

## **WILDLIFE POPULATION TRENDS IN UGANDA, 1960 – 2005**

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Wildlife populations in Uganda boomed in the years prior to the 1970s, which made Uganda a favorite tourist destination. These populations were decimated during the turbulent period between the 1970s and early 1980s due to lawlessness, but with the onset of peace and restructuring since 1986, Uganda's wildlife populations are slowly and steadily recovering. Based on the surveys that have been conducted periodically over the years, the populations indicate an increase in trends of the major wildlife species throughout the country especially in the National Parks.

Table 1 shows population trends of some key species across the country since 1960 to 2004 while figures 1 and 2 show trends in individual Protected Areas (PAs); Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth, Lake Mburo and Kidepo Valley Conservation Areas. Figure 1, shows that the buffalo population in Murchison Falls National Park that had dropped from 30,000 in the 1970s to just 1,610 by 1991 (95% reduction), has now risen to 11,004 (Rwetsiba et al, 2005) indicating an increase of 583.5%.

Other key wildlife populations have increased too in Murchison Falls NP and in other PAs as well. For example following Sommerlatte and Williamson (1995), Lamprey and Michelmore (1996), Lamprey (2000), Rwetsiba *et al* (2002) and Rwetsiba *et al.*, (2005), in Murchison Falls elephant population have increased by 156.7%; Hippos by 40.5%; Uganda Kob by 46.6% and giraffe by 145.0% since 1995. While in Queen Elizabeth NP the population of elephants increased from 1,008 in 1995 to 2,497 by 2004, topi increased from mere 94 individuals to 440 individuals by 2004, waterbuck from 1,861 in 1995 to 3,382 by 2004, warthog from 1,174 to 1,880 while the population of the Uganda kob remained relatively stable.

The population of hippos in queen increased from 2,958 since 1995 to 3,400 by 2000 and dropped to 2,632 by 2004 due to anthrax epidemic that hit the hippo population that year. Similar population trends do apply to other PAs as for example indicated in figure 2 in case of Kidepo and Lake Mburo Conservation Areas. In addition, species distributions, once constricted to small 'safe havens' during the time of lawlessness and extreme poaching pressure, have now spread again to major resource areas throughout the protected areas

