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Equipped. Six Patrol Boats are now fully operational and two marine ranger stations have been renovated, something that is of key importance since Queen Elizabeth (QE) is dominated by Lakes Edward and George, and the inter-connecting Kazinga Channel.



UWA investing for future generations



Hope. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) rangers learning how to drive boats safely and effectively during a course run by marine operations specialist Tony Tester. The boat, engine and life jackets are examples of what has been donated through the Recovery of Queen Elizabeth Protected Area programme. PHOTOS BY UCF.

INVESTMENT. With funding from the European Union, through CITES MIKES and the Uganda Conservation Foundation (UCF), UWA has started the Recovery of Queen Elizabeth programme, writes **Daily Monitor Reporter**.

If you have travelled to Queen Elizabeth National Park (QE) in the past year, you will have noticed that the park is busy, and clearly the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is investing considerable energy into making long term improvements.

Over the past decade, the tourism industry has been vocal about poaching and the illegal wildlife trade, which has been impacting on the park badly – so much so that tour operators have been bypassing Uganda’s flagship savanna national park.

With tourism investments booming

DID YOU KNOW

TOURISM. There are now over 40 tourism lodges in and around QE. QE has been attracting investment and generating incredible employment opportunities.

and tourism being the largest foreign exchange contributor to the national economy, I met with UWA to investigate what is happening in QE.

My first interview was with the Executive Director of UWA, Sam Mwandha, who says: “The parks have been under incredible pressure by criminal gangs poaching wildlife which is undermining tourism - the strongest contributor to the national and regional economy. Uganda’s dedicated teams from UWA have been working extremely hard to protect our heritage, wildlife and tourism.”

Reclaiming QE National Park

It is clear that since the 1980s, QE and UWA have not received the levels and type of investment needed to allow tourism and conservation to achieve anything like their full potential. Only relatively small areas of the parks are accessible or have permanent protection, greatly limiting tourism and development.

UWA’s leadership clearly recognises the problems as seen in QE and change is now happening.

With funding from the European Union, through CITES MIKES and the Uganda Conservation Foundation (UCF), the Recovery of Queen Elizabeth programme has started.

In April 2017, UWA brought together an experienced team to establish the QE law enforcement management plan. It

was immediately endorsed by UWA’s leadership. UWA then recruited and trained a further 75 rangers for QE and signed an agreement with the Uganda Conservation Foundation to implement the plan and the recovery programme.

The programme is led by Michael Keigwin MBE, who started working in southern QE in 1998 and knows QE well. The programme he ran then continues to be successful today, reducing elephant crop raiding in Ishasha by up to 90 per cent, from Kikarara through Kameme to Ishasha customs post on the DRC border.

Michael explains that the CITES MIKES funding and effort by UWA could not have come at a better time. “QE was in serious trouble in 2017, and UWA is now turning it around. Whilst funds available are limited, critical and long term investments are finally being made. We all wish we could do more but thanks to UWA and the EU / CITES MIKES funding, we are starting to resolve important problems facing the future of QE.”

In regard to what is needed, Michael and Charles Tumwesigye, the Deputy Director of Conservation at UWA, both reply, ‘the basics’, the foundations of protected area management. Nothing more.

Charles explains; “We need our teams distributed in the important areas full time – to counter the threats we face; to be able to communicate, with the means of transport necessary. There must be sufficient numbers of rangers, and they must have the necessary equipment and training.”

My next step was to see what has been done!

Progress so far

Already, three large ranger posts have been built in key sectors providing, for the first time, a permanent anti-poaching presence where important wildlife populations and habitats exist.

Head of Law Enforcement, John Mhanghi explains: “Rangers now feel the effort they put into their dangerous work is respected. They have secure and well-built accommodation, clean water, solar power, communications and clean ablutions. These are simple things that make a huge difference to the morale of those on the frontline.”

He goes on to say that six Patrol Boats are now fully operational and two marine ranger stations have been renovated, something that is of key importance when QE is dominated by Lakes Edward and George, not to mention the inter-connecting Kazinga Channel.

UWA is now patrolling day and night by boat, as well as providing a safety and rescue service to tourism and local fishermen.

Staff training

To make this possible, more than 50 rangers have gone through intensive boat operations training. A Ugandan tourism investor and operator from Katinguru also benefited from this boat training via his own coxswains attending the courses.

