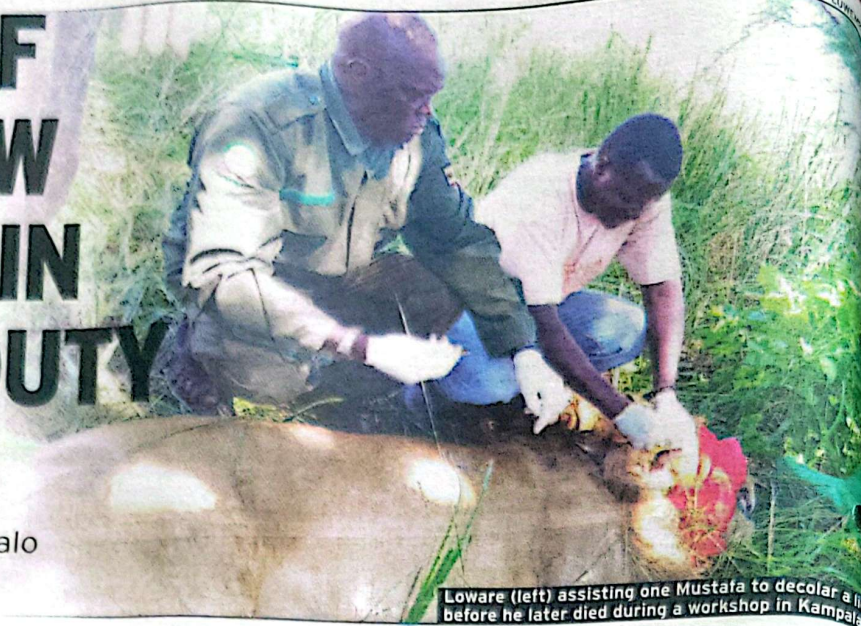


GUARDIANS OF THE WILD: HOW RANGERS DIE IN THE LINE OF DUTY

While rangers stand to protect wildlife resources, property and human life in the protected areas, their safety is somewhat endangered. From wildlife attacks by buffalo and elephants, some have lost their lives. Julius Luwemba reveals more on this.



Loware (left) assisting one Mustafa to decolour a fabric before he later died during a workshop in Kampala.

The Rwenzori ranges loomed in the distance, while the rolling savanna punctuated with acacia trees was still blanketed under the morning dew. The sky, painted with soft golden hues, gave a gentle tap to all the slumbering fauna that survive in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Like one budding writer Isaac Namanya describes, the celebrated medley of wonders stood like a monument of pride, blending effortlessly into the wild landscapes. The early light teasing silhouettes of euphorbia trees in the Ishasha sector of the park was cut short by black smoke from the firing guns and a tense mood that followed after the shooting incident.

It was a Tuesday morning of February 19, 2013, when gunmen raided Katooke gate in the Ishasha sector of the national park and shot dead Angel Kobusheshe, the accounts clerk working with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), before fleeing with sh2m.

Another staff member, Mercy Nabasa, was also shot in the right thigh, but her life was preserved by the medics in Kanungu district, where she was rushed after sustaining the injury. The tragic incident was described as a robbery before the culprit, Peter Mariamungu, was later apprehended and sentenced to 40 years in prison.

Kobusheshe, who hailed from Ikumba sub-county, Kabale district, in western Uganda, left behind a pregnant wife and

OTHER RANGERS KILLED ON DUTY

In early December 2022, Charles Okawa was shot dead by suspected poachers during a wild gunfire exchange in the Kidepo Valley conservation area. Okawa was shot dead during the gunfire exchange, while another of his colleagues was injured before seeking treatment at Yotkom Medical Hospital in Kitgum town.

The deceased, who had served Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) for 14 years, is survived by a wife and seven children. In March 2023, Deo Twinomujuki was trampled to death by an elephant in the Nyamusika cliffs, Murchison Falls National Park. The deceased had spent eight years working with UWA.

Also, in May 2023, Sgt Samuel Loware, 47, the then acting head ranger for the Kidepo Valley conservation area, collapsed during a workshop that was organised on the strategic action plan for African lions and other large carnivore conservation.

