

Kenya poaching crisis a 'national disaster'

September 5 2014



A bull elephant forages in the evening light on August 7, 2014 at the Ol Jogi rhino sanctuary, in the Laikipia county, north of Nairobi

Kenya's government was under renewed pressure Friday to declare a "national disaster" because of the rampant slaughter of elephant and rhino.

Two major newspapers dismissed wildlife authority claims everything was under control.

Conservation groups have repeatedly said the state-run Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is losing the fight against poachers and the organised crime bosses that pay them, and that the country's famed wildlife—key to the country's vital tourism economy—is on a fast track to destruction.

In an rare common call, top newspapers said more action had to be taken and they accused the KWS of sleeping on the job and trying to cover up the real extent of the poaching problem.

"Poaching is a national disaster," The Standard newspaper said in its editorial. "KWS is being economical with the truth when it argues that poaching is not an immediate danger."

"Those charged with preserving game must come out of their lethargy and realise that if it takes limiting access to our [national parks](#) to preserve endangered species for posterity, losing revenue from tourism for a while will be a small price to pay for a long-term gain."

The Daily Nation newspaper said the ministry's downplaying of the "brazen slaughter" was a "big surprise."

"Officials cannot afford to pretend that the threat is not grave enough and let the poaching menace spiral out of control," the Nation said.

A campaign group, Kenyans United Against Poaching (KUAPO), have gathered over 20,000 signatures in plea to Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta to "declare poaching a national disaster."

But the environment ministry and KWS, in report to lawmakers this week, insisted "Kenya is yet to reach such a critical stage", and that calling the crisis a "disaster" would only scare off tourists.

Instead, the ministry has asked lawmakers to toughen existing

anti-[poaching](#) laws.

Poachers slaughtered double the number of Kenyan rhinos in 2013 than the year before. Nearly a hundred elephants have been killed this year, according to official figures, but conservations say they believe the figure to be far higher.

On the Asian black market, rhino horn is sought after as an ingredient in traditional medicine and can be more expensive than the equivalent weight in gold. Ivory from elephants is also sought out for jewellery and decorative objects.

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