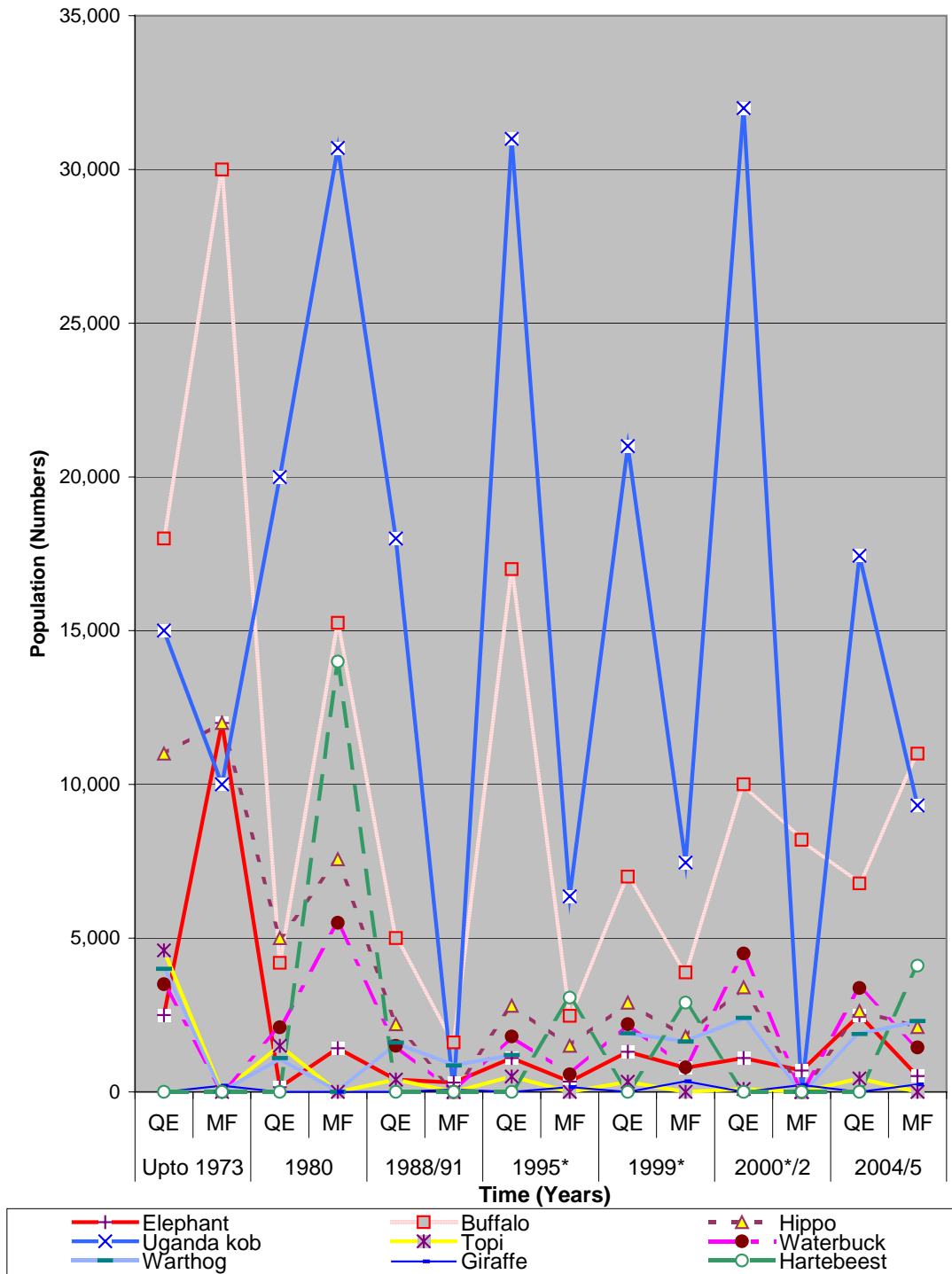
The increasing wildlife trends can be attributed to the conservation efforts by Uganda Wildlife Authority and other stakeholders. However the populations of some species in are still low and fluctuating. This could be attributed to various factors such as diseases and poaching. Nevertheless, the Uganda Wildlife Authority is desirous of getting all the population trends upwards. Re-location and translocation programs have been initiated in partnership with NGOs to enhance crashing populations, strategic management interventions/programs that include anti poaching, boundary marking, community conservation, monitoring and research, and tourism development among others have been implemented to address all sorts of threats to wildlife conservation in Uganda.