Thankfully, the UPDF and UWA have also ensured that only correctly licensed

20% **BENEFITS.** UWA shares 20 per cent of park entry revenue from tourists with the local communities.



On board. “The government of Uganda has UWA to protect and support the growth of our tourism industry, wildlife and important parts of our heritage. UWA does that for the benefit of every Ugandan. I want my grandchildren to be able see how beautiful Uganda is, and maybe even work in the sector.” **HON GEOFFREY KIWANDA, STATE MINISTER FOR TOURISM.**

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TOP. UWA rangers and wardens having successfully completed the Junior Leadership course delivered by the British Military, the Irish Guards, in March 2019.



Home. New ranger posts in the park motivate rangers are able to protect wildlife all day, every day. These posts were commissioned by State Minister for Tourism, Hon Geoffrey Kiwanda, and the Executive Director of UWA, Sam Mwandha this year.



Support. The British Army have been helping to train Wardens and Rangers in QE.



Recognition. Irish Guardsman and UWA Senior Warden congratulate ranger Bernard Olobo Acire as the best student in the Junior Leadership course held in Mweya in March.



Progress. (L-R) Programme lead, Michael Keigwin MBE, UWA Deputy Director of Field Operations, Charles Tumwesigye, and the Chief Park Warden, Edward Asalu, visiting various projects to monitor progress.

STRIDES

Improvements.

Uganda Conservation Foundation (UCF) and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) have restored important waterholes in Queen Elizabeth National Park(QE) after they silted up 40 years ago. In the 1980s when 90 per cent of QE's elephants, hippos and buffaloes were poached, the waterholes silted up, dramatically changing the distribution of animals in QE. This forced wildlife in some areas, such as in Kasenyi, to have to enter villages to get water. In 2018, UCF restored four waterholes – two in the main game drives in Kasenyi, one in Lions Bay and the other along the Channel Track. The Noble Caledonia Trust is credited for sponsoring these improvements.

boats and legally sized nets are being used for fishing. Fish stocks had previously collapsed due to illegal fishing, but are now showing signs of recovery – a relief to everyone.

Two vehicles and two motorbikes have also been donated, thereby supporting a broad spectrum of operations, from anti-poaching and legal work, to problem animal control and community development programmes.

John Muhangi says, “I joined the QE team six months ago and I have seen incredible levels of expertise coming to

Uganda to support the development and professionalism of our UWA teams. It is wonderful to see.”

I lost count of the courses John described, but they included:

- UWA's Marine Ranger Unit being put through two intensive training courses;
- The Irish Guards, a highly respected British Army infantry regiment, providing a two weeks long junior leadership course in early 2019, the 8th course of its type to be run for UWA;
- An ex-police training team from the UK delivered three courses on founda-

tion level law enforcement;

• And recently, the US military completed their first Junior Leadership ranger training course in QE.

Muhangi is a hard working and enthusiastic UWA Warden. He is seeing UWA change for the better, and believes his young and energetic team has more leadership and support than ever before.

He does however, demand his team's full commitment and energy. What I noticed is that he is getting it, and what's more, there is a belief and strength in culture amongst the rangers. It is great to see and be around.

Government on board

Hon Geoffrey Kiwanda, State Minister for Tourism, backs the investments fully. He said: “The government of Uganda has UWA to protect and support the growth of our tourism industry, wildlife and important parts of our heritage. UWA does that for the benefit of every Ugandan.

“I want my grandchildren to be able see how beautiful Uganda is, and maybe even work in the sector. UWA has to be able to stop the criminal gangs from poaching and under-

mining the national and regional economy. This is a serious issue and the few can't be allowed to undermine the national economy!”

UWA shares 20 per cent of park entry revenue from tourists with the local communities. Sadly, with the poaching and the handful of individuals who have been grazing their cattle illegally in the park and fishing villages, and who have also poisoned Uganda's most viewed lions, tourism in QE has declined badly.

With it, funds for the many who live in and around QE park and the protected area have similarly reduced.

Sam Mwandha closed his remarks by commenting: “There is a growing professionalism about UWA, and a growing pride in our role. We can't thank our staff, CITES MIKES, the EU and the Uganda Conservation Foundation enough. The help from our partners is helping to unlock our full potential.”

What I heard and saw in QE was so inspiring. UWA has had a tough time, not least this year! But I saw lots of tourists enjoying the elephants, hippo, my totem the Uganda Kob, and of course a magnificent lion, as I did!