

Katonga to become national park

By Titus Kakembo

In a bid to boost tourist volumes to Uganda, no stone is being left unturned. Katonga Game Reserve is being restocked prior to becoming the 11th national park in the country.

Last week saw zebras, topies and waterbucks successfully darted and loaded from Lake Mburo National Park, which is 112km away, to the reserve. The new status is destined to change the fortunes of the Bahima populace as they diversify from cattle rearing to tourism.

Dr Margaret Acidi, who was in charge of transferring the animals, said the exercise is picking up as more animal species are captured.

"The Uganda kob were fast and furious on their feet compared to giraffes and zebras," Acidi said.

"Each vial used for darting costs about \$500. We cannot afford to waste any during the exercise."

"A road is already being tarmacked from the Sembabule junction to the reserve," Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) spokesperson Gessa Simplicious, said. "We capture the animals by darting them, loading them on a truck and transporting them there."

The relocation exercise was 100% successful. Upon delivery,



Wildlife officials preparing a waterbuck for transfer from Lake Mburo National Park to Katonga Game Reserve. Photo by Titus Kakembo

Last week saw zebras and waterbucks darted and loaded from Lake Mburo National Park

the mammals were seen grazing, watering and marking their territory in the new setting.

The park, which has been having stanunga hunters, bird watchers and primates fans is destined to change with the arrival of the new animals.

"We expect investors to build lodges, theatres, camping sites and hotels to boost tourism in the

area," the senior warden, Samuel Amariya, said. "A lot remains untapped here. Beef, milk and literature will have a ready market instead of transporting produce to Kampala, Mbarara or Masaka as has been the case."

Some Katonga residents have between 50 and 100 head of cattle. The excess milk produced is processed into ghee. Goats and sheep roam the fields like grasshoppers in season. Men walk about clutching herding sticks and wearing Safari hats.

"The ancient railway line that is overgrown with bush is due to be reconstructed under the Standard Gauge Railway project," Amariya said. "Connectivity to Katonga will be easy and comfortable. The volume of traffic to Kyegogwa and Karamwenge has shot up lately. With Lake George located not far away from the game reserve, it could act as a big motivation for tourists who want to visit the region. Can you imagine fish are still dying of old age here," he added.

A kilogramme of fish goes for sh5,000, whereas it costs sh10,000 elsewhere in the country.

Milk remains relatively affordable in the area. Food in Rushere costs sh5,000 per plate laden with steamed bananas, potatoes, cassava and vegetables.

Traditional yoghurt costs sh2,000 a glass at Rushere Hotel.

"With yoghurt, you do not need to apply cosmetics or any other chemicals to have a smooth skin texture," revealed Fortunata Asimwe, a cherubic attendant. "It is good for babies and housewives."

At a glance, Katonga Game Reserve could do with more eating places, camping sites, pubs and residential facilities in order for travellers to spend more than a day there.

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