



# Behind Bars:

Lifting the Lid off Kenya's  
Cruel Wildlife Farming





## About World Animal Protection

World Animal Protection is the global voice for animal welfare. Since 1950 we have been campaigning for a world where animals live free from cruelty and suffering.

We have offices in 12 countries spread across different continents. We collaborate with local communities, the private sector, civil society and governments to change animals' lives for the better.

Through our global strategy, we will end factory farming and create a humane and sustainable food system, that puts animals first. By transforming the broken systems that fuel exploitation and commodification, we will give wild animals the right to a wild life.

Our work in protecting animals plays a vital role in solving the climate emergency, the public health crisis and the devastation of natural habitats.

### Cover Image:

Tortoises confined to a small mesh enclosure with a shallow pond of water, preventing full submersion necessary for keeping the shell clean and hydrated. Photo captured in one of the facilities featured in the report. Credit: World Animal Protection

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## Foreword

Every year, millions of wild animals are taken from their natural habitats or born into captivity, to be exploited as pets, tourist attractions, and slaughtered for their body parts for traditional medicine or decorations. Whether the trade is legal or illegal, these animals endure immense suffering. Beyond animal welfare concerns, the wildlife trade causes biodiversity loss, disrupts ecosystems, and exposes people to the risk of zoonotic diseases.

For over 70 years, World Animal Protection has been collaborating with governments, the private sector, local communities, and civil society in over 50 countries to end animal suffering and cruelty. From persuading corporations like Turkish Airlines and Cargo to stop transporting African Grey parrots, to influencing South Africa to phase out captive lion breeding, we have been pushing the world to protect wild animals.

Under our 2021-2030 Strategy, A New World for Animals, we have committed to transforming systems that perpetuate the exploitation of wild animals. As the global demand for wildlife and their products increases, so does the pressure on animal habitats and biodiversity. Africa, a major source of wildlife, faces rapid species loss. For example, African Grey parrots, highly sought after as pets, have seen a 79% population decline in the last 50 years due to poaching and habitat destruction.



Population decline of African Grey parrots in the last 50 years due to poaching and habitat destruction.

In Ghana, their population has decreased by 99%, while the species is considered extinct in Togo.

In Kenya, wild animals –large (eg Crocodiles) and small (eg Tortoises) – are being extracted from the wild or bred in captivity for trade.

While captive breeding has been touted as a solution to protect wild populations, studies show it can have the opposite effect by normalizing the commodification of wildlife and stimulating demand for more species.

This report, in particular, exposes the harsh realities of profit-driven wildlife farms in Kenya where traders exploit animals under the guise of “legal” and “sustainable use”. In reality, these operations contribute to animal suffering, biodiversity loss and put people at the risk of contracting zoonotic diseases.

We urge the Kenyan government to take action to end commercial captive wildlife breeding based on the findings and recommendations in this report.

By doing this, Kenya will enhance its image as a true eco-tourism and conservation leader. At World Animal Protection, we are ready to offer our expertise because we believe that together, we can change the way the world works to end animal suffering and cruelty. Forever.

Tennyson Williams  
Director for Africa  
World Animal Protection

## Executive Summary

Wild animals in Kenya are being captured from the wild and subjected to inhumane conditions in commercial wildlife farming facilities. These facilities, which breed and confine wild animals for profit, pose significant threats to animal protection, conservation efforts, and public health. Whereas wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013 permits farming of various wildlife species, our investigation exposes the scale and flaws of the country's wildlife farming industry. This report sheds light on the unethical practices that jeopardize individual animal welfare, local wildlife populations, and the well-being of communities.

## Systematic Literature Review Findings

Systematic literature review screened 52,800 search results and reviewed 55 captive wildlife facilities in Kenya. Of these, 74.5% (n=41) were privately owned, while 25.5% (n=14) were public facilities. The data revealed that public facilities primarily focused on conservation and education, whereas 11 of the 29 privately owned facilities open to the public were engaged in breeding wild animals for commercial purposes. Four of these breeding facilities also offered Animal-Visitor Interactions (AVIs), which raised additional welfare and public health concerns.