**Table 1: Changes in the population of some selected large mammal species in Uganda from the 1960s to 2003**

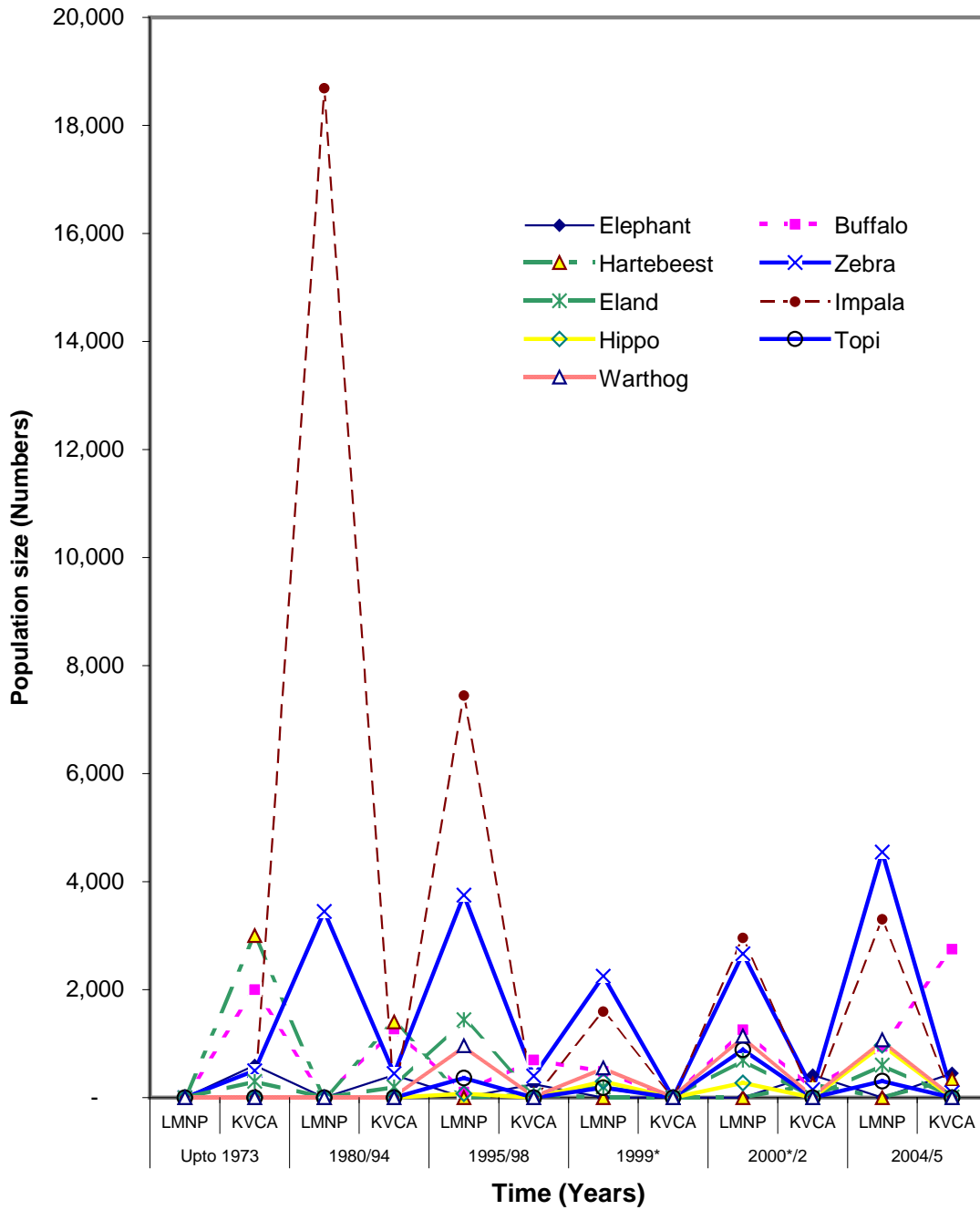
Species	1960s	1982/3	1995-96	1999-2003	Status in Uganda
Elephant	30,000	2,000	1,900	2,400	Population low, but slowly increasing
Black rhino	400	150?	0	0	Extinct in Uganda
White rhino	300	20?	0	0	Extinct in Uganda
Burchell's zebra	10,000	5,500	3,200	2,800	Population low, possibly still decreasing
Hippopotamus	26,000	13,000	4,500	5,300	Population increasing slowly
Rothschild's giraffe	2,500	350	250	240	Population low but stable
Buffalo	60,000	25,000	18,000	17,800	Population stable, decline in QENP offset by increases in MFNP
Hartebeest	25,000	18,000	2,600	3,400	Population increasing slowly
Topi	15,000	6,000	600	450	Population decreasing
Impala	*	19,000	6,000	3,000	Population low, may now be increasing slowly
Waterbuck	10,000	8,000	3,500	6,000	Population increasing
Uganda kob	70,000	40,000	30,000	44,000	Population increasing
Bright's gazelle	1,800	1,400	100	50?	Very rare
Roan	700	300	15	7	Very rare, precarious
Oryx	2000	200	0	0	Extinct in Uganda
Eland	4,500	1,500	500	450	Population low, may still be decreasing
Derby's eland	300	?	0	0	Extinct in Uganda

*Source: Game Department reports and aerial surveys as indicated in this report. These are species for which reliable previous estimates are available, from which to determine trends. Numbers are approximate.*

**Fig. 1: Population trends of major wildlife species in Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls National Parks (1970s to 2005)**



**Fig. 2: Population trends of major wildlife species in LMCA and KVCA (1970s to 2005)**



**Reference:**

- Lamprey, R.H. (2000) Aerial Counts of Wildlife in Queen Elizabeth National Park and Murchison Falls National Park, 1999-2000. Uganda Wildlife Authority, Kampala
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- UNP (1971) *Uganda National Parks Handbook*. Longman, Uganda