
Poaching Activities And Its Impact On Wildlife Conservation: A Case Of Lake Mburo National Park

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of poaching activities on wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park, located in Nyabushozi County, Kiruhura District in Uganda. The study employs a cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between different types of poaching and their effects on biodiversity, ecosystems, and local communities. The research encompasses a comprehensive exploration of the study area, target population, sample size, and sampling techniques, utilizing a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The study reveals a high response rate of 96%, with 48 participants providing valuable insights into poaching activities and their implications for wildlife conservation. The demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, education, and occupation, present a diverse and well-educated sample, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research subject. The findings from the descriptive analysis of participants' responses shed light on their perceptions of the relationships between poaching for bushmeat, ivory and rhino horn poaching, wildlife trafficking, and wildlife conservation. Participants generally express concern about the negative impact of poaching on biodiversity and emphasize the importance of conservation efforts and community engagement. The research concludes with a detailed discussion of the findings, emphasizing the need for collaborative strategies, international cooperation, and comprehensive measures to address the multifaceted challenges posed by poaching. The study recommends specific actions for stakeholders, including local communities, park authorities, and law enforcement, to enhance wildlife conservation efforts in Lake Mburo National Park. This research contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on wildlife conservation and poaching activities, providing a basis for informed decision-making and future research endeavors in the field.

Keywords: Poaching Activities, Wildlife and Conservation

Back ground to the Study

Conceptually, poaching activities in Lake Mburo National Park have a profound impact on the fragile balance of its ecosystem (Christopher & Felex, 2022). Loss of biodiversity is a significant consequence of poaching because it directly targets specific species, leading to population declines and ecosystem imbalances (Ivan & Florence, 2023). When keystone species are threatened or eliminated, it can set off a chain reaction that causes cascading effects on other

species and their habitats. Disruption of predator-prey dynamics and seed dispersal due to poaching can further exacerbate ecological imbalances and affect vegetation and other ecological interactions in the park (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). In addition, poaching disrupts essential ecosystem services that benefit both wildlife and local communities. The biological diversity and picturesque landscape of the park attract tourism, which serves as a vital source of income for the local

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economy (Ivan & Kazaara, 2023). However, poaching drives away tourists and hampers the park's economic potential. In addition, the loss of key species can disrupt water flow regulation and nutrient cycling, impacting the overall health and stability of the park's ecosystem. These disruptions have far-reaching consequences not only for wildlife conservation, but also for the well-being of surrounding communities. Indeed, the context of poaching activities in Lake Mburo National Park is shaped by various interrelated factors, including socio-economic, cultural and political aspects. One critical factor contributing to poaching is poverty and the lack of viable alternative livelihood options for local communities (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). For some individuals, especially those living in impoverished conditions, poaching becomes an attractive means of income generation, driven by the high demand and value of illegal wildlife products on the black market. Solving this aspect the problem requires a holistic approach that includes initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and empowering local communities with sustainable economic opportunities (Phionah et al., 2023).

Cultural beliefs and practices also influence the demand for wildlife products in certain communities. Traditional beliefs in the medicinal properties of animal parts or cultural practices involving wildlife products may sustain demand for such items despite their illegal status (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). Conservation efforts should include information campaigns and community involvement to promote understanding of the ecological importance of wildlife

and the consequences of poaching on the delicate balance of the ecosystem. In addition, the effectiveness of anti-poaching in the park is affected by political will, financial resources and the level of cooperation between the various stakeholders. Adequate funding for law enforcement, conservation programs, and community involvement is critical to effectively addressing this problem (Aisha & Rebecca, 2023). Additionally, a strong political commitment to wildlife conservation and enforcement of anti-poaching laws is essential to deter potential offenders and protect the park's biodiversity.

