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11 lions die in Queen Elizabeth game park

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KAMPALA. Eleven lions were yesterday confirmed dead in Queen Elizabeth National Park, further plummeting one of the core backbone of tourist attractions in the country. Three mothers and eight cubs were among the dead.

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) executive director, Mr Sam Mwandha, confirmed the deaths and said he was assembling a team of investigators to establish the cause.

"We found them dead in Hamkungu fishing village in Queen Elizabeth National Park," Mr Mwandha said by telephone.

Due to their carnivorous nature, whenever the animals get out of the protected areas, they wreak havoc in the surrounding areas.

The communities react by killing them, sometimes using poison.

In an earlier interview, Mr Stephen Asiimwe, the executive director of Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), said these particular species should be protected because they are a tourist attraction.

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Animals. Estimated number of lions and lionesses left mainly in Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls national parks according to a 2015 survey done by UWA. The same report also estimated that at least 1-1.5 male lions and 2 to 2.25 lionesses are killed annually mainly by poisoning.

"These parks are in the savannah, which has good pasture for cattle and there are lakes where communities come and fish. This increases human-animal conflict but the ministry [Tourism] is addressing it," Mr Asiimwe said.

Figures from the 7th Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report indicate that tourism continues to be a pillar of Uganda's economy, contributing nearly Shs7.3b to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the financial year 2015/2016.

This translates into 9 per cent of the country's GDP. This was an increase from Shs6.3b in 2014/15 financial year.

Dr Akankwasah Barirega, the commissioner Wildlife Conservation in the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, said preliminary observations point to poisoning, but they were waiting for full investigations.

"We have commissioned investigations into the matter. We shall use the evidence gathered to prosecute and if convicted decisively punish the perpetrators of this heinous crime," Dr Barirega said.