

# Drought ignites human-wildlife conflict in Zimbabwe

January 11 2020, by Ish Mafundikwa

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Taken on November 12, 2019 it shows the carcass of an elephant that succumbed to drought in the Hwange National Park, in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean villager Dumisani Khumalo appeared to be in pain as he walked gingerly towards a chair under the shade of a tree near his one-

room brick shack.

The 45-year-old was attacked by a buffalo days earlier, and he was lucky to be on his feet.

Wild [animals](#) in Zimbabwe were responsible for the deaths of at least 36 people in 2019, up from 20 in the previous year.

"I thank God that I survived the attack," said Khumalo with a laugh, making light of the fact that the buffalo almost ripped off his genitals.

Authorities recorded 311 animal attacks on people last year, up from 195 in 2018.

The attacks have been blamed on a devastating drought in Zimbabwe which has seen hungry animals breaking out of game reserves, raiding [human settlements](#) in search of food and water.

"The cases include attacks on humans, their livestock and crops," said national parks spokesman Tinashe Farawo.

He said elephants caused most fatalities, while hippos, buffalos, lions, hyenas and crocodile also contributed to the toll.

Hwange National Park, which is half the size of Belgium, is Zimbabwe's largest game park and is situated next to the famed Victoria Falls. The park is not fenced off.

Animals breach the buffer and "cross over to look for water and food as there is little or none left in the forest area," Farawo said

## **Starving animals**



Khumalo vividly remembers the attack.



More than 200 elephants starved to death over three months last year

He was walking in a forest near his Ndlovu-Kachechete village to register for food aid, when he heard dogs barking.

Suddenly a buffalo emerged from the bush and charged, hitting him in the chest and tossing him to the ground.

It went for his groin and used its horn to rip off part of the skin around his penis.

Khumalo grabbed the buffalo's leg, kicked it in the eye and it scampered off.

Villagers in Zimbabwe's wildlife-rich but parched northwestern region are frequently fighting off desperately hungry game.

More than 200 elephants starved to death over three months last year.

Despite suspecting that Khumalo was hunting illegally when he was attacked, Phindile Ncube, CEO of Hwange Rural District Council admitted that [wild animals](#) are killing people and that the drought has worsened things.

"Wild animals cross into human-inhabited areas in search of water as ... sources of drinking water dry up in the forest," said Ncube.

He described an incident that took place a few weeks earlier, during which elephants killed two cows at a domestic water well.

Armed scouts have been put on standby to respond to distress calls from villagers.

But it was while responding to one such call that the scouts inadvertently shot dead a 61-year-old woman in Mbizha village, close to Khumalo's.

"As they tried to chase them off one (elephant) charged at them and a scout shot at it. He missed, and the stray bullet hit and killed Irene Musaka, who was sitting by a fire outside her hut almost a mile away."





In this file photo taken on November 12, 2019 a hippo is stuck in the mud at a drying watering hole in the Hwange National Park, in Zimbabwe.

### **Chilli cake repellent**

Locals are encouraged to play their part to scare off animals. One way is to beat drums.

But the impact is limited.

"Animals, such as elephants get used to the noise and know it... won't hurt them, so it does not deter them in the long term," said George Mapuvire, director of Bio-Hub Trust, a charity that trains people to respond to [animal attacks](#).

Bio-Hub Trust advocates for a "soft approach" that encourages peaceful co-existence between humans and wildlife.

Mapuvire suggested burning home-made hot chilli cakes to repel wildlife.

"You mix chilli powder with cow or elephant dung and shape it into bricks, once the bricks dry, you can burn them when elephants are approaching. They can't stand the smell!"

Villagers have created an elephant alarm system by tying strings of empty tin cans to trees and poles.

When the cans click, they know an elephant is approaching and they light chilli cakes to keep it away.

Another way of keeping [elephants](#) at bay is the chilli gun, a plastic contraption loaded with ping-pong balls injected with chilli oil.

"When it hits an elephant, it disintegrates, splashing the animal with the chilli oil," Mapuvire explained.

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