

Uganda: Govt Warns of Rapid Loss of Medicinal Plants Ahead of World Wildlife Day 2026

The Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Tom R. Butiime, has warned that Uganda risks losing vital medicinal and aromatic plant species due to overexploitation, habitat destruction and weak regulation, threatening healthcare systems, cultural heritage and rural livelihoods.

Butiime made the remarks in Kampala as Uganda prepares to mark United Nations World Wildlife Day on March 3, 2026, amid growing concern over the unsustainable harvesting of medicinal plants from the wild.

National celebrations will be held in Entebbe Municipality, Wakiso District, with President Yoweri Museveni expected to officiate as chief guest, according to the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities.

This year's commemoration will focus on medicinal and aromatic plants under the theme "Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods," highlighting what the minister described as a deepening conservation crisis.

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Butiime said Uganda's exceptional biodiversity--among the richest globally--is under increasing pressure as demand for traditional medicine rises while conservation safeguards remain weak. He noted that nearly 90 percent of medicinal plants are harvested from natural ecosystems, accelerating species depletion and habitat degradation.

Uganda is home to more than half of the world's remaining mountain gorilla population and significant proportions of global bird, mammal, amphibian and reptile diversity. However, the minister cautioned that climate change, land-use change and encroachment are steadily eroding this natural wealth.

He cited medicinal species such as *Prunus africana* and *Warburgia ugandensis* as increasingly threatened by illegal trade and unregulated harvesting, pushing some plants closer to extinction.

Butiime also raised concern over the erosion of indigenous knowledge, saying traditional medicinal practices are disappearing as plant resources decline and younger generations disengage from conservation.

The ministry said weak enforcement of existing laws, poor monitoring of harvesting practices and limited investment in sustainable cultivation have worsened the situation, despite the sector's importance to rural incomes, particularly for women.

The minister called for urgent policy and regulatory reforms, including tighter controls on harvesting, promotion of domestication and cultivation of medicinal plants, and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms to ease pressure on wild species.

As Uganda prepares for World Wildlife Day 2026, Butiime urged government agencies, conservation groups and the public to treat the event as a call to action rather than a symbolic celebration.

"If these plants are lost, the country risks undermining healthcare for millions, erasing cultural heritage and weakening rural economies," he said, describing conservation as a national priority.

