

RESULTS OF CENSUSES OF ELEPHANT, BUFFALO, GIRAFFE AND GREVY'S ZEBRA COUNTED IN FIVE KEY ECOSYSTEMS CONDUCTED IN 2016 AND 2017.

The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources has released results of wildlife censuses for elephant, buffalo, giraffe and grevy's zebra carried out in five vital ecosystems in 2016 and 2017. Cabinet secretary in the ministry, Prof. Judi Wakhungu presided over the release of the results at the Kenya Wildlife Service headquarters in Nairobi on December 22, 2017. One of the highlights of the results was the significant increase of elephants, which she termed commendable.

The following is the full report of the results as read by the Cabinet Minister:

“Kenya hosts a precious Natural Resource heritage, including wildlife that is the back bone of tourism development and also providing significant support to supports community livelihoods.

In order to facilitate sustainable conservation and management of our wildlife, monitoring populations is a major prerequisite in accordance to international standards and the Wildlife act, 2013.

In this regard, Kenya has been updating the status of its Wildlife population in line with the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, 2013. The act requires my Ministry to submit to the National Assembly, a Wildlife Resources Monitoring Report and also avail it to the Public, at least every five years.

In addition, the information generated, is also used to prepare a National Wildlife Conservation Status Report, for submission to the National Assembly after every two years.

Therefore, my Ministry has been undertaking aerial surveys in savannah ecosystems of Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit, Meru Conservation Area and Mwea National Reserve, whereas ground surveys using the dung count method have been carried out in the forested ecosystems of Aberdare Forest, the Mau Forest Complex and the Mount Kenya Forest. These surveys are undertaken after every 3-5 years.

The wildlife survey results I am announcing today are for the Laikipia-Samburu-Meru-Marsabit Ecosystem, Mwea National Reserve, Aberdare Conservation Area, Mau Forest Complex and Mount Kenya Forest, and they are:

1. AERIAL TOTAL SURVEY OF ELEPHANTS, BUFFALOES AND GIRAFFE IN THE LAIKIPIA-SAMBURU-MERU-MARSABIT ECOSYSTEM (NOVEMBER, 2017)

The 2017 wet season aerial survey was carried out between November 19, 2017 and December 2, 2017. The surveyed area is about 62,000km².

During the census, a total of 7347 elephants were counted compared to 6454 elephants in 2012. Out of these 7166 and 181 elephants were counted in Laikipia-Samburu ecosystem and the Marsabit ecosystem compared to 6365 and 89 elephants in 2012 respectively. There was an increase of elephant population in Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit ecosystems by 12% over the last five years, from 2012-2017. This represents an annual increase of about 2.4% over this period.

In the Marsabit ecosystem, the population of elephants increased by 51%, with the total number of elephants in 2012 being 89 while in 2017 the total number now stands at 181 elephants.

In Laikipia-Samburu ecosystem, the elephant population increased by 11% with the year 2012 recording a total of 6365 elephants while in 2017 the total number stands at 7,166 elephants. This translates to about 2.2% annual increase of elephants between 2012 and 2017 in the area.

A total of 76 elephant carcasses were recorded during the survey. The 'very old' elephant carcasses had the highest proportion with more than 75% (n=57) of the total carcasses, followed by old carcasses at 25% (n=19). Overall, there was about 1% (0.01) carcass ratio for the Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit ecosystem. There were no fresh or recent carcasses recorded during the survey.

The population of buffaloes counted in Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit ecosystem during the November 2017 census was 4499, which is about 10% increase compared to 4069 buffaloes recorded in the same ecosystem in 2012.

The 2017 Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit ecosystem aerial survey indicated that the ecosystem supports a large number of giraffes totaling 4223 giraffe compared to 2839 giraffes counted in 2012 census.

Further, the 2017 aerial survey in Laikipia-Samburu-Marsabit ecosystem recorded 1621 Grevy's zebra compared to 1897 and 2400 Grevy's Zebra counted during the 2012 and 2008 census.

This means that the annual rate of Grevy's Zebra decline has slowed down from about 5% between 2008 and 2012 to 3% between 2012 and 2017. This implies that the conservation efforts that my Ministry has put in place through Kenya Wildlife Service and Other Conservation Partners, is for an increase in future. I can conservatively state, that we are managing to save this endangered species.

