

South Sudan's elephants face extinction: experts

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A picture released by the Wildlife Conservation Society shows a herd of giraffe running through the Bandiglio National park in 2011. Elephant, giraffe and zebra in the world's newest nation South Sudan could soon be extinct due to rampant poaching and trafficking, conservation experts warned Tuesday.

Elephant, giraffe and zebra in the world's newest nation South Sudan could soon be extinct due to rampant poaching and trafficking, conservation experts warned Tuesday.

Ironically, animals in South Sudan's vast wildernesses had been largely protected by almost five decades of civil war, despite poaching by rebels.

The war stifled development and preserved the largest intact savannah in [East Africa](#), according to the United States-based [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) (WCS).

But war also left the fledgling nation awash with guns, and in the years since a 2005 peace deal, increasingly organised armed groups are trafficking ivory and killing animals for food.

The [elephant population](#), estimated at 130,000 in 1986, has crashed to 5,000 if South Sudan is "lucky", WCS director in South Sudan Paul Elkan told reporters.

"Within the next five years, they could completely be gone with the current rates of poaching," Elkan said, adding that even security forces are "involved in trafficking."

South Sudan's animal migration is one of the largest in Africa, potentially topping in size even the world famous Maasai Mara and Serengeti migrations between Tanzania and Kenya, WCS said.

But the wildlife faces major challenges.

"Other species such as the zebra may already be gone, the rhino is probably already gone, giraffes are on the way out, so commercial bush meat also needs to be brought under control", Elkan added.

But a lack of laws and weak institutions prevent poachers and [traffickers](#) who are caught from being brought to book.

"We have apprehended so many [poachers](#), caught red handed ... but because of this legal vacuum it is very difficult to prosecute them", said Gabriel Changson Chang, the country's wildlife, conservation and tourism minister.

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