



MINISTRY OF TOURISM, WILDLIFE AND ANTIQUITIES

PRESS STATEMENT ON COMMEMORATION OF UNITED NATIONS WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 2020 IN UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

Uganda will join the rest of the world to celebrate United Nations World Wildlife Day on the 3rd March 2020 at ssaza grounds in Kisoro Municipality, Kisoro District in Kigezi region. This is a great day for Uganda, a country dedicated to protect and conserve wildlife for the benefit of the present and future generations.

On 20th December 2013, the Sixty eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 3rd March of every year as World Wildlife Day to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness of the several benefits that conservation provides to humanity.

A COUNTRY GIFTED BY NATURE: THE PEARL OF AFRICA

Uganda boasts of a rich and diverse wildlife heritage owing to its unique location at the zone of overlap between the savannah of East Africa and the rainforests of West Africa. The country is distinctly blessed with spectacular landscapes of unrivalled beauty ranging from the great rift valleys to lake basins, crater lakes rolling plains, tropical forests, vast savannahs to permanently snowcapped Rwenzori mountains. The numerous landforms and habitats support rich and varied wildlife species and communities.

With a recorded 18,783 species of flora and fauna, Uganda ranks among the top most biodiversity rich countries globally. Uganda is a host to over 50% of the world's remaining population of Mountain gorillas, 11% of the world's recorded species of birds (which is 50% of Africa's bird species richness), 8% of the global mammal diversity (which is 39% of Africa's mammal richness), 19% of Africa's Amphibian species richness, 14% of Africa's reptile species richness and 1,249 recorded species of butterflies. The rich wildlife endowment is the number one competitive edge to develop Uganda into a top tourism destination in Africa.

Uganda's rich wildlife biodiversity has been conserved through a robust policy and legal framework ushered in by the NRM Government in 1986 including through establishment of a network of wildlife Protected Areas covering about 10% of the country's total land surface. These include 10 National Parks, 12 Wildlife Reserves, 10 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 5 Community Wildlife Areas.

ANIMAL POPULATION INCREASING

Due to enhanced integrity of the Protected Areas, arising from political stability and associated sustainable security, there has been general increase in wildlife populations. For instance, the elephant population has increased from only 2000 in 1983 to the current 6000; Mountain Gorillas in Bwindi alone have increased from only 298 in 1993 to over 459 by 2018 (50 groups out of 91 global groups); Buffalos have increased from 25,000 in 1982 to now 37,054; Uganda kob has increased from 40,000 in 1982 to 74,702 surpassing the post independence populations of 60,000 kobs. We have been able to successfully reintroduce Rhinos back to Uganda that had gone extinct in early 1980's. The initial population of 8 has bred and multiplied to the current population of 28 individuals.

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF TOURISM TO THE ECONOMY

Tourism is now the leading foreign exchange earner for Uganda, bringing in US\$ 1.6 billion (about 24% of the total exports) annually. With a recorded total of 1.5 million international arrivals, tourism which is largely wildlife-based contributes about 9.0% of GDP annually. The tourism sector provides 1.173 million jobs in Uganda (7.8% of total employment). Uganda Wildlife Authority alone employs over 2,350 staff. We therefore as a country have all reasons to celebrate our wildlife endowment.

The national World Wildlife Day 2020 celebrations will be held at Ssaza grounds, Kisoro District in the Kigezi region under the theme ***“Sustaining Wildlife for the benefit of the present and future generations”***. HE the President of the Republic of Uganda is expected to be the Chief Guest.

The theme of the day is timely and reminds us of the need to ensure peaceful coexistence between wildlife and people for the benefit of present and future generations. Government, working with all our stakeholders has undertaken several initiatives towards realizing harmonious living between wildlife and people including:

- (a) Uganda Wildlife Act 2019 enacted and HE the President signed it into law on 1st July 2019. The Act came into force on 27th September 2019. The Wildlife Act 2019 strengthens penalties against wildlife offenders, enhances community participation in wildlife conservation, and provides for compensation for damage to property, injury and loss of life. We are now formulating regulations to fully operationalize the law.
- (b) Sharing of Protected Area revenues (20%) with adjacent communities. A total of 15,390,345,544/=) has been shared with communities in the last three years.
- (c) Wildlife utilization programme has generated revenue for different stakeholders over the last three years, UWA, US\$ 1,195,312; Local Communities US\$ 1,639,847 and US\$ 259,447 for District Local Governments.