A total of 674 elephants were counted in Meru Conservation Area (MCA) compared to 659 elephants counted in 2015. This represents an increase of about 2% in two years. A total of 19 elephant carcasses (14 old and 5 very old) were recorded during the survey compared to 34 carcasses (1 fresh, 1 recent, 27 Old and 5 very old) recorded in 2014. Further, 2711 buffaloes were counted in MCA in 2017 compared to 1663 counted in November 2014, which represents a 39% increase in three years. Other species recorded during the survey in MCA were giraffe (888 animals compared to 894 in 2014) and Grevy's zebra (6 animals compared to 9 in 2014).

1. AERIAL TOTAL COUNT OF ELEPHANTS, BUFFALOES AND GIRAFFES IN THE MWEA NATIONAL RESERVE (OCTOBER, 2017)

A total of 125 elephants were counted during the survey compared to 82 elephants counted in 2012. This gives an elephant density of 3 elephants/km² compared to a

density of 2 elephants/km² reported in 2012. A total of 3 old elephant carcasses were recorded. Majority of the elephant carcasses were within the dry valleys.

A total of 200 buffaloes compared to 32 in 2012 were recorded in the reserve, giving a density of 4.8 individuals per square kilometre.

The high density of elephants requires immediate interventions through translocation to mitigate their impacts on habitat and to reduce their chances of getting out of the fenced reserve to cause human-elephant conflicts.

2. ELEPHANTS SURVEY IN ABERDARE ECOSYSTEM, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2017

The estimated elephant density in the Aberdare landscape was 2.25 elephants/km², which translates to an estimate of 3,939 elephants, compared to 3540 elephants in 2005. I am happy to report to you that this population is healthy and has been increasing.

3. ELEPHANT SURVEY IN MAU FOREST COMPLEX, SEPTEMBER 2016

The estimated elephant density was 0.45 elephants/km², which translates to about 652 elephants. The last survey of elephants in the Forest Complex was carried out in 1995 and recorded about 1,003 animals. This translated to a reduction of 351 elephants, which is about 35% decrease in 22 years. Elephants were limited to 5 forest blocks (Southern tip of Western Mau, South Western Mau, Trans-Mara, Olpusimoru and the Maasai Mau in areas estimated to be 1458km²).

Four elephant carcasses were recorded during the survey. Three of the carcasses were located in the Trans-Mara forest block. One of the three carcasses found in this forest block was fresh.

My Ministry accords priority to the five blocks with elephants as we put measures in place to sustainably conserve the Mau Forest Complex.

4. ELEPHANT SURVEY in MOUNT KENYA FOREST, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2016

The estimated elephant density for Mount Kenya Forest was 1.28 elephants/km², which translates to about 2579 elephants, compared to 2911 elephants in 2001. Only three elephant carcasses were recorded during this survey. Most elephant signs were found in the North-East (Imenti area) and the South-East (Sagana area) of the Forest.

I am aware that both the savannah and forested ecosystems are facing the challenges of illegal tree logging, livestock incursions, charcoal burning, bush-meat, medium size snares and elephant traps.

In this respect, let me point out that carrying out of Wildlife census is a very expensive exercise that requires a lot of resources and expertise. We are grateful for the support provided by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing (DRSRS), Save the Elephants, Laikipia Wildlife Forum, Mpala Research Centre, BornFree Foundation, Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Marwell Wildlife, Space for Giants, Loisaba Conservancy, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Northern Rangeland Trust and private Pilots towards the aerial surveys whereas the forest ground surveys were supported by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Mount Kenya Trust, Rhino Ark, Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Bongo Surveillance Project (BSP) and Disney's Reverse The Decline (RTD).

As I conclude, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources through the Kenya Wildlife Service will continue to work with other government agencies and departments as well as conservation NGOS, Development partners, Communities and County governments to provide short and long term measures for sustainable conservation of Kenya's Wildlife.

Lastly, I now call upon the KWS Board of trustees and the management, to come up with a clear road map of implementing the recommendations provided through this census".