

Uganda Wildlife Authority Takes Full Ownership Of Canine Units To Tackle Wildlife Trafficking



AWF CEO, Kaddu Sebunya, AWF Uganda Country Director Rose Ssebatindira and Uganda Wildlife Authority Representatives during the program transition ceremony for the Canine Units in Uganda

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Entebbe, Uganda – August 26, 2025 – Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has officially assumed full oversight and management of the Entebbe and Karuma canine units, marking nearly a decade of collaborative investment in combating wildlife trafficking with the support of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

The transition ceremony, held at the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre (UWEC), signified the official integration of the Canines for Conservation Program into UWA's operational structure, ensuring the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts in Uganda.



One of the detection dogs and handler during a demonstration at the Entebbe International Airport

Established in 2016, the Canines for Conservation Program was launched in response to Uganda's vulnerability to wildlife trafficking—an issue that placed the country in the Gang of eight alongside, Kenya and Tanzania as source countries for elephant ivory. Since then, the program has played a vital role in Uganda's remarkable progress, contributing to national efforts to combat wildlife crime.

With AWF support, detection dogs were first deployed at Entebbe International Airport before the program expanded to Karuma, in Murchison Falls Conservation Area, with detection and tracker dogs. Over nine years, the program has delivered measurable results:

- a) 28 handlers trained and integrated into UWA's enforcement structure.
- b) 14 detection and tracker dogs deployed across the two units. With 3 additional dogs donated by AWF during the transfer ceremony to further strengthen operational capacity.
- c) 362 finds have been made by the detection unit from the inception of the program to June 2025, contributing significantly to anti-trafficking efforts.
- d) Poaching incidences responded too by the tracker dogs unit.
- e) Purpose-built infrastructure, including kennels, handler housing, and operations rooms at both sites.

The program recorded its highest number of seizures between 2016 and 2018, with approximately 86 cases involving ivory, pangolin scales, and rhino horn concealed in luggage, cargo, and vehicles. In later years, the program's success was reflected in reduced incidents, with seizures averaging 30–40 annually.

These seizures not only disrupted trafficking but also provided credible evidence for prosecutions, thanks to the canine units' role in safeguarding crime scenes and producing court-admissible evidence. Moreover, Intelligence-led operations achieved a 70% success rate, particularly in ivory recovery, contributing to the dismantling of wildlife trafficking networks.

AWF CEO Kaddu Sebunya noted that the program's success demonstrates the value of long-term investment in African institutions: "Nine years ago, we introduced canine detection to Uganda when trafficking networks were becoming increasingly sophisticated. The results speak for themselves: trained handlers, proven facilities, and dogs that have intercepted wildlife products before they could leave the country. Today's transition confirms that Uganda has both the capacity and commitment to carry this work forward."

The transition comes as UWA formally embeds canine operations within its organizational structure. With dedicated roles for canine masters and unit leaders being created, budget allocations for dogs welfare, replacement dogs, training, and operations now secured under UWA.

AWF Uganda Country Director Rose Ssebatindira emphasized national pride in the achievement: "These canine units have become part of Uganda's identity in the fight against wildlife crime. What began as a pilot project is now a fully-fledged enforcement tool that Uganda owns. They demonstrate that, with the right investment, African rangers and institutions can match and outpace traffickers."



AWF CEO, Kaddu Sebunya, UWA, Fiel Operations Director, Charles Tumwesigye and AWF Uganda Country Director, Rose Ssebatindira during the program transition ceremony

Beyond seizures, the program introduced new standards in handler training, covering animal welfare, crime scene management, and courtroom testimony. Handlers are now effective first responders in wildlife crime scenes. Helping to strengthen prosecutions while creating skilled employment opportunities within UWA.

UWA Executive Director Dr. James Musinguzi expressed appreciation to AWF for the support over the years and reaffirmed the Authority's commitment to fighting wildlife trafficking in Uganda. "We sincerely thank AWF for the support over the past nine years, and today, we are proud to take full responsibility

for the Entebbe and Karuma canine units. They are no longer pilot projects but a permanent feature of our enforcement strategy. The support from AWF and partners has been invaluable, and we will build on this foundation to protect Uganda's wildlife," he said.

This transition concludes nearly a decade of AWF direct implementation while ensuring that Uganda retains the tools, skills, and institutional frameworks to sustain canine-led enforcement well into the future. As we transition, AWF remains committed to lobbying for continued investment in this critical program and call upon partners and stakeholders to support its long-term success.

About African Wildlife Foundation

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is the primary advocate for the protection of wildlife and wild lands in Africa. Founded in 1961 during Africa's independence movement, AWF works to build African capacity to steward natural resources. By integrating science, education, public policy, and field programs, AWF demonstrates the benefits of conservation while advancing a vision of a modern and prosperous Africa where people and wildlife thrive.

About Uganda Wildlife Authority

Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is a government agency mandated to conserve, protect, and sustainably manage Uganda's wildlife both inside and outside protected areas. UWA oversees a diverse network of 10 National Parks, 12 Wildlife Reserves, safeguarding some of the world's most iconic species and habitats. The authority collaborates with communities, government institutions, and international stakeholders to ensure that wildlife resources contribute to national development while being conserved for future generations.