

Bee Keeping for Human-Elephant Conflict Mitigation: A Success Story for Sustainable Tourism in Kibale National Park, Western Uganda

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Abstract : The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) remains one of the most crop-damaging species around Kibale National Park, western Uganda. Elephant crop raiding deprives communities of food and incomes, consequently impacting livelihoods, attitude, and support for conservation. It also attracts an aggressive reaction from local communities including the retaliatory killing of a species that is already endangered and listed under Appendix I of the Convention on Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES). In order to mitigate against elephant crop raiding and minimize conflict, a number of interventions were devised by the government of Uganda such as physical guarding, scare-shooting, excavation of trenches, growing of unpalatable crops and fire lighting all of which have over the years been implemented around the park. These generated varying degrees of effectiveness but largely never solved the problem of elephants crossing into communities to destroy food and shelter which had a negative effect onto sustainable tourism of the communities who often resorted to killing these animals and hence contributing the falling numbers of these animals. It was until government discovered that there are far more effective ways of deterring these animals from crossing to communities that it commissioned a study to deploy the African honeybee (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) as a deterrent against elephant crop raiding and income enhancement for local people around the park. These efforts led to a number of projects around Kibale National Park where communities were facilitated to keep bees for human-elephant conflict mitigation and rural income enhancement through the sale of honey. These projects have registered tremendous success in reducing crop damage, enhance rural incomes, influence positive attitude change and ultimately secure community support for elephant and park conservation which is a clear manifestation of sustainable tourism development in the area. To address the issue of sustainability, the project was aligned with four major objectives that contributed to the overall goal of maintaining the areas around the parks and the national park itself in such a manner that it remains viable over an infinite period. Among these included determining deterrence effects of bees against elephant crop raiding, assessing the contribution of beekeeping towards rural income enhancement, determining the impact of community involvement of park conservation and management among others. The project deployed 500 improved hives by placing them at specific and previously identified and mapped out elephant crossing points along the park boundary. A control site was established without any intervention to facilitate comparison of findings and data was collected on elephant raiding frequency, patterns, honey harvested, and community attitude towards the park. A socio-economic assessment was also undertaken to ascertain the contribution of beekeeping to incomes and attitude change. In conclusion, human-wildlife conflicts have disturbed conservation and sustainable tourism development efforts. Such success stories like the beekeeping strategy should hence be extensively discussed and widely shared as a conservation technique for sustainable tourism.

Keywords : bees, communities, conservation, elephants

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