

Museveni faults UWA over stray elephants

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

President Yoweri Museveni has asked the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to wake up and help people of Nwoya district whose crops are being destroyed by stray elephants from Murchison Falls National Park.

Museveni, who was on Saturday launching the FOL Logistics (Uganda) Ltd farm in Lamoki village in Anaka sub-county, Nwoya district, was shocked to learn that animals are destroying crops in the area. Museveni wondered why the matter that was discussed years ago and solutions identified has not been implemented by UWA.

"I will have to do something to the executive director of UWA," Museveni said.

He said the wild animals can be controlled using both mechanical and biological methods that may include installing an electric fence or planting red pepper on the boundary of the park.

Museveni's comments came after the Nwoya district LC5 chairperson, Patrick Okello Oryema, complained about the destruction of crops by elephants from Murchison Falls National Park.

"People are trying their best to cultivate, but crops such as watermelon and rice are being destroyed from the gardens. This is demoralising," Oryema said.

However, John Simplicitious Gesa, the public relations officer of UWA, said the animal attacks in Nwoya were being managed.

He says Nwoya, where the animals are straying into people's gardens, used to be the elephant's migratory corridor, but have since been taken over by locals for agriculture, settlements.

"During the war in Northern Uganda, elephants were using this area, which was abandoned for almost 20 years of the war. But since the war ended and people returned, there has been a lot of damage because people settled in the animals' migratory corridor," Gesa says.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Although the President talked about the issue of electric fences, Gesa says the solution is good, but may not be easy to implement currently since it is an expensive approach that requires time and resources.

The elephants are increasingly confined in few pockets of suitable habitat around which humans and elephants come into contact and conflict with each other keep happening.

Gesa says UWA has employed a multiplicity of approaches to solve the challenge.

Some of the solutions according to Gesa include bee keeping, where locals are encouraged to do bee farming which is also good for income generation and protection from elephants.

Locals are also encouraged to grow red pepper across the park border to stop elephants from crossing to the gardens.

"When the chili is ready, you can pound it and spread the powder across the border line of your garden, this will irritate the elephants and they will not cross to the garden," Gesa says.

The issue of digging trenches along the park has become tricky since elephants have a tendency of covering them and crossing over to people's gardens. Sometimes they cross through wetlands where trenches cannot be dug.

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"We have trained wildlife scouts who live within the community, we offered them skills of scaring away elephants by using noise making tactics such as vuvuzelas," Gesa says.

UWA says in other circumstances, they deploy rangers who fire bullets to scare the animals.

Uganda's Wildlife Act does not provide compensation to people whose crops are damaged or whose family members are killed by animals, which always enrages people near the protected areas.