

African elephant fares better in countries with good education than in countries with newly created nature

February 12 2013

Elephants are rare in African countries where poor schooling, a failing economy and widespread corruption are rife. Countries where these factors are well-organised have larger populations of elephants. It would appear that elephants enjoy better protection in African countries boasting a good education system and solid social-economic development than in countries where the wildlife parks have been expanded to accommodate them.

These are the conclusions of researchers from Wageningen University, part of Wageningen UR, and their Kenyan and British colleagues, published in a recent article in the scientific journal [Biological Conservation](#).

The [African elephant](#) is the icon of [wildlife protection](#) in Africa. In an effort to safeguard the animal's long-term protection, a team of ecologists from Wageningen went in search of the factors affecting elephant numbers. Although environmental factors such as the availability of food and water are obviously important, it appears that human factors including policies, corruption or the country's economy also have a direct or indirect impact.

Africa as a whole

The research team, led by Dr Fred de Boer, carried out an extensive

review of the literature on the occurrence and density of the [elephant population](#) throughout the [African continent](#) and discovered that natural factors such as the availability of water explain the occurrence of elephants across the continent. However, human factors seem to be a better measure for explaining the density (i.e. number of elephants per square kilometre) of populations. The researchers were surprised to discover that poor schooling, a high level of corruption and a failing economy are reflected in a low elephant population density. As expected, there are also very few elephants per square kilometre in countries with poor nature protection policies. The researchers have only ascertained a correlation between these factors. Researcher Fred de Boer suspects that the risk of poaching is largely to blame for the low elephant density in high-risk countries.

Strategy

The findings lead the researchers to conclude that a social-economic approach is the best way forward when it comes to protecting elephants. In their opinion, more will be achieved by improving education and the social-economic climate of a country than by establishing new wildlife parks, expanding existing habitats or creating new watering places for elephants. This implies that launching new plans to protect [elephants](#) (and probably other larger species) is less important to their survival than ensuring that the local population support these plans. It is also essential that well-trained, reliable officials are charged with implementing these plans effectively.

More information: de Boer, F. et al. Understanding spatial differences in African elephant densities and occurrence, a continent-wide analysis. *Biological Conservation*, Volume 159, March 2013, Pages 468–476, available online via: www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0006320712004351

Provided by Wageningen University

Citation: African elephant fares better in countries with good education than in countries with newly created nature (2013, February 12) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-african-elephant-fares-countries-good.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.