

Museveni cautions poachers, pastoralists

KASESE

By John Thawite

President Yoweri Museveni has warned poachers to desist from destroying wildlife in Uganda.

The President sounded the warning in a speech read for him by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, during the UN World Wildlife Day celebrations on Saturday at Nyakasanga Stadium, Kasese municipality.

"Poachers must know that we have defeated terrorism and we are now coming for them. I have also heard that our lions are being poisoned by pastoralists. This must stop," the President said.

The day was marked under the themes: "The big cats" and "Creating a safe environment for the survival of Uganda's big cats."

The President commended conservation partners and investors for supplementing government efforts in conserving and marketing wildlife in the country and abroad.

Museveni said Uganda nearly lost all its wildlife to poaching in the 1960s and 1970s, which were characterised by lawlessness and political turmoil.

"With the restoration of



(From right) Rugunda, Kamuntu and other officials being shown traps used by poachers at Nyakasanga Stadium in Kasese on Saturday. Photo by John Thawite

peace and stability, the situation has been reversed," he said.

The President said the Government had registered remarkable

in saving wildlife species that were under the threat of extinction, adding that tourism has grown in the last 10 years, fetching the country \$1.4b from \$375m in 2006.

The President also revealed that besides hosting 53.9% of the world's population of mountain gorillas, 11% of the world's recorded species of birds and 8% of the global

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mammal diversity, Uganda also hosts 19% of Africa's amphibian species.

This includes 14% of Africa's reptile species and 1,249 recorded species of butterflies as well as 600 fish species.

He added that tourism is Uganda's leading foreign exchange earner. Annually, tourism fetches \$1.37b.

The President said tourism, which is largely wildlife-based, contributes sh7 trillion of Uganda's GDP annually and provides about 1.2 million jobs in Uganda.

Electric fences

Tourism minister Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu, said the ministry is carrying out feasibility studies aimed at installing electric fences around some national

parks to prevent animals from straying into the neighbouring communities.

He added that the ministry had carried out various policy reforms enhance tourism management.

Big cats endangered

The UN resident co-ordinator, Rosa Malango, said although the lion, cheetah and leopard are some of the world's most celebrated cats, they are facing threats mostly from humans, climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

"Unfortunately, statistics show the number of lions has dropped by 40% over the last 20 years," she said.

Malango called for ways of protecting the species as part of a balanced ecosystem, pledging the United Nations Development Programme support.

She hailed Uganda for its strong leadership in the tourism ministry, the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).

The district chairperson, Geoffrey Bigogo, urged Parliament to expedite the law of compensation.

"Perhaps this will compel UWA staff to act quickly whenever animals stray into the communities," he said.

DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT

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