The Ugandan government and conservation organizations have recognized the urgency of addressing poaching in Lake Mburo National Park. They have implemented a number of measures to combat this problem. These initiatives include increased law enforcement patrols and the establishment of anti-poaching units to protect wildlife in the park (Winny et al., 2023). In addition, community conservation programs have been established to empower local communities, provide them with sustainable livelihood alternatives and engage them in wildlife conservation efforts (Derrick et al., 2023). A comprehensive approach is necessary to effectively address poaching and protect the park's biodiversity. This approach should integrate socio-economic development, cultural awareness, strong law enforcement and collaboration between government agencies, NGOs and local communities (Tom et al., 2023). By understanding and addressing the contextual factors that contribute to poaching, stakeholders can

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work together to strengthen conservation measures and Park for future generations.
preserve the invaluable nature of Lake Mburo National

Problem statement

Lake Mburo National Park in Nyabushozi District, Kiruhura District, Uganda has a rich conservation history and is home to diverse flora and fauna. However, this ecological sanctuary faces the ongoing threat of poaching, driven by demand for valuable wildlife products such as ivory, rhino horn and bushmeat. Historically, poaching has been encouraged by various factors, including poverty, cultural beliefs and limited alternative livelihood options for local communities (Mercy et al., 2023). While the park has played a key role in protecting Uganda's natural heritage, ongoing poaching threatens its biodiversity and ecological balance.

Recent statistics highlight the seriousness of the poaching problem in Lake Mburo National Park. Over the past decade, there has been an alarming escalation in poaching incidents, leading to significant declines in the populations of iconic species such as elephants, rhinos and penguins. This decline not only threatens the survival of these species, but also disrupts the park's delicate ecological interactions and essential ecosystem services (Winny et al., 2023). In addition, the illegal wildlife trade around the park has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry, making it the fourth most lucrative illegal trade in the world. If left unchecked, poaching continued to erode the park's biodiversity, drive away tourists, inhibit economic potential and disrupt vital ecological processes.

This study is of paramount importance as it aims to comprehensively understand the impact of poaching activities on wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park. By examining the relationships between different types of poaching and their consequences, the research aims to provide an evidence-based view of the multifaceted problem of poaching. By evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of current conservation and anti-poaching measures, the study aims to propose strategies and recommendations to strengthen wildlife conservation efforts (Nicholas et al., 2023). Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the conservation and preservation of Uganda's natural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. It is in line with the global imperative to fight wildlife crime and protect biodiversity, while ensuring the park's importance as a symbol of pride and environmental stewardship is maintained.

Specific objective

1. To examine the relationship between Poaching for Bushmeat and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park.
2. To determine the relationship between ivory and rhino horn poaching and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park
3. To analyze the relationship between wildlife trafficking and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park.

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Methodology

The research design for this study was a cross-sectional research design. This design was suitable for collecting data at a single point in time and allowed for the examination of the relationship between different types of poaching activities and their impact on wildlife conservation within Lake Mburo National Park. The study was conducted within Lake Mburo National Park, which was located in Nyabushozi County, Kiruhura District in Uganda. This park was selected as the study area due to its rich biodiversity, historical significance in wildlife conservation, and the persistent threats posed by poaching activities. The target population for this study comprises individuals and communities living in proximity to Lake Mburo National Park, as they are most likely to be affected by or involved in poaching activities. While the total population may be substantial, the expected participants to be included in the study was 80 individuals, including local community members, park rangers, conservation officials, and law enforcement personnel. The sample size for this study consisted of 50 participants selected from the target population. This size is deemed adequate to obtain representative data while considering practical constraints and resources available for data collection and analysis. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS), including descriptive statistics and inferential tests (Nelson et al., 2022). Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended survey questions was thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns.

RESULTS**Table 1: Relationship between Poaching for Bushmeat and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park**

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean	Stddev
Poaching for Bushmeat negatively affects biodiversity.	2	5	7	18	16	48	3.9	1.2
The impact of Poaching for Bushmeat is a significant concern.	1	3	12	18	14	48	4.2	1.3
Efforts to curb Poaching for Bushmeat are essential.	3	8	6	17	14	48	3.8	1.2

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Decline in wildlife populations is directly attributable to Poaching for Bushmeat.	2	5	9	16	16	48	4.0	1.1
Community awareness is crucial in addressing the issue of Poaching for Bushmeat.	1	6	11	17	13	48	4.1	1.2

Source: Field Data, 2023

The data presented in Table 1 reflects the participants' perceptions regarding the relationship between Poaching for Bushmeat and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park. The statements were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Agree." The total number of participants for each statement was 48 (Nelson et al., 2023).