The two-day workshop had been organised at the Protea Hotel in Kampala. Loware collapsed at around 4:00pm before he was rushed to

Medipal International Hospital and later to Nakasero Hospital, from where he was announced dead. Ambrose Lotyanga, a family member, revealed then that the deceased had a blood pressure condition that was likely associated with the tragic incident.

Loware, from Karenga district, had worked with UWA for 22 years. During an interview with *The Guardian* newspaper in 2018, Loware is quoted as saying: "You will never run from death."

He detailed a story of how he had survived bullets of poachers. "Even a man who sits at home and does not work as a ranger can die in an accident or be killed by raiders.

"So, from that time until now, I decided that for the love of conservation, for the love of the rest of my colleagues, and for the love of the rest of the country, let us work," Loware said.

Between 2002 and 2024, over 15 UWA rangers had been killed in the line of duty in the Mount Elgon conservation area alone. Within the same period, 35 rangers from the same conservation area were injured while carrying out their duty of

protecting Uganda's wildlife and its habitat.

This was earlier revealed by Samuel Amana, the chief warden for the Mt Elgon conservation area, which encompasses Mt Elgon National Park, Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve, and Matheniko-Bokora Wildlife Reserves.

A source within the wildlife authority confided that over 38 rangers have died in the line of duty across Uganda's vast landscapes. However, Bashir Hangi, the UWA assistant commissioner in charge of public affairs, said the authority is still harmonising the number of fatalities and deaths in order to get an accurate figure.

"What is more important is for the public to understand that the staff who are protecting the country's wildlife face tremendous challenges, including losing their own lives," Hangi said.

Some rangers are injured and killed by the wildlife, especially buffalo, warthogs, hippos and snakes, whereas others have, in the past, been killed by poachers and some hostile community members staying around the protected areas with dubious motives.

Musinguzi said. "In February 2020, UWA took on the responsibility of supporting the four children of the late Angel Kobusheshe among other fallen staff," he added.

It was also revealed that over 95 children are benefiting from the UWA education scheme, which takes learners up to university.

"We firmly believe that investing in their education not only honours the legacy of their parents, but also empowers them to contribute meaningfully to society in the future," the UWA boss added.

Part of the school fees is fundraised through annual marathons organised by UWA.

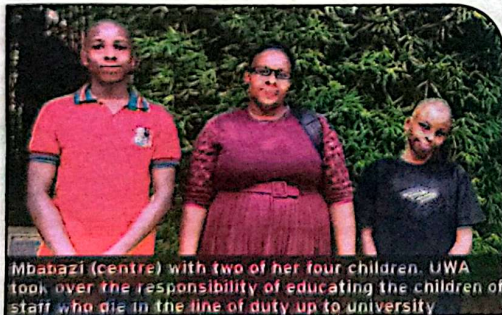
"Our fundraising marathon this year will be held on March 1, at Kitante Primary School in Kampala," Musinguzi rallied.

RANGER DUTIES

Early this year, UWA released a public notice aimed at recruiting 550 more rangers to protect wildlife resources, property, and human life in the protected areas.

Rangers are also mandated to, among other things, conduct patrols and operations as well as to protect wildlife resources in and around the protected areas.

They are also tasked with detecting and proactively preventing wildlife crimes, as well as arrest, search, and support prosecution of suspects involved in illegal wildlife activities. They are also mandated to collect and record field data for management decision-making as well as support the rescue, capture, and translocation of wildlife.



Mbabazi (centre) with two of her four children. UWA took over the responsibility of educating the children of staff who die in the line of duty up to university.

three children. With teary eyes, Hope Mbabazi, the wife of the late Kobusheshe, recounts the gloomy, painful past years without her husband and yet, with a pile of responsibilities.

"I later secured a job with the wildlife authority that had formerly employed my late husband, but the responsibility of tending to the family of very young children outweighed the determination to fend for them financially," Mbabazi narrated.

She later retreated and

started up a retail shop from which basic needs are secured for the four children.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Dr James Musinguzi, the UWA executive director, has reaffirmed the authority's commitment to taking care of children of rangers that have been killed in the line of duty.

"UWA remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the well-being of families of fallen heroes, especially in terms of scholarship support,"