Primates confined to cramped, unsanitary enclosures where they are exploited daily as mere props for tourist entertainment—an alarming reflection of the gaps in existing policies and enforcement mechanisms meant to protect animal welfare. Photo captured in one of the facilities investigated. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## Field Visit Findings

Fieldwork conducted in 2024 involved visiting six wildlife facilities to validate the findings from our 2023 systematic review. We found a total of 1,477 animals, predominantly ostriches (700), tortoises (545), and crocodiles (177) in captive wildlife facilities. Other captive animals found included hippos, giraffes, birds of prey (such as vultures, eagles, and owls), snakes, chameleons, fish, and primates, including bush babies and baboons. Alarming, 100% of the visited venues exhibited animal welfare concerns, ranging

from inadequate shelter, untreated injuries, infestation with parasites to visible stress related behaviors. Approximately 83% of these venues had been operating for over five years, with many employing outdated practices that predate Kenya's more modern, though not well-enforced, wildlife conservation laws.

Veterinary care was consistently lacking, with several facilities having no regular access to veterinary services, leaving animals vulnerable to illness, injury, and parasite infestations.



Tourism-focused facilities, which accounted for 33% of the sites visited, exploit animals for entertainment through AVIs. These interactions often involved direct contact, such as feeding giraffes and hippos, petting young crocodiles, or handling tethered birds. Such AVIs increase stress and welfare issues for the animals and pose risk to human life and health.

Despite having higher entrance fees than purely breeding facilities, the revenue tourist venues generate from AVIs was not directed towards improved animal care. For example in one of the facilities, Kenyan citizens were charged 600 Kenya shillings (which is approximately US\$ 5), while international visitors were charged more than double the amount. The giraffes in this facility were found to be heavily infested with ticks. This Shows that the revenue is not directed to the core care of animals who are used to generate profits.



Breeding facilities, which accounted for 67% of the venues visited, focused primarily on commercial purposes. These include the sale of live tortoises, ostriches, and crocodiles as breeding stock, ostrich and crocodile meat, and animal products, including ostrich and crocodile skins, eggs, and oil. These commercial practices raise serious ethical concerns, particularly with the extraction of animals from the wild to supplement breeding stock. One facility was found to be sourcing wild tortoises, raising concerns about the sustainability of these practices and their impact on local wildlife populations.



In one of the facilities investigated, tourists were encouraged to engage in direct interactions with wildlife, such as feeding giraffes with bare hands. Disturbingly, these animals were found to be heavily infested with ticks—highlighting serious lapses in animal welfare and public health safeguards. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## Conclusions and Call to Action

Kenya, renowned for its rich biodiversity, is facing a growing crisis as wildlife farming gains traction under the guise of economic development and tourism. Species like ostriches, crocodiles, tortoises, and snakes are bred in captivity, often in appalling conditions, for their meat, skins, and other products. The ongoing capture of wild animals to supplement farm populations perpetuates animal suffering and threatens conservation efforts and public health.

The time has come to end the exploitation of wildlife in Kenya. Wildlife farming is inherently cruel and unsustainable, and no amount of regulation can change that.

Instead, we must focus on protecting wildlife in their natural habitats and promoting humane, sustainable alternatives. This generation of farmed wild animals must be the last.

We call on the Kenyan government, corporations, and individuals to take decisive action. Wild animals belong in the wild, not in captivity where they are bred and exploited for profit. It is time to end wildlife farming in Kenya and beyond, ensuring that wild animals are protected, not commodified. Together, we can move towards a future where wild animals thrive in their natural environment, free from exploitation and cruelty.

# 1. Background

## What is the Distinction between Commercial Wildlife Farms, Sanctuaries and 'Good Zoos'?

Commercial wildlife farms are establishments that breed and raise wild animals for various commercial purposes, including the production of meat, fur, traditional medicine ingredients, the exotic pet trade, and hunting reserves (1,2).

Commercial wildlife farms often operate with the goal of maximizing production and profit. This can lead to conditions that inherently harm animals' well-being, such as overcrowding, inadequate veterinary care, and unnatural environments that do not meet the species' basic needs (1,3). Wildlife farms, depending on their jurisdiction, may operate under minimal or unenforced regulations, leading to inadequate standards of animal care. In contrast, genuine sanctuaries, and accredited zoos – in theory at least – aim to provide care

that meets or exceeds established animal welfare standards. Sanctuaries are dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of animals that cannot return to the wild, offering them a haven. While accreditation of zoos does not always guarantee that the basic needs of captive wildlife are being met, the best zoos aim to provide as close to natural life as possible for the animals in their care (4). These zoos must also have a strong commitment to conservation, focus on education, research, and the preservation of species, providing animals with environments that simulate their natural habitats as closely as possible. These wider goals are a fundamental difference between sanctuaries and the best zoos, and commercial wildlife farms, where pure profit influences farm operations and undermines animal welfare.