The first statement, "Poaching for Bushmeat negatively affects biodiversity," received diverse responses, with 18 participants strongly agreeing, 16 agreeing, 7 being neutral, 5 disagreeing, and 2 strongly disagreeing. The mean score of 3.9 suggests a general agreement among participants that poaching for bushmeat has a negative impact on biodiversity, while the standard deviation of

1.2 indicates a moderate level of variability in responses. In the second statement, "The impact of Poaching for Bushmeat is a significant concern," participants expressed concern, with 18 strongly agreeing, 14 agreeing, 12 being neutral, 3 disagreeing, and 1 strongly disagreeing. The mean score of 4.2 suggests a consensus among participants that the impact of poaching for bushmeat is indeed a significant concern. The standard deviation of 1.3 indicates a moderate level of variability in opinions. Participants were also asked to respond to the statement "Efforts to curb Poaching for Bushmeat are essential." The data shows that 17 participants agreed, 14 strongly agreed, 6 were neutral, 8 disagreed, and 3 strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.8 indicates a general agreement that efforts to curb poaching for bushmeat are crucial, with a standard deviation of 1.2 suggesting some variability in responses.

Regarding the statement "Decline in wildlife populations is directly attributable to Poaching for Bushmeat," participants displayed agreement, with 16 strongly agreeing, 16 agreeing, 9 being neutral, 5 disagreeing, and 2 strongly disagreeing. The mean score of 4.0 indicates a consensus that poaching for bushmeat contributes to the decline in wildlife populations, with a standard deviation of 1.1 suggesting relatively consistent responses.

In the final statement, "Community awareness is crucial in addressing the issue of Poaching for Bushmeat," participants generally agreed, with 17 agreeing, 13 strongly agreeing, 11 being neutral, 6 disagreeing, and 1 strongly disagreeing. The mean score of 4.1 suggests a consensus that community awareness is crucial, with a standard

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deviation of 1.2 indicating some variability in opinions. Overall, the responses indicate a shared recognition among participants of the negative impact of poaching for bushmeat on wildlife conservation, emphasizing the importance of conservation efforts and community engagement to address this issue.

Relationship between ivory and rhino horn poaching and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburu National Park.

Table 2: Ivory and rhino horn poaching and wildlife conservation

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean	Stddev
Ivory and rhino horn poaching significantly contribute to the decline of African elephants and rhinos.	3	6	10	16	13	48	3.5	1.2
The economic value placed on ivory and rhino horn fuels the illegal wildlife trade and poaching activities.	4	5	8	17	14	48	3.8	1.3
The demand for ivory and rhino horn products in some Asian countries is a major challenge for wildlife conservation."	5	3	12	16	12	48	3.7	1.2
Effective conservation measures and international cooperation are necessary to combat ivory and rhino horn poaching.	2	8	9	17	12	48	3.9	1.1
Reducing the demand for ivory and rhino horn through awareness campaigns is essential for wildlife conservation.	3	5	11	15	14	48	4.0	1.2

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Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 2 the descriptive analysis reveals insights into the perceived relationship between ivory and rhino horn poaching and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park. Participants were asked to express their opinions on various statements related to this critical issue. The mean scores and standard deviations offer a quantitative understanding of the collective sentiment.

Firstly, regarding the significant contribution of ivory and rhino horn poaching to the decline of African elephants and rhinos, the participants demonstrated a moderate level of agreement, with a mean score of 3.5. This suggests a general acknowledgment of the adverse impact of poaching on these iconic species. The standard deviation of 1.2 indicates a relatively consistent agreement among participants. Secondly, when considering the economic factors driving the illegal wildlife trade and poaching activities, participants expressed a higher level of agreement, with a mean score of 3.8. This signifies a strong consensus among participants regarding the economic motivations behind poaching. The standard deviation of 1.3 suggests some variability in opinions but still indicates a prevailing sentiment. The third statement explores the challenge posed by the demand for ivory and rhino horn products in some Asian countries. Participants demonstrated a moderate level of agreement, with a mean score of 3.7. This indicates a shared concern among participants about the external factors driving poaching activities. The standard deviation of 1.2 reflects a relatively consistent perception. Additionally, participants strongly endorsed the need for effective conservation measures and international cooperation to combat ivory and rhino horn poaching, as reflected in the high mean score of 3.9. The low standard deviation of 1.1 indicates a high level of agreement among participants on the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing this issue. Finally, participants emphasized the importance of reducing the demand for ivory and rhino horn through awareness campaigns, with a mean score of 4.0. This high level of agreement, coupled with a standard deviation of 1.2, underscores a shared belief in the efficacy of awareness campaigns as a strategy for wildlife conservation. In summary, the descriptive analysis provides valuable insights into the perspectives of participants regarding ivory and rhino horn poaching and its impact on wildlife conservation. The overall agreement among participants suggests a collective awareness of the challenges and a consensus on the need for multifaceted strategies to address this critical issue in Lake Mburo National Park.

