

Wildlife devastated in South Sudan war: conservationists

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Warring factions in South Sudan have slaughtered, poached and eaten "alarming" numbers of endangered wildlife, devastating one of Africa's largest migrations, conservationists warned Wednesday.

Government and rebel troops, locked into a [war](#) marked by widespread atrocities in which tens of thousands of people have been killed, are pushing elephants to the brink of extinction in the young nation, said Paul Elkan from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

Elephants have been slaughtered for their tusks, while giraffe and antelope have been mowed down with machine guns for meat to feed the tens of thousands of soldiers and rebels battling each other since December.

"It is a tragedy, the conflict is having a terrible impact," Elkan told AFP from Juba, where he works with the government to set up parks and protect the wildlife.

"South Sudan's war weary elephants are now at a precipice, and the ongoing fighting threatens to push them ever closer towards national extinction."

The survival of South Sudan's wildlife was once a rare cause for hope in a land left in ruins by the decades of conflict that paved the way for its independence in 2011.

But since war broke out again in South Sudan in December last year, almost a third of elephants fitted by WCS with satellite monitoring collars are believed to have been poached.

"In less than a year we have witnessed this enormous loss," Elkan said. "This indicates that there are an alarming number of elephants being poached."

The latest war had erupted when President Salva Kiir accused his sacked deputy Riek Machar of attempting a coup. Violence has escalated into an ethnic conflict involving multiple armed groups.

With gunmen shooting down aircraft—including UN aid helicopters—the WCS have been unable to deploy its low level flights to verify exact numbers of wildlife killed.

But Elkan, an American conservationist based in South Sudan for several years and who conducted the first aerial surveys after the end of the 1983-2005 war, said the 30 percent loss of collared [elephants](#) was "indicative" of the wider slaughter.

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