Crocodiles kept in overcrowded communal pens, trapped in filthy, foul-smelling water that had clearly not been changed for long an appalling level of neglect that subjects these animals to severe suffering and health risks. Photo captured in one of the facilities investigated. Credit: World Animal Protection.

The role of commercial wildlife farms in conservation is complex and controversial. Supporters of wildlife farming argue that by supplying the market with wildlife products, these farms can reduce the pressure on wild populations (5). However, there is little evidence to prove this. In some cases, the trade in wild individuals was proven to not decrease as the trade in captive-bred animals increased (6-8), as wild-caught animals are often preferred. Evidence instead suggests that commercial farming of wildlife can stimulate demand for wildlife products and enable the laundering of illegally caught wild animals through legal farms (9). In contrast, sanctuaries and good zoos are directly involved in conservation efforts, including breeding programs for endangered species, research, and public education aimed at fostering conservation awareness and action (1).

Commercial wildlife farms, sanctuaries, and good zoos serve fundamentally different purposes and operate under different principles. While no captive facility can fully replicate a wild animal's natural habitat or meet their needs fully, the likelihood of suffering is far greater in facilities where commercial profit is the goal.

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## What are the Potential Impacts of Wildlife Farming?

### Animal Welfare Concerns

Wild animals kept in farms, especially those that are not designed to mimic natural habitats closely, can experience significant stress and psychological harm. This stress can be due to confinement, unsuitable social groupings, and the inability to express natural behaviors, leading to psychological harm (10–12).

Physical health issues are common in wildlife farms, including disease, malnourishment, stress-induced behaviors, injuries, infected wounds, cannibalism, physical abnormalities caused by inbreeding, and premature death (10). **Farmed crocodiles, for example, are often housed in communal pens, and while these may allow for social interactions, they also lead to frequent aggressive encounters and wounds from fights.** While individual pens limit these injuries, they restrict social behaviors, which can lead to mental stress due to isolation (13,14).

Ostriches suffer significantly in farming, with the stressful handling of chicks increasing their sensitivity and fear of humans (15). Farming practices such as feather pulling, handling, inspection, and transportation cause pain and suffering (15).

Gastric impaction, where indigestible material accumulates in the stomach, is also a major issue for farmed ostriches, leading to blockages, malnutrition, and often death (16). Contributing factors include poor diet, environmental management, and limited grazing in intensive systems (16). Leg deformities and fractures are also common, caused by nutritional imbalances, rapid growth, and inadequate housing (17,18). These conditions can severely impair mobility and overall welfare, leading to chronic pain and in some cases, the inability to walk.

Captive reptiles, including commercially farmed tortoises and snakes, face a range of welfare issues, including inadequate housing conditions, poor nutrition, and stress due to overcrowding, improper handling, and transportation (19,20). Stress can result in weakened immune systems and increased susceptibility to disease (21). **Commercial breeding facilities may provide insufficient space and poor substrate for these animals, leading to restricted movement, shell deformities in tortoises, and respiratory issues.** Nutritional deficiencies are common in captive tortoises, as they are often fed diets lacking in variety and essential nutrients (22,23).

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### Conservation Impacts

The existence of wildlife farms can threaten wild populations through the capture of wild specimens to supplement breeding stock, potentially depleting local populations and disrupting the ecosystems in which they live (24,25). **Breeding programs in captivity can lead to genetic bottlenecks and reduce the genetic diversity of species (26,27).** This is particularly concerning for conservation, as it can make populations more vulnerable to diseases and reduce their adaptability to changing environments. Captive-bred animals may also escape or be released to the wild, impacting their individual welfare and the local wild population.

Evidence suggests commercial wildlife farms can indirectly and directly support the illegal wildlife trade by providing a cover for the laundering of wild-caught animals under the guise of legality (9,28,29). Additionally, the existence of farms can stimulate demand for wild animals, potentially increasing poaching (9,30).

While some tout wildlife farming as a sustainable use of natural resources and a means to conserve species, the potential negative impacts on animal welfare and conservation efforts cannot be ignored.

## What are the Potential Negative Impacts of Wildlife Farming on People?

The intricate relationship between wildlife farming, public health, criminality, and socio-economic factors is a subject of increasing scrutiny, especially in Africa where wildlife trade and farming have profound implications.

