

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE
& MARIA JACINTA KANNYANGE

KAMPALA. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is set to offer tourists a diverse wildlife experience beyond its famed gorilla tracking following the first-ever census that revealed 426 chimpanzees in the northern segment of the park.

The survey, conducted by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), in partnership with the Jane Goodall Institute Uganda between May and June 2025, provides the first scientific data on the park's chimpanzee population, long considered largely undocumented.

"With verified population numbers and mapped locations, we can now introduce chimpanzee-focused tourism without disturbing the animals or their habitats," UWA Executive Director James Musinguzi said during the launch of the census results on February 24 at UWA headquarters in Kampala. "This means visitors can experience chimpanzees, gorillas, and hippos all within the same ecosystem."

Dr Musinguzi noted that the findings open opportunities for tourism diversification, allowing visitors to extend stays and reduce reliance on gorilla tracking alone in northern Bwindi, where chimpanzees are concentrated.

"The expanded tourism portfolio could create jobs for guides, hospitality workers hence increased revenue streams from permits and tourism activities while supporting craft and cul-

Chimpanzee census to boost tourism

CENSUS RESULTS

Spatial analysis showed that the northern section of Bwindi is particularly suitable for chimpanzees, while southern areas are more suited for gorillas. The survey further documented signs of other wildlife, including elephants and six other primate species, confirming Bwindi as a biodiversity hotspot.

tural enterprises in villages surrounding the park. The communities around this place are relatively poor and this is an opportunity to empower them through diversifying sustainable tourism," he added.

Michael Jurua, the conservation science manager at Jane Goodall Institute, said two methods, the standing crop count and marked nest count, were applied to ensure conservative and accurate estimates. The chimpanzee population was determined at 1.33 individuals per square kilometre, primarily concentrated in the northern segment (neck) of the park.

He adds that results show that chimpanzees share some areas with mountain gorillas, often nesting in proximity

Mr James Musinguzi, the Uganda Wildlife Authority Executive Director, speaks during the release of the chimpanzee census results early this week.
PHOTO/SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

to one another. "Spatial analysis showed that the northern section of Bwindi is particularly suitable for chimpanzees, while southern areas are more suited for gorillas. The survey further documented signs of other wildlife, including elephants and six other primate species, confirming Bwindi as a biodiversity hotspot."

Unlike elephants, chimpanzees in

Bwindi are not habituated to humans. Mr Martin Bahinduka Mugarra, the State minister for Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities noted that even the sound of humans can cause chimpanzees to flee, highlighting the challenges research-

ers faced during the census.

"The confirmation of a strong chimpanzee population strengthens Bwindi's reputation as a critical habitat for great apes," Mr Mugarra said. "It also presents an opportunity to integrate chimpanzees into tourism offerings while ensuring sustainable conservation and community development since people in that space are relatively low income earners."

The minister noted that the data will inform protected area management decisions, guide conservation interventions, and support the integration of chimpanzees into long-term protection and monitoring frameworks alongside other flagship species.

He added: "The economic incentives will encourage conservation efforts and help reduce illegal activities that threaten wildlife and habitats."

Background

National context as of the last chimpanzee census Uganda hosts over 5,000 chimpanzees distributed across 21 forest blocks.

Approximately 75 percent of the population resides in five major blocks: Budongo Forest (Masindi) with about 800, Bugoma (580), Kibale (1,200), and the combined Kalinzu, Kasyoha-Kitoma and Maramagambo forests (about 1,000). The remaining individuals are spread across smaller forest and community lands.



5,000
CHIMPANZEES
IN UGANDA