

PRESS RELEASE

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KENYA CELEBRATES THE LARGEST LAND MAMMAL ON WORLD ELEPHANT DAY

12TH AUGUST, 2023: World Elephant Day is an annual international event commemorated on August 12, dedicated to raising awareness and support for the conservation and protection of the world's elephants. Kenya joins the rest of the world in celebrating the eleventh anniversary of World Elephant Day, under the theme; "Let us come together to give elephants a safe place to live in." Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) will spearhead the celebrations in collaboration with stakeholders and partners.

Due to the charismatic nature of the African elephant and its ability to modify its natural habitats, hence affecting the occurrence of other species where they range, monitoring elephant for provision of accurate and timely information on their population status is paramount. The Government of Kenya (GoK) through its arm Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is obligated to carry out this function, in collaboration with relevant conservation partners.

The African elephant is listed in Appendix I in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1990, except populations of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, which are in Appendix II.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species classifies the African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) as critically endangered and the African savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) as endangered.

The African elephant is classified as endangered in the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (WCMA), 2013.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Kenya's elephant population was estimated at 170,000 individuals, utilizing most of the country's varied landscapes. Between 1979 and 1989, the worldwide

demand for ivory resulted in a sharp decline of the national population, with only 16,000 elephants remaining by the end of 1989, which necessitated the establishment of Kenya Wildlife Service through an Act of Parliament, to stop further decline.

The declining trend has since been reversed, resulting in the national elephant population increasing by more than 5% annually to the current estimate of over 36,000 elephants. Key elephant ranges include Tsavo Ecosystem, hosting approximately 41% of the elephant population, Laikipia-Samburu (19%), Aberdare Ecosystem (11%), Masai Mara Ecosystem (7%), Mount Kenya Ecosystem (5.3%), Amboseli Ecosystem (5.2%), Meru Ecosystem (3%) and Mau Ecosystem (2.6%).

World Elephant Day is important because although most elephant populations are stable, they face a number of mostly human-induced threats, such as Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC), habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, increased human pressure to traditional elephant habitats and infrastructural developments, impacts of climate change with increased frequency of prolonged severe droughts, leading to increased HEC, drought-related mortalities and poaching.

To address these threats, KWS in collaboration with stakeholders developed the 2nd edition of the National Elephant Action Plan 2023-2032, whose vision is to "sustain thriving elephant populations and their habitats, while ensuring beneficial, harmonious co-existence with humans for posterity."

Dispersal is a critical component of wildlife ecology that is poorly understood for most species. In particular, savanna elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) have been studied for decades in national parks across Africa, but little is known about their dispersal into new or unused habitats or their population dynamics in human-dominated landscapes. This is exacerbated by the immiserating community livelihoods around elephant range areas.

Continued monitoring has led to the success in the identification and response to poaching and Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC). The monitoring has been facilitated by improvement on monitoring technologies and methodologies. For instance, detailed genetic analysis of the elephant population resulted in the recent confirmation of two distinct species of elephants: the forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*).

Elephants are extremely intelligent, social and emotional animals which have a rich culture and history. They deserve our respect and compassion as fellow inhabitants of the Earth, and should be allowed to live in peace. Elephant enthusiasts can observe World Elephant Day by learning

more about elephants through wildlife documentaries and KWS Conservation Education and Extension Programs; spreading awareness on the plight of elephants on social media platforms; donating to KWS and her conservation partners and visiting protected areas to observe elephants in their natural habitats.

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