



elephants

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KAZA ELEPHANT SURVEY LACKS FORMAL TREND ANALYSIS

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A new report by Elephants Without Borders (EWB), summarising aerial survey results from over a decade across Southern Africa, found that overall, elephant numbers have not changed significantly.

The report added that while the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) aerial survey counted 227 900 elephants, it lacked any formal trend analysis.

The transboundary aerial survey of KAZA elephants was flown from August to October 2022.

KAZA includes Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which share international borders along the Okavango and Zambezi River basins.

No significant changes

The report notes that Namibia has about 21 090 elephants, Botswana is home to 131 909 elephants, 65 025 elephants were counted in Zimbabwe, 5 983 in Angola and 3 840 in Zambia.

According to EWB, for their report, they used data from aerial surveys from 2010 to 2022 to update the conservation status of elephants in KAZA, which is a 520 000 km² network of protected areas in the above-mentioned five countries.

“Overall, numbers of elephants did not change significantly between 2014/2015 and 2022, with a growth rate of 1.2%
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per year," it said.

However, the report said carcass ratios, an index of elephant mortality rates, did increase significantly over that time period, growing from 8% to 11% and potentially indicating unsustainable mortality rates.

"Overall, KAZA's elephants generally have stable or slowly increasing populations. Rising carcass ratios in some parts of KAZA and the fact that populations are no longer growing rapidly, if at all, mean that continued monitoring of KAZA's elephant population is critical."

Between 2015 and 2022, the elephant population in Namibia decreased slightly and non-significantly in the Kavango and Zambezi regions and increased non-significantly in the Khaudum and Nyae-Nyae areas.

Detailed reporting needed

The report stressed that multi-country surveys of KAZA, like the ones in 2014–2015 and 2022, should be conducted regularly to monitor populations and to detect any negative changes, such as high carcass ratios and reports of poaching, before they can advance too far.


The report highlighted the fact that since 2015, controversies have arisen regarding the management of KAZA's elephants.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe and Botswana authorities, claiming elephant overpopulations, have called for exporting elephants to other countries. In 2019, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe unsuccessfully petitioned the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) for permission to sell ivory stocks as well as hides, hair and other products derived from elephants.

EWB said that addressing the complicated issues of elephant management requires the best possible data on elephant populations.

"Answering the question of how and where populations are changing within countries, how elephant populations are faring where hunting is occurring, and whether poaching is affecting elephant populations in KAZA will require a detailed analysis of elephant population data in specific regions."

The EWB said that the 2022 KAZA survey included only a cursory analysis of trends, comparing elephant numbers by country or region with previous surveys.

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