### Public Health Concerns

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that can spread between animals and people. The close contact between humans and wildlife in farming and trade settings increases the risk of spillover events, where pathogens can jump from animals to humans. **Wildlife farms create opportunities for disease emergence and transmission due to the high concentrations of animals, poor hygiene, and regular human contact for husbandry purposes.**

Deadly zoonotic diseases include the Ebola virus, which has been associated with the handling and consumption of wild animal meat (31), and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, suspected to have originated from bats that then spread through a wildlife market (32). Of the first three recorded cases of COVID-19, two were directly related to the sale of wildlife at the market (32). Zoonotic disease outbreaks are believed to cause around 2.7 million human deaths annually and 2.5 billion cases of significant human illness (33).

The economic consequences can also be immense. The COVID-19 pandemic has been estimated to have cost the global economy as much as US\$16 trillion (34). Between 1940 and 2004, 72% of zoonotic diseases in human populations originated from wildlife (35,36). **Several farmed wildlife species have been found to transmit infectious diseases.**

For instance, COVID-19 spread between mink and farm workers at farms in The Netherlands and in Denmark (37). Tape worms also spread from snakes to a farm owner in the Gambia (38). Furthermore, a skin disease caused by pathogenic fungi spread from a lion to its caretaker (39). Visitors to lion farms in South Africa have reported that hand sanitizers and disinfectant foot paths between enclosures are absent, putting tourists at risk (3).

**2.7M**

Annual human deaths caused by zoonotic disease outbreaks globally.

**72%** 

The percentage of zoonotic diseases in human populations from wildlife

### Criminality and Legal Issues

Wildlife farming is entangled with issues of criminality, due to its connections with the illegal wildlife trade. **Although some wildlife farms operate legally, there is a concern that they can be used as a front for laundering illegally captured wild animals, which makes it difficult for authorities to regulate and monitor the trade (9,40).**

Criminal networks sometimes seek influence over legally operating wildlife industries, such as wildlife farms, to act as cover for fraudulent activity (30). Criminal networks thrive when the lines between legal and illegal activities become blurred, exacerbating issues of corruption and law enforcement challenges.



## Impacts on Livelihoods and the Economy

Wildlife farming has multifaceted negative impacts on livelihoods and the economy. It is often promoted as a way to generate revenue for rural communities, but in many cases, the profits are siphoned away from locals. For example, in South Africa's captive predator breeding industry, there is a huge discrepancy between the earnings of workers in such breeding and tourist interaction facilities and the profits gained by the venue owners (41). Workers on such predator breeding farms are often undocumented foreigners, who are paid far below the minimum wage, working extremely long hours without overtime pay (41).

Workers typically receive no paid sick leave and in some cases sign indemnity agreements stating the venue owner bears no responsibility for accidents, despite the workplace being inherently dangerous, with limited safety protocols (41).

Research found that workers at a snake farm received wages so low that they could barely keep their families above the extreme poverty line (38).

Besides the injuries caused by handling dangerous wildlife, farm workers who interact directly with wild animals are also at a higher risk of contracting zoonotic diseases (38).

Beyond individuals and their communities, the association of wildlife farming with zoonotic diseases can have far-reaching economic consequences. Outbreaks linked to wildlife can lead to significant economic losses through impacts on tourism, agriculture, and trade restrictions imposed by other countries in response to disease outbreaks.

These activities are also unsustainable. Overexploiting wildlife for farming can lead to depletion of species that are crucial for ecological balance, which can affect ecosystem services such as pollination and seed dispersal. These services are vital for agriculture and therefore, local economies (UNEP, 2018). While proponents of wildlife farming might suggest strategies to mitigate its many negative impacts, measures such as strengthening regulations to prevent the illegal wildlife trade are not enough.



A staff member was seen handling a snake without any protective equipment—no gloves, apron, or protective footwear—putting themselves at serious risk of injury or infection and exposing glaring lapses in health and safety protocols. Photo captured in one of the facilities investigated. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## What is the Current Legal Situation for Wildlife Farms In Kenya?

In Kenya, conservation efforts and economic interests influence wildlife farming. The country boasts rich biodiversity, including iconic species like elephants, rhinos, and lions, which are crucial to its tourism industry. Kenya has long been a leader in wildlife conservation, implementing measures such as national parks, reserves, and stringent anti-poaching laws to protect its natural heritage.

The Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (WCMA) 2013 governs wildlife farming, or

“game farming,” allowing for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses of wildlife. The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) permits the farming of various species, including crocodiles, tortoises, chameleons, ostriches, frogs, lizards, guinea fowl, quails, snails, and butterflies, along with several plant species. These operations include captive breeding, ranching, and harvesting animals for commercial use, as well as managing wildlife in sanctuaries for ecotourism, recreation, and education (42).

