

AFRICA

## Uganda jails 2 poachers for 17 years over killing of lions

Lions are listed as 'vulnerable' on International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species

Hamza Kyeyune | 02.09.2022



### KAMPALA, Uganda

A court in Uganda has sentenced two men to 17 years each in prison for poisoning to death six lions in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Last year, the bodies of six tree-climbing lions were discovered at the park in southwestern Uganda, making headlines around the world. All of them had been poisoned, their heads and paws cut off and their carcasses left to attract vultures, which were then also killed by the poachers for their body parts.

Following the horrific poaching incident, the government launched one of the most extensive wildlife crime investigations ever seen in Uganda.

It offered a \$2,500 reward for any information leading to arrests.

A task force consisting of Uganda Police Force (UPF), Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) officers was put together to find the perpetrators in an effort to protect Africa's dwindling lion populations.

Two men were arrested and admitted to killing the animals and took security officials to a location where the heads of three lions were found hidden in a tree and a fourth one was buried with 15 legs under the same tree.

Vincent Tumuhirwe, 49, and Robert Ariyo, 40, were convicted of not only poisoning the lions but also of killing 10 vultures and of hunting a kob, or antelope, without a license and being in possession of protected species after the court heard evidence from 14 witnesses.

The two used Furan, a dangerous chemical pesticide applied to crops to protect them from insects, on the lions.

The trial magistrate noted that the country gets huge sums of money through foreign earnings from tourists who come to see these animals and the money trickles down to communities in the form of revenue sharing every year.

"The selfish acts leading to the deaths of lions greatly affect communities around national parks and the country at large. This is because they affect nature tourism, yet tourism contributes a big percentage to Uganda's economy. The revenue that accrues from nature tourism is

shared among communities,” Chief Magistrate Gladys Kamasanyu said while delivering the sentence.

Deputy Resident District Commissioner Gad Rugaaju Ahimbisibwe said the suspects admitted to slaughtering the lions for their teeth and claws, which to them is big trade.

“They told us they did it for business. A lion’s head is sold at \$10, its fat is sold at \$15, and its nails and heart are sold at a negotiable price,” he said.

Lions are listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which determines the conservation status of species.

Africa has two popular lion climbing populations at Ishasha in Queen Elizabeth Park in Uganda and Manyara in Tanzania.

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