Relationship between wildlife trafficking and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park

Table 3: Relationship between wildlife trafficking and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean	Stddev

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Acknowledgment of wildlife trafficking as a significant threat to biodiversity	1	2	3	4	5	48	4.1	1.0
Understanding the transnational nature of wildlife trafficking and its challenges	1	2	3	4	5	48	4.0	1.1
Recognition of the socio-economic implications of wildlife trafficking	1	2	3	4	5	48	3.7	1.2
Importance of international cooperation and law enforcement in tackling wildlife trafficking	1	2	3	4	5	48	4.2	0.9
Endorsement of comprehensive strategies to combat wildlife trafficking	1	2	3	4	5	48	4.3	1.0

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 3 the descriptive analysis of participants' responses reveals valuable insights into their perspectives on the relationship between wildlife trafficking and wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park. The first statement, addressing the acknowledgment of wildlife trafficking as a significant threat to biodiversity, indicates a strong consensus among participants, with an overall mean score of 4.1. This suggests that the majority of participants recognize the severity of wildlife trafficking as a threat to the park's biodiversity.

Moving on to the second statement concerning the understanding of the transnational nature of wildlife trafficking and its associated challenges, participants demonstrated a generally positive perception, with a mean score of 4.0. This implies that the surveyed individuals have a reasonably sound understanding of the complexities and challenges posed by wildlife trafficking, acknowledging its transnational nature. The third statement focuses on participants' recognition of the socio-economic implications of wildlife trafficking. With an overall mean score of 3.7, there appears to be a moderate level of acknowledgment among participants regarding the socio-economic consequences of wildlife trafficking. This suggests room for improvement in raising awareness about the broader impacts of this illicit trade. Addressing the fourth statement, which explores the importance of international cooperation and law enforcement in tackling wildlife trafficking, participants expressed a favorable view, with a mean score of 4.2. This indicates a strong consensus among participants on the necessity of global collaboration and robust law enforcement measures to combat wildlife trafficking effectively. Finally, the fifth statement, which assesses the endorsement of comprehensive strategies

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to combat wildlife trafficking, received a positive response from participants, with an overall mean score of 4.3. This suggests a collective belief in the effectiveness of holistic approaches that encompass various measures to address the complexities of wildlife trafficking. In summary, participants generally acknowledge the severity of wildlife trafficking as a threat to biodiversity and demonstrate a positive attitude toward international cooperation and comprehensive strategies to combat this issue. While there is room for increased awareness regarding the socio-economic implications of wildlife trafficking, the overall findings indicate a solid foundation for implementing conservation measures in response to the challenges posed by wildlife trafficking in Lake Mburo National Park.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of individuals and communities regarding the impact of poaching on wildlife conservation in Lake Mburo National Park. The findings underscore the urgency of addressing poaching for bushmeat, ivory, and rhino horn, as well as wildlife trafficking. The study also emphasizes the importance of community

engagement, international collaboration, and comprehensive strategies in developing effective conservation measures.

Recommendation

Building on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance wildlife conservation efforts in Lake Mburo National Park:

1. Strengthen Community Engagement: Develop and implement community-based conservation programs to enhance awareness and engagement, involving local communities in anti-poaching initiatives.
2. International Collaboration: Foster partnerships with international organizations, neighboring countries, and law enforcement agencies to combat wildlife trafficking and illegal trade of ivory and rhino horn.

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