However, despite the legality of wildlife farming, regulations remain inconsistently implemented. The WCMA 2013 outlines provisions for Consumptive Wildlife Utilization (CWU), but regulations and guidelines for game farming are not fully operationalized (43). The Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, through KWS, has encouraged farmers to explore non-traditional farming, known as emerging livestock, which includes wildlife farming (44,45).

In 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife established the Task Force on Consumptive Wildlife Utilization to evaluate CWU under WCMA 2013. The task force reviewed legislation, consulted stakeholders, and proposed recommendations for sustainable wildlife utilization. The report, which mentions the game farming of reptiles (crocodiles, chameleon, tortoise and butterfly) and certain species of birds (Ostrich and guinea fowl) revealed several important findings. It highlighted issues including inadequate regulatory frameworks, weak enforcement of existing laws, unclear definitions of wildlife user rights on private and community lands, and the lack of capacity and resources within KWS to effectively manage CWU activities (43). Despite these concerns, the task force recommended expanding the commercial exploitation of wildlife.

Kenya has also witnessed a significant decline in wildlife population, with large mammal species declining by 68% over the past 40 years. Despite these red flags, the report's short, medium, and long-term interventions for sustainable wildlife use support expanding the exploitation of wildlife for commercial uses.

When wild animals are already suffering in the current captive breeding facilities and breeding-cum-entertainment facilities in Kenya, encouraging such expansion is both cruel and dangerous. It is only by ending the farming of captive wild animals that individual animal welfare and wider threats to biodiversity and public health can be addressed.

Recent developments suggest the government is reconsidering its approach to wildlife utilization. During the 1st Wildlife Scientific Conference in 2024, Kenya's president directed the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife to re-examine the country's wildlife laws, signaling potential regulatory changes.

In this context, we urge the Kenyan government, private sector, and individuals to stop supporting the current CWU system and ensure that the wild animals currently being farmed in Kenya are the last generation to endure such suffering.

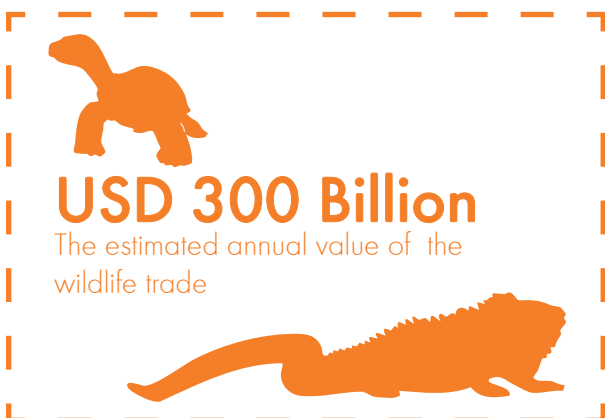


One of the hippos at a tourist attraction facility we investigated was found with a gaping, bleeding wound on its back—an undeniable sign of neglect and a failure to provide even basic health care, exposing the animal to unnecessary suffering. Credit: World Animal Protection.



## What is the Aim of this Report?

There is a growing demand for wildlife in various sectors, including the exotic pet trade and exhibition in zoos and entertainment venues. Yet, the source markets for these animals and their welfare within wildlife farming facilities remain largely under-researched (46). Although the allure of owning an exotic pet captivates many, the suffering these animals endure is often hidden (10,46,47). From the trauma of being extracted from the wild to the distressing conditions they face in captivity, these creatures are subjected to intense pain and suffering throughout their lives (10). The global demand for exotic pets and wildlife products is insatiable, fuelling a booming wildlife trade industry valued at an estimated USD 300 billion annually (Harvey 2022). The limited research available points to a critical need for deeper investigation into wildlife farming and ranching facilities across Kenya.



This report aims to shed light on the scope and scale of these operations, offering a clearer understanding of how wildlife farming fits into Kenya's broader conservation and economic landscape.

By mapping out the industry, we hope to reveal the often-overlooked impacts on biodiversity, animal welfare, and public health. With many of these animals living in substandard conditions and subjected to cruel practices, it is vital that we confront the harsh realities behind the growing trade in wildlife.



In one of the facilities visited, crocodiles were found confined in cramped enclosures, with filthy water and visible wounds on their backs—suffering from neglect and a complete disregard for their basic needs and well-being. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## 2. Methods

### Summary of how Data was Collected

Our investigation into captive wildlife facilities in Kenya began with an extensive review of online sources, including academic databases, expert insights, and social media platforms. Using a Boolean search with nine keywords related to wildlife farming and captivity in Kenya, we screened 52,800 results. Despite the scale of this search, we did not uncover specific facility names. To bridge this gap, we relied on the collective 25 years of experience of our consultancy team, identifying 55 known captive wildlife facilities. The researchers meticulously organized this information into a detailed matrix, which informed the next stage of our research.