(d) To address human wildlife conflicts

- A total of 50.9 new kilometers of elephant deterrent trenches were excavated in Murchison Falls National Park, Queen Elizabeth National Park and Kibaale National Park. 161.1km of the existing 237km elephant trenches were maintained.
- In order to further scare away elephants, a total of 1,435 beehives were procured and installed in Kibaale (200), Queen Elizabeth (174) , Kidepo Valley (250) and Bwindi Conservation Areas (811).
- 10 km of Electric fence were constructed in Kyambura WR in Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area
- A hippo deterrent demonstration fence covering 0.7 km was constructed on the shores of Lake Kyamwiga in Rubirizi district.
- Mauritius live fences (192.5km), chilli cakes, scare shooting, buffer crops like tea to prevent human wildlife conflicts were also implemented.

(e) We have enhanced Inter-Agency collaboration and coordination by establishing a National Wildlife Crime Coordination Task Force which brings together all key law enforcement agencies in Uganda to combat wildlife crime along the entire crime chain.

(f) We have built adequate capacity to combat poaching, illegal wildlife trade and trafficking (More personnel, more training, more equipment)

(g) In an effort to eradicate invasive and exotic species, a total area of 1,213 hectares with invasive/exotics were rehabilitated by uprooting, selectively cutting and debarking in the 6 PAs of QENP, KNP, MGNP, SNP, KVNP, LMNP and Katonga WR. Management of invasive especially *Dichrostachys Cinerea* is being undertaken in QENP and Lantana camara in KWR.

(h) As a strategy to ensure conservation of all species and diversification for tourism experiences across the country, the UWA strengthened the animal translocation program in various Protected Areas:

- (i) Translocation of 36 giraffes from the Northern to the southern Bank of MFNP
- (ii) Translocation of 110 Uganda Kobs from MFNP to Kidepo Valley National Park
- (iii) Translocation of 46 zebras and 31 Topis from ranches around LMNP to Katonga Wildlife Reserve
- (iv) Translocation of 14 giraffes from MFNP to Kidepo Valley National Park (KVNP)
- (v) Translocation of 2 Zebras and 2 topis from ranches around LMNP to Kalangala – Sese Island Wildlife Centre
- (vi) Translocation of 91 Impala from ranches around LMNP to Pian Upe WR

MAJOR EVENTS

Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities in collaboration with its Agencies, other Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Uganda Tourism Association and its affiliated Private Sector Associations in Tourism and Conservation, Conservation NGOs, Academia and other conservation partners has organized a number of events to commemorate the day as follows:

1. The annual wildlife marathon on 23rd February 2020, starting at Uganda Museum at 6:30am. The marathon will have 5km, 10km, 21km and 42km categories all ending at the Museum. The Chief Guest at the marathon is expected to be Rt. Hon. Jacob Oulanyah, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Uganda.
2. A conservation conference on wildlife conservation in Uganda on 27th February 2020, in Kampala. The Conservation Conference will bring together conservation practitioners, private sector, policy makers and all stakeholders. The Rt. Hon Prime Minister is expected as Chief Guest at the National Conservation Conference.
3. Wildlife Conservation competitions involving quiz, debates, music dance and drama will be held to raise awareness about conservation issues among the youth. Tertiary institutions competitions will be held on 21st February 2020 at Uganda Christian University Mukono, Secondary Schools competitions will be held on 29th February 2020 at Seseme Girls Secondary School, Kisoro and Primary Schools competitions will be held on 2nd March 2020 at Mutolere Primary School Kisoro, District.
4. Main Celebrations will be held on 3rd March 2020 in Kisoro Municipality where HE the President is expected to be the Guest of Honour. The main celebrations will have exhibitions and recognition awards for people who have contributed significantly to wildlife conservation in Uganda.

CONCLUSION

I call upon all Ugandans and all our conservation and tourism partners to promote and participate in the above events to commemorate the United Nations World Wildlife Day 2020.

HON KIWANDA GODFREY SSUUBI
MINISTER OF STATE