



Press Release

KAZA Launches its 2022 KAZA Elephant Survey results

Livingstone, Zambia, 31 August 2023

Survey of the five KAZA countries shows elephant populations are stable
Results will further inform coordinated wildlife management plans

Leaders of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA), led by Ministers from Zambia, Botswana and Namibia as well as heads of delegation from Angola and Zimbabwe, today expressed optimism as they revealed results of the KAZA Elephant Survey. KAZA TFCA includes Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe which have common international borders along the Okavango and Zambezi River basins. The estimated elephant population for the region was calculated at 227,900, indicating that the population appears stable.

Delivering his opening remarks at the launch, Zambia's Minister of Tourism, Honorable Rodney Sikumba, who is also the KAZA Ministerial Committee Chair reflected on the survey's scale and scope, "Flying over this expansive terrain, meticulously adhering to rigorous scientific standards, while surveying Africa's largest contiguous elephant population, is a testament to the collective dedication and perseverance of all involved." Honorable Philda Kereng of Botswana welcome the survey as it would help foster "human-wildlife co-existence, facilitate integrated land-use planning including science-based re-evaluation of fencing policy, nurture sustainable tourism development, promoting connectivity in the landscape, and aligning with the various objectives of the KAZA elephant conservation and management framework." Honorable Heather Sibungo of Namibia also welcome the survey findings: "This survey comes not long after Namibia successfully held the first national Human Wildlife Conflict Conference, where it emerged that there was an urgent need for robust scientific data to guide policy and decision-making including management of human wildlife conflict."

"We undertook this unprecedented aerial survey to provide an accurate estimate of the number of live elephants, elephant carcasses, and other large herbivores in this region that is home to more than half of the savanna elephant herds in Africa," said Dr Nyambe Nyambe, Executive Director of the KAZA Secretariat. "This rich dataset now gives us the opportunity to understand the health of our ecosystems and implement best practices for wildlife management and human-wildlife coexistence."

The country-by-country numbers are estimated as:

KAZA TFCA	2022: 227,900	2014/2015: 216,970
Country	KAZA Survey	IUCN – 2016 AESR
Angola	5,983	3,395
Botswana	131,909	129,939
Namibia	21,090	19,549
Zambia	3,840	6,688
Zimbabwe	65,028	57,398

The overall carcass ratio was 10.47% which leadership says warrants closer inspection since it may indicate heightened mortality rates.

“Several factors are likely contributing to the somewhat elevated mortality we’re observing,” said Darren Potgieter, KAZA Elephant Survey coordinator. “Factors such as aging populations, improved sampling methodologies, environmental conditions, and poaching could all be at play here.”

The KAZA-wide survey was the first of its kind to cover five countries in the KAZA TFCA through a synchronized flight plan using the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Aerial Survey Standards, and deploying rigorous quality assurance metrics including flight speed, heights, transect adherence, and a balance of observations between right and left rear seat observers.

Each transect in the flight plan is flown with a pilot, a recorder in the right front seat, and two observers in the rear seats.

“Flying more than 67 thousand kilometres of transects which is nearly twice the circumference of our globe in two months using 16 remote bases across the region and trained pilots, observers and field staff, we are extremely satisfied with the quality of the sampling effort,” said Potgieter. “And the fact that Partner States seconded more than 50 percent of the 47-person operations team makes this that much more rewarding.”

The survey was flown from August to October 2022 during the dry season when elephants can be more readily seen. Flights were tracked by EarthRanger for both safety and quality assurance purposes. The data captured was tracked and reviewed daily, and the full analysis was completed in early 2023 following which a peer review process was undertaken prior to final publishing.

The KAZA Ministers issued a joint communique after the launch providing detailed positions on various aspects about the survey results.

The KAZA Secretariat and Partner States would like to express our sincere gratitude to World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the implementation partner for the survey, and the KAZA Elephant Survey donors and international cooperation partners comprising the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Vulcan, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development through KfW, the Dutch Postcode Lottery through the Dreamfund Project, USAID’s Combating Wildlife Crime in Namibia and the Kavango-Zambezi Area Project, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, WWF – US, Panthera, and the EU-funded CITES MIKE Programme. The Peace Parks Foundation has been the Implementing Agent for the Federal Republic of Germany’s support to KAZA.