### Summary of how Facilities were Selected and how Field Work Data was Collected

The fieldwork involved visiting sites to verify the desktop research findings. Although we initially planned to visit only preselected facilities, our plans required adjustments; three facilities could not be located, possibly due to their remote or unlisted locations, and one had shut down after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, we gathered data from six facilities: three from our original list and three others identified opportunistically through engagement with local communities. These site visits offered valuable insights into the operations, ownership, and wildlife breeding practices at these facilities.

### 3. Systematic Literature Review Results

Out of 55 evaluated facilities that host captive wildlife, 25.5% (n=14) are public, owned by either county government or the national government, while 74.5% (n=41) are private ventures, owned by individuals or private companies. The high proportion of private ownership is significant, as private facilities often prioritize profit-driven, exploitative practices over the well-being of the animals and broader conservation efforts.

All 14 public facilities are accessible to the public upon payment of the entrance fee. Public facilities, being government-owned, are typically subject to stricter regulations and oversight, which may contribute to their stronger focus on conservation and education rather than active captive wildlife breeding. As a result, the study did not include public facilities in further analysis since they did not align with the study's focus on captive breeding operations.

Of the 41 private facilities, 29 of them are reported to be accessible to public upon payment of entrance fee while accessibility of the rest (n=12)

was undeclared in the documents reviewed in this study. The lack of transparency regarding the operations of these private facilities raises concerns about potential unregulated practices and insufficient oversight.

Among the 29 privately-owned facilities open to the public, 11 were found to actively breed wild animals for commercial purposes. This is particularly relevant as commercial breeding of wildlife often involves ethical and welfare concerns, especially when it is conducted with limited regulation or scrutiny. Additionally, the operational status of one facility could not be verified with the available information, highlighting potential gaps in monitoring and accountability.

Notably, 4 of the 11 facilities were reported to offer visitor-animal interactions. These interactions can exacerbate welfare issues, as they often involve practices that are stressful for animals, such as handling or close confinement, which prioritize visitor experience over animal welfare.

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### 4. Fieldwork Research Results

#### General Findings

We recorded a total of 1,477 animals housed at the six visited facilities, either directly observed by our researchers or reported directly from staff members. These included 700 ostriches, 545 tortoises, 177 crocodiles, and 54 other animals, including 10 snakes (pythons and venomous snakes), two hippos, five giraffes, primates including bush babies and baboons, and a herd of elands. More than 86% of the total reported or observed animals were housed in captive breeding facilities, with far fewer (14%) housed in primarily tourism-focused venues.

Approximately 83% of the venues had been operating for more than five years, with some as old as 60 years. This longevity suggests that many facilities may be operating under outdated practices, predating modern wildlife conservation laws in Kenya. With all but one of the visited facilities involved in breeding wildlife – whether for sale or to maintain internal populations – the use of animals as a commercial resource is widespread,

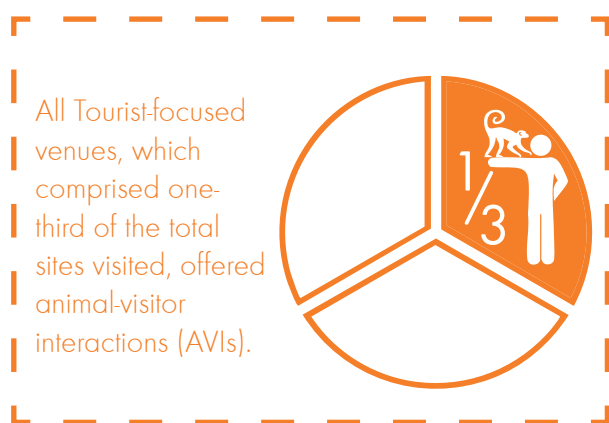
particularly in rural areas. Our visits revealed systemic welfare issues across all sites, indicating a lack of consistent enforcement of welfare standards. These issues ranged from inadequate shelter, food, and water provision to untreated injuries and visible stress behaviors.

Veterinary care was was gravely minimal or non-existent. Two venues reported to have a vet on site but still housed distressed and injured animals. At another venue, the owners provided makeshift treatment themselves. The veterinary status at half of the venues was unknown, potentially leaving animals vulnerable to untreated injuries or illness. We observed various injuries, including a hippopotamus with a gaping, bleeding wound and another with an overgrown tusk. The same venue housed giraffes infested with ticks. Educational materials were limited to signs providing species information, with no substantive focus on educating visitors about animal welfare or the ethical implications of wildlife interactions.



