

As a flock of endangered birds flying over trees in the evening with dark and purple sunset sky in Nyungwe rainforest in Southwestern Rwanda, the park warden asks for complete silence: this is the time of day when different species gather near the surrounding area. Not far away, a swamp deer takes its bath in the middle of the forest.

Conservation efforts were ramped up most recently including increasing the scope of inspection and monitoring, to better protect the wildlife after Rwanda lost its last elephant from Nyungwe in 1999 especially due to indiscriminate hunting and habitat loss in Kamiranzovu. This area represents the largest wetland which gives an impressive geological formation in the middle of this Africa's oldest rainforest .

Now authorities and conservation organizations plan to reintroduce elephants soonest, where the wild endangered species is believed to have disappeared.

Protais Niyigaba, the park manager said that there is currently a plan to reintroduce elephants to "help rejuvenate the endangered animal population."

"The plan is to reintroduce elephants [in the park] and help them reproduce in Nyungwe," Niyigaba said.

With one of Africa's highest population densities, available land is an issue facing both Rwanda's people and its wildlife, according to experts.



The reintroduction of elephants in Nyungwe rainforest is expected to boost revenues

The natural reserve located in Southwestern Rwanda has a forest area that stretches more than 1,019 square km, providing a place with enough water and food for the elephants, it said

As a critical catchment area feeding both the Congo Basin to the west and the Nile Basin to the east, estimates by conservation organizations show that the park provides 70% of Rwanda's water. It also has a nascent tourism economy, playing a key role in generating revenue and employment as Rwanda emerges as one of the world's foremost luxury ecotourism destinations.

The park had an elephant but poachers in 1999 trapped and killed the only elephant of this ecosystem. The Skelton of this killed elephant is kept in the museum of the

forest as part of preservation of history that the elephant existed in the forest. Currently, conservation experts are exploring new ways to introduce new elephants in Nyungwe National Park

While initial studies conducted by conservationists show that some of major reasons that caused the extinction of elephants in Nyungwe were poaching for tusks/ivory trade (57.7%) and for bushmeat (20.6%), other conducted research show that some negative perceptions of the park and its biodiversity has also affected conservation efforts.

However, experts take delight in noticing that a lot of success achieved in current conservation efforts is especially due to a close collaboration with local communities who depend on biodiversity conservation for their livelihoods.

The Rwanda Development Board and African Parks are currently working together to secure the sustainability of the park by improving law enforcement, investing in and stimulating local enterprise, and by optimizing Nyungwe's exceptional potential for conservation-based tourism.

The Nyungwe Forest, which in 1960 had 114,025 hectares, had reduced to 108,800 hectares by 1970. In the 1990s, according to official estimates, swathes of the Nyungwe forest were destroyed by fires set by poachers and wild honey collectors, and were fueled by unusually dry weather conditions. Around 10% of the 100,000 hectare forest was lost. By 1999 its area had shrunk to 89,150 hectares, according to conservation organizations.

The reintroduction of the elephant is expected to boost revenues, according to officials.