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## Why giraffe killings are top on poacher's hit list in Manyara

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### Summary

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**Babati.** Tanzania is among the few African nations that have managed to curb serious cases of rhino and elephant poaching. Yet, the country's pride of the nation--the giraffe, has entered into illegal hunters' list.

Recent investigations through InfoNile on wildlife crime in East Africa have revealed that the majestic giants are being hunted for bush meat and animal fat in the belief that it has magic wand to treat people of their various ailments, including men's libido.

The tall mammal's bone marrow is also wrongfully believed to have medical value, further driving up the demand.

Giraffe flesh is becoming popular in black markets that trade in illegally acquired game meat.

Manyara Acting Regional Police Commander Limited Mohongole said that from January to March, 260 kilograms of giraffe meat were impounded.

Cases of giraffe killings have been reported by the community in the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem in northern Tanzania, especially within the two wildlife corridors of Mswakini and Kwakuchinja.

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From the investigations, it is believed that villagers in the area collude with people from other regions in trapping and killing the giraffe, while crossing the Mswakini and Kwakuchinja wildlife corridors.

The area is a passageway for animals moving back and forth between Tarangire and Lake Manyara National Parks, as well as those within the Burunge Wildlife Management Area.

Mr Jeremiah Peter, a resident of Vilima Vitatu village of Babati, said the giraffe killing spree started in January.

Apparently, killers extract bone marrow and other organs from the poached giraffes, selling the remaining meat to residents of Magugu, Minjingu and Babati.

Other villagers admit that the giraffe poaching schemes also involve some local ward and village leaders.

A number of suspects have been arrested in connection with the illegal endeavour.

Rehema Ibrahim, a resident of Magugu, said many people pass the Magugu area with containers and bags filled with game meat, selling to local residents.

Rajabu Salehe, another local resident, says there have been some beliefs that giraffe's fat and bone marrow are elixirs for curing various human ailments as well as being regarded to be potent for increasing male libido.

“In fact that is the only reason why all of a sudden, people are scrambling for giraffe flesh,” added Salehe.

Village Executive Officer for Vilima-Vitatu, Seleman Juma, admits that poaching incidents are rife within the Burunge Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

His village is among the ten hamlets forming the Burunge Wildlife Management Area.

“We have been trying to create awareness-raising programs among local residents, and in fact, the majority see the importance of wildlife conservation, but there are always the few who are normally out to destroy,” he added.

In their General Land Management Plan, the Burunge WMA has set aside special areas for photographic tourism, investments such as hotels and lodges, hunting safaris and human activities such as grazing and farming.

Benson Mwaise, Executive Secretary of Burunge WMA, has been actively patrolling the area against poaching and illegal logging.

“We have been working with the Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority (TAWA), rangers from Tarangire National Park as well as the Chemchem Conservancy,” Mwaise said, adding that despite the efforts, poaching cases continue.

He believes that the increase of human activities in the area including farming, grazing, and building of houses further acts to camouflage some criminals who move into the precincts targeting wildlife.

Babati District Wildlife Officer Christopher Laizer, said five people so far have been arrested in connection with giraffe poaching activities, with two of such cases already in court.

“We have three accused, Amos Makala, Twaha Idd and Jackson Mwenda, who were caught with giraffe parts, but the main target now is to uncover the people who fund these schemes,” said Mr Laizer.

### **Why target giraffes?**

With ready markets, poachers take advantage of the fact that giraffes are calm animals to hunt them down, mostly during the night.

Also, because giraffes are incredibly large animals on average weighing between 200 to 600 kilograms, poachers have a lot to harvest from a single killing.

Peter Banjoko, Senior Assistant Commissioner for the TAWA, said poachers have devised many ways of killing giraffes.

“The culprits are always slippery, but we have now reinforced patrols, covering practically all ends of the corridors. We are confident that very soon the racket will cease,” said Banjoko.

He stated that the most recent incident occurred on March 27, when a giraffe was killed at Mswakini and that follows the preceding case of yet another animal that was slaughtered at Burunge.

Walter Pallangyo, the manager of Chemchem conservancy, said the conservancy created a joint unit in January to fight poaching, involving wildlife rangers from Burunge Wildlife Management Area (WMA) of Babati, the Chem-Chem Association, and Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority.

Pallangyo reckons that a new, improved approach is required in order to effectively contain rising cases of illegal wildlife hunting and forest logging, as racketeers continue devising new styles.

### **Surge of illegal killings - local police**

The Acting Manyara Regional Police Commander, Limited Mohongole, stated that between January and March there had been a surge of illegal killings of giraffes.

“On the first day of February, for instance, two suspects riding on a motorbike were spotted in the Burunge area. When game scouts followed them, they ditched their motorcycle and sped off.”

According to the Police Commander, the bike, upon inspection, was found to be carrying bags of freshly extracted meat, weighing 176.5 kilograms, which was later discovered to be giraffe flesh.

Again on February 7, a resident of Mamire, Idd Ally Idd was caught with a giraffe tail. Police are still investigating the case.

Later on March 27, another suspected motorbike rider ditched his vehicle and escaped after seeing game patrolling officers take an interest.

Sure enough, the rider was carrying nearly 83 kilograms of giraffe flesh.

The police are still searching for the suspect.

Despite this concerning spike, in recent years, there has been an overall decline in wildlife crime in Tanzania. This is according to #WildEye East Africa, a new interactive map produced by InfoNile and Oxpeckers Investigative Environmental Journalism tracking wildlife crime in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. According to 105 tracked cases of wildlife crime that were prosecuted between 2017 and 2022 in Tanzania, the vast majority of wildlife items were seized during 2015-2016.

Before 2020, the map data does not track any giraffe killings. The first case tracked was in 2020 in Arusha region, when Saiteru Sanare Saningo was found with giraffe's meat equivalent to one killed giraffe. He was released on bail in the High Court while his case is being heard.

### **Government monitoring**

The Babati District Commissioner, Lazaro Twange said the government was closely monitoring the developments by using detectives around the street.

“There have been arrests and in fact, some suspects are already facing court charges of obtained government trophies, number BAB/IR/435/2022,” he said.

Christopher Laizer, District Game Officer, added that his office will ensure that all court cases are handled properly and the accused face justice.

In June 14,2022 , a 41-year-old resident of vilima vitatu Village in Babati District in Manyara Region, Mashaka Boay was sentenced to 20 years in prison for possession of giraffe meat value 34 milioni.

Manyara Regional Magistrate Kimario Said handed down the sentence after the court convicted Boay.

Magistrate Kimario said Boay had committed the offense on March 23 this year, in the village of vilima vitatu around Tarangire and Manyara Ecosystem.

The Tanzania National Park’s Commissioner of Conservation, William Mwakilema explained that increasing human activities and settlements across wildlife corridors fuel poaching incidents.

“TANAPA will continue to work with local authorities and other security organs to ensure that such incidents are stopped,” he said.