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Nigerian communities where elephants killed, injured many

By Chidimma C. Okeke (Abuja), Ismail Adebayo (Birnin Kebbi), Hassan Ibrahim (Bauchi), Peter Moses (Abeokuta) & Victor Edozie, Port Harcourt | Published Date Oct 13, 2019 4:47 AM



Villagers watching in amusement as strayed elephant invaded their community at Zaria Kala Kala, Koko Besse area of Kebbi State



Acting General Manager Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi, Muhammed Ladan

Annually, more than 500 people are estimated to be killed by elephants in Africa. In the past two years, many people have also died as a result of the invasion of residences and farmlands by animals in Nigeria. The deaths were caused by elephants, crocodiles and other animals that strayed into several communities.

Human interaction with animals is an age-long tradition as they share food and other resources. Instructively, this interaction, which can either be positive or negative, has resulted in conflict.

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According to experts, human conflict with wildlife has contributed to the extinction and reduction of numerous species, especially terrestrial ones, and uncountable human deaths, as well as economic losses.

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Increase in the human population, which results in expansion and growth in agriculture and urbanisation, contributes immensely to the conflict.

Recently, the director-general of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Dr. Mukhtari Aminu-Kano, raised the alarm over what he described as “close proximity” between humans and wild animals in some states in Nigeria, saying, the situation portends danger if not tamed.

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Speaking at the 30th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Foundation in Lagos, he said many communities across some states in Nigeria had been taken over by elephants. He listed the states as Ogun, Kebbi, Bauchi, and Gombe, among others, saying elephants now live among humans in the communities, destroying plants.

He stressed that “human and wildlife conflict” was getting worse on a daily basis due to poor management of the environment.

He said: “As we speak, there are over 60 elephants roaming communities in the vicinity of Ogun forest, and it is just a matter of time before an accident happens. We have a similar situation in Kebbi and Bauchi.”

A check by Daily Trust on Sunday showed that in recent times, many communities in the aforementioned states have had encounters with elephants, hippopotamuses or crocodiles.

In Bauchi State, the activities of wild elephants roaming communities surrounding the Yankari Game Reserve are said to pose threats to the lives of residents and food crops as the destruction of farmlands is witnessed in the area.

There are several instances where wild animals killed and injured humans, as well as destroyed farmlands in Tarangadi village, Alkalari Local Government Area of the state; Gwartanbali village and the Yankari Game Reserve.

A source said neighbouring communities of the game reserve live in fear because of the intrusion of wild animals into farmlands and villages, and if appropriate measures are not taken, there could be more casualties and food shortage.

A community leader in Gaji village, near the game reserve, Malam Hassan Muhammed, said wild elephants from the Yankari Game Reserve recently crossed into farmlands in five villages and destroyed their crops.

Muhammed gave the names of the affected villages as Yalwan Duguri, Gwartanbali, Natsira, Dan, Tarangadi and almost all the villages around the game reserve. He blamed the management of the game reserve for their inability to prevent the wild animals from leaving the environment.

“In the past, there were some outposts of rangers at villages to monitor the animals. Unfortunately, those measures are no longer in place.

“All efforts by leaders of the communities to address the challenge were not successful. It was the last administration in the state that listened to complaints and gave tokens to the affected farmers, but since then, the people were left in that condition,” he added.

When contacted, the acting general manager of Yankari Game Reserve, Muhammed Ladan, confirmed the incidents in a telephone interview, saying that most of them took place during the rainy season when there was the availability of water and food everywhere. He said management evolved various control mechanisms to address the challenge.

“We employed elephant monitoring agents in all the surrounding villages of the reserve. These elephant friends, as they are called, are expected to monitor the movement of elephants and immediately inform the management for quick intervention to prevent accidents in communities.

“The elephant friends are like informants. Whenever they sight wild animals trying to cross the boundary into farmlands or villages, they will quickly inform the management of the reserve so that there will be quick intervention,” he said.

In Ogun State, human proximity to elephants is rampant in Ijebu East and Ogun Waterside local government areas due to the location of the Omo Forest Reserve.

Specifically, Eseke, Sojukodoro and Apora are among the 30 settlements within and around the tick Omo Forest Reserve in the J4 area in Ijebu East Local Government Area, where farmers ply their trade.

Findings by our correspondent revealed that due to human incursion into the forest, there have been a series of attacks on farmers and invasion of their farmlands by elephants.

In April last year, some of the elephants reportedly invaded some farmlands in Ogun State and neighbouring communities in Lagos, which led to the destruction of crops, so the incident of April this year was not the first.

In 2003, some youths in the area were arrested for allegedly killing an elephant in a game reserve in a bid to sell its tusk at N25million.

The elephants also killed some farmers in the area.

It was also reported that in August 2019, some youths in the Imobi community in Ijebu East Local Government Area escaped death by divine intervention during attacks by elephants as they were videoing the animals in the area.

A 33-second video, which went viral on social media, showed a young man being chased by an elephant.

"In the meantime, all the communities have been seriously warned. We have taken extra measures. This is exactly what happened last year in Baoku when a youngster was killed. This will not happen again.

"These two elephants (male and female) left the herd recently to form their own group. But they are under control. We have made sure that the elephants are relaxed where they are. They feel at home. There is absolutely no conflict between the elephants and villagers if not provoked. The villagers are now proud of their new friends. We are getting there to save these gentle giants," Trier, a Belgian, told our correspondent in a telephone interview.

When contacted, the acting project manager, Ogun State Forestry Plantation Project, Mr Adebosin Babatunde said, "I am not aware of that."

Also, some communities in Kebbi State have come under attacks by wild elephants and hippopotamuses.

At different times, some of the communities, particularly those around the banks of River Niger in Yauri, Ngaski, Bagudo, Shanga and Koko Besse, witnessed invasions by elephants, hippopotamuses and crocodiles.

Last year, a giant elephant strayed into Sorgirma, a community in Bunza Local Government Area. The elephant spent three days roaming the small community and was killed by the locals before government officials got to the village.

Two years ago, a hippopotamus was killed at a community in the Warrah area of Ngaski. The animal was said to have invaded the community through River Niger banks. Before it was killed, it was said to have destroyed farms and crops about to be harvested.

Also, in August last year, there was an intense fear in Zaria Kala Kala, Koko Besse Local Government Area of Kebbi State, as three strayed elephants invaded their community.

Locals suspected that the elephants may have migrated from neighbouring Niger Republic or Benin through the banks of River Niger.

But a resident of the area, Usman Muhammad, thinks the elephants would have come from Karaileje to Yamusa in Borgu district of Niger State.

It was also said the elephants were pushed out of their habitat by flood, occasioned by heavy rainfall.

Briefing officials of the National Wild Life Park who paid him a ^{close} courtesy visit at the ^{close} Government House in Birnin Kebbi, Governor Abubakar Atiku Bagudu said the Ministry of Environment had been directed to protect the animals.

“As I speak to you, the animals are being monitored so that no harm comes to them. One is in Zaria Kala-Kala and the other two are in Bagudo . Transporting them would be difficult. It is believed that they crossed into the state from the Benin Republic and they might come for them,” he said.

The chairman of Koko Besse Local Government, Musa Shehu, told our correspondent that following the governor’s directive, policemen and members of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) protected the animals and residents.

In Rivers State, residents of Obolo and other rural communities in Andoni Local Government Area are becoming apprehensive over the increasing presence of elephants. Our correspondent learnt that about 46 elephants are found in the eastern communities.

A resident of the area, John Uche Ngo, said the animals were noticed in 1992.

“When we noticed the presence of elephants in our community we became apprehensive. But with enlightenment by government agencies that an elephant is a friendly animal, the hostility against the animal began to wane,” he said.

Another resident of Ataba in Andoni Local Government Area, who pleaded anonymity, said that the elephants had been in their communities for 27 years. He said they were not hostile, but residents do not see it that way.

It was gathered that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is proposing some measures to check the increasing rate of elephants and human conflicts in Andoni Local Government Area.

Some of the proposed measures include the creation of an elephant sanctuary, provision of adequate training to selected youths in the area, with a view to guarding the forests against the activities of poachers, as well as sensitizing the communities to regard the animals as their heritage.

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