## Exploitative Practices at Tourism Venues

All tourist-focused venues, which comprised one-third of the total sites visited, offered Animal-Visitor Interactions (AVIs). Their AVIs involve direct contact with animals, such as feeding giraffes, hippos, and crocodiles; posing for selfies with pythons, handling tortoises and birds of prey, and ostrich riding. AVIs are marketed as unique experiences but often come at the expense of animal welfare. For instance, at one venue, birds of prey were tethered to perches by strings and were pecking at visible leg wounds. **The birds had no access to water or food, enduring long hours in the sun as visitors took photos.** The conditions for these animals were far from natural, and the stress of repeated interactions was evident.



Despite the lucrative nature of these AVIs, the conditions of the venue were deplorable and not right for the animals, the welfare of the animals involved was consistently compromised, with little to no consideration given to their mental or physical well-being.

The higher admission fees at tourist venues (averaging 400 Kenyan shillings - KSh) compared to breeding facilities (averaging 250 KSh) suggest that tourism-focused operations prioritize profit through entertainment and interaction, often to the detriment of animal well-being. **The commercial pressure to provide these experiences exacerbates welfare issues, as animals are pushed to perform and interact repeatedly, often with minimal respite.**



In one of the visited facilities, an eagle—a bird of prey that naturally flies vast distances in search of food—was cruelly tethered in an open space for tourist attraction. Shockingly, there was no visible provision of food or water, highlighting a grave neglect of its basic needs and well-being. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## Cruelty at Breeding Facilities

Breeding facilities made up 67% of the visited venues, and all were engaged in breeding wildlife for commercial purposes, such as selling live animals, eggs, meat, or other animal products. One-third of these venues sold wildlife meat, reflecting the demand for exotic products in high-end markets. Welfare concerns were severe and widespread, with similar issues to those observed in tourism venues. **Animals were often kept without visible food or water and displayed signs of injury and stress.** A dead tortoise was found at another venue, with no explanation about its death, and ostriches were found suffering from health issues including anal prolapse and leg deformities.

Just as at tourism venues, veterinary care was also inadequate at breeding facilities. **Some owners claimed to manage the health of their animals without veterinary assistance, while others provided only basic treatments like copper sulfate for wounds and multivitamins in food.** Education was minimal, generally focused on simple tours of the facilities, with little emphasis on broader conservation issues or animal welfare. While three-quarters of the breeding facilities focused solely on their breeding operations, one-quarter were observed to also have AVIs. These included a show-style performance of crocodile feeding, pythons being used as photo props, tortoise handling, and ostrich riding.



A cruel show-style performance witnessed in one of the facilities visited involved feeding crocodiles for the sole purpose of entertaining tourists—reducing these wild powerful creatures to mere spectacles of exploitation, devoid of their dignity and natural behaviors. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## The Capture of Wild Animals

We also found that at least one of the Kenyan wildlife breeding facilities is actively involved in extracting or purchasing animals caught from the wild, exacerbating the ethical concerns surrounding their operations. In one case, the venue was openly found to be sourcing animals directly from the wild, with local community members capturing and delivering them in crude conditions (see tortoise case study). One breeding facility received live tortoises from the wild to bolster their breeding stock, including species that are now prohibited from trade by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). This practice highlights the disparity between the so-called “conservation” efforts of these facilities and pure commercialization, where economic interests drive breeding instead of the protection of species. The ongoing extraction of wild animals raises serious concerns about the sustainability of these practices and their impact on already vulnerable populations in their natural habitats.



In one of the facilities, tortoises were delivered in a sack, placed on top of an adult tied to a motorbike—treated as mere objects. These tortoises, all wild-caught from local communities, highlight a critical conservation threat and expose significant gaps in policies aimed at protecting wildlife from illegal capture and exploitation. Credit: World Animal Protection.



A wild-caught adult tortoise being transported to the holding facility raises significant concern, as such practices directly threaten their already vulnerable wild populations, exacerbating the risks of decline and extinction. Photo captured in one of the facilities investigated. Credit: World Animal Protection.



## Species Case Studies

### Ostrich

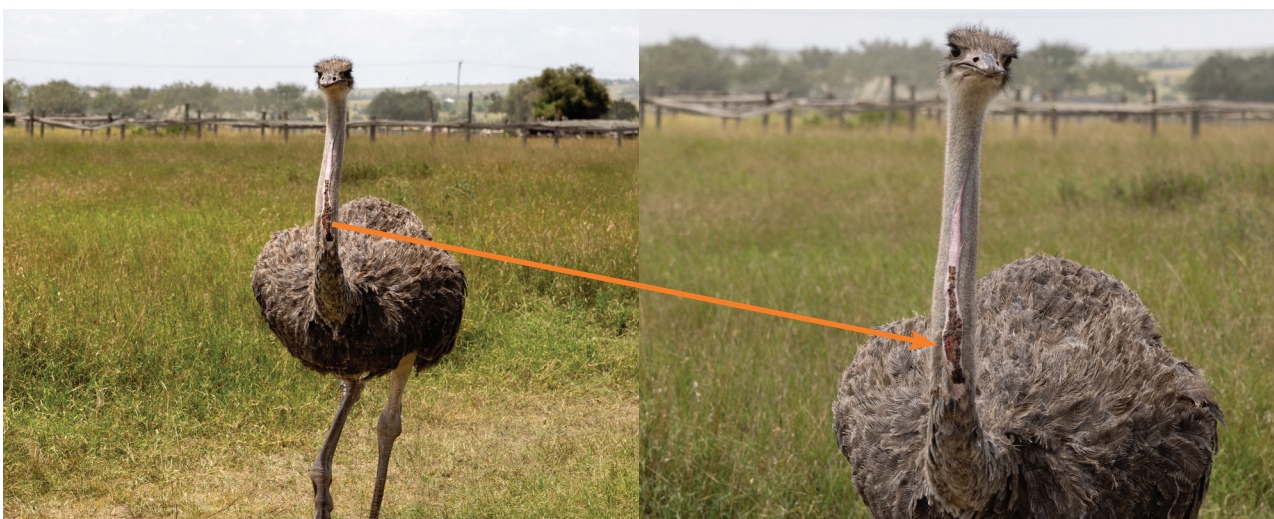
Ostriches in Kenya, like many in Africa, have been commodified through farming for their meat, leather, and feathers, often under the guise of contributing to local economies and tourism. Initially introduced as a means of economic diversification, ostrich farming has rapidly expanded, driven by high demand for exotic products. However, the focus on profit has overshadowed the welfare of these sentient animals. Intensive farming practices, including breeding for international trade, highlight the industry's disconnect from true conservation efforts and ethical animal treatment, with animal welfare often severely compromised.

Our researchers found ostrich to be exploited at one of the six visited farms, which breeds both Maasai and Somali ostrich species. Staff say the facility houses up to 700 birds ranging from chicks to adult breeding stock; ostriches were by far the most common animal observed throughout the study.

The main purposes of this venue are to breed ostriches for meat, which is sold locally, and to supply ostriches and their eggs to other national and international farmers looking to breed them. Three-month-old ostriches are sold for 75,000 KSh

(around US\$575), while eggs sell for 3,000 KSh each (around US\$23). Fresh and cured ostrich skins are also sold locally and to visitors, alongside decorative feathers. **Animal-visitor interactions also occur at the venue daily – an adult male ostrich is forced to carry guests weighing up to 75kg in distressing rides around an arena 20 times per day, while other guests watch the performance.** Staff reported this practice revolved around “foreign” (i.e., non-African) tourists. At the time of our visit, the ostrich was excused from riding activities after injuring his neck on the enclosure fence. When not being ridden, he is kept alone in his enclosure. Staff reported that they are also training five young male ostriches for riding.

**The welfare conditions at the ostrich farm were poor, with no provision of shelter for individuals over four months old or the breeding stock.** The birds displayed signs of stress and behavioral abnormalities, such as biting the wire fences around them. Despite reportedly having an onsite vet, several physical injuries were observed, including a young bird with fresh wounds, one with an anal prolapse, two with neck injuries, four birds with excessive feather loss, and two chicks with deformed legs.



A male ostrich, used for riding activities at one of the facilities visited, was found with a visible neck injury—raising serious concerns about his well-being. The practice of allowing riders, purportedly limited to individuals no heavier than 75 kg, further highlights the cruelty inflicted on the animal for the sake of entertainment. Credit: World Animal Protection.



## Crocodiles

Nile crocodiles in Africa, including Kenya, faced severe population decline by the 1960s due to uncontrolled hunting for their skins, meat, and traditional medicine (48). In response to this, 'protection programs' and legal trade were established in Kenya, claiming to take the strain off wild populations by offering farmed alternatives (49). While regulated crocodile farming has been claimed to help stