhokya, Kaleberyo, Kahendero, Kikorongo, Kiburara, Katholhu and Nyamughasani, all in Kasere District.

Recently, Daily Monitor carried a story, "Museveni warns UWA boss on stray animals" where the President warned Mr Andrew Sseguya, the UWA executive director, over his alleged failure to address wildlife invasion into community

farmlands.

Mr Museveni said despite continuous reminder to Mr Sseguya to have the problems addressed, he [Sseguya] and his team have instead been 'sleeping'.

"The director of UWA needs some kiboko [canes], we have been talking about the issues of wild animals invading people's gardens for about 10-15 years now, but nothing has been done to address the problem," he said.

The President made the remarks while reacting to a submission of Nwoya District chairperson Patrick Okello Oryema at the launch of a 2,000 hectares rice farm belonging to POL Logistics Uganda Ltd, in Anaka Sub-county at the weekend.

briefly

Lorry driver shot dead

BUIKWE: Police are looking for relatives of a lorry driver who was on Monday night shot dead by unknown thugs in Buikwe Village, Najjembe Division in Lugazi Municipality, Buikwe District. The Soroti regional police spokesperson, Ms Helen Butata, confirmed the shooting of James Somogyere, 41, the driver of lorry UA2 223 G. Ms Butata added that the deceased, whose residence remains unknown, was driving from Tororo carrying 300 bags of cement destined for Kampala. By press time, the unclaimed body was lying at Kawola Hospital mortuary [Denis Edema]

50,000 drivers held

KAMPALA: A total of 50,000 drivers were arrested in one year, according to traffic police director, Dr Steven Kasilima. The traffic police chief on Friday told journalists that the drivers were arrested during Fika Salama (safe drive) operations, especially on roads including Kampala-Masaka highway. He said 70 per cent of the drivers had no driving permits, whereas others had forged driving licences. Dr Kasilima challenged drivers to always move with original driving permits, saying 90 per cent of drivers who move with photocopies are forged. Police launched Fika Salama after about 300 people had been killed in accidents on Masaka road, making it the second deadliest road in the world. [Joseph Kato]

Residents worried

WAKISO: Residents of Matugga in Wakiso District have expressed worry over the increasing number of thieves and burglars in the area. The locals expressed their worry during a community meeting at the weekend in which they showed police a cave where the thugs reportedly hide during day time and terrorise the residents in the night. Mr Moses Kayongo, the village defence secretary, said the thieves break into their homes every night and steal household items and beat occupants. At least two people were rescued last week by police after an angry mob pounced on them after they were allegedly caught with stolen goats. [Joseph Kato]

Man arrested with skull

MUKONO: Police in Mukono District are holding a man after he was found with a human skull. The suspect, a resident of Namayengo village in Mukono District, was arrested on Monday following a tip-off from the residents. The suspect, who is believed to be a witch doctor, was allegedly found with the skull in his shrine, something that terrified residents and they alerted police. However, the residents warned police not to release the suspect before he explains where he got the human skull. They also threatened to lynch the suspect if he was released before he is prosecuted in court. [Joseph Kato]