

Activists warn against taking selfies next to wild animals

KAMPALA

By Michael Odeng

Animal rights activists and wildlife conservationists have called for restricted access to wild animals to mitigate accidents that occur during park tours.

The World Animal Protection and the Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO) say tourists who take selfies with animals either infect them with diseases or prompt animals to attack them.

During a meeting in Kampala yesterday, the activists launched the Wildlife Selfie Code, which restricts tourists from accessing wild animals. Close to 250,000 people have already signed the commitment.

The Wildlife Selfie Code seeks to mitigate the damage caused by the evolution of smartphones.

The activists say it has become a tendency for tourists not to observe distance when inside the national park, which ends up either in accidents; by animals attacking them or infecting them with diseases.

Gloria Tumwesigye, the executive director of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators, said the code comes on the heels of a projection that Uganda's

tourism sector will outgrow any other country in the East African Community.

This, according to experts, will require improved knowledge on how to deal with wild animals.

She said the increase of the number of tourists will also mean the need to double the number of tour guides. Lillian Kamusiime, the vice-chairperson of the Uganda Safari Tour Guides Association, said the tourism minister proposed the training of all active Ugandans as tour guides.

She said the sector will train bodaboda riders and airport taxi drivers in marketing the country to tourists.

Kamusiime explained that they still face challenges of lack of laws that stipulate how much a guide should earn, which has led to fraud in the job.

According to the tourist board data, almost 1.2 million tourists came to Uganda in 2013, an increase of 50%. Findings also indicate that tourists to Uganda last year almost hit two million people.

Raphael Omoding, the education and outreach liaison officer, said billions of animals are suffering around the world and each of them needs help by rebuilding their lives.

Findings indicate that 10% of posts of selfies involving elephants came from South Africa and Tanzania, 67% of posts involving lions from South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania

He noted that good animal welfare is fundamental to a better world, community wellbeing, food production and agricultural systems, environment, public health and a sustainable global economy.

"We discourage the use of wildlife in entertainment and as props in selfies by tourists. Our aim is to make tourists and travel agencies aware of the cruelty behind wildlife performances and selfies," he said.

Omoding said when wildlife tourism is properly managed, it can be good for the environment. "Support the protection of natural areas, improve animal welfare and alleviate poverty," he said.

Omoding said the use of animals as photo props for wildlife selfies is an increasingly alarming source of animal welfare and conservation concern.

"The presence of these images on social media is almost certainly driving up the interest in this activity, with much of the cruelty involved kept hidden behind the scenes," he said.

AUTO findings indicate that 10% of posts of selfies involving elephants came from South Africa and Tanzania, 67% of posts involving lions from South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania, while 28% of posts involving giraffes on Instagram came from Kenya.

What do you think?
TYPE VIEWS<space>
Comment, Ask, suggest
Send to
8338
TXT US

forest reserves and forest plan development.

"We have also developed a that will regulate the activities of indigenous population in the reserve," he noted.

Aisha Alibhai, NFA's community manager, announced that she also initiated dialogue with Karamoja communities for the conservation of the central forest.

"We have resolved with communities in the sub-region ensure that the locals are involved in planting of trees and the protection of the forest cover," she said.

Michael Okot, the NFA range for Karamoja, noted that the plans to harvest all the old trees in the forest to pave way for indigenous breeds.

"During colonial rule, there was planting trail in the area and have matured and are exotic. We have resolved to cut and replace them with indigenous breeds," he said.

Recently, business in the municipality came to a halt following a protest by the community against plans to cut trees planted by the colonialists in 1945 on Mt. Moroto.

The protesters walked banners for 65km from Tap to the Moroto district head.

The protesters said the source of rain and water for the surrounding area and Te also prohibits cutting down the slopes of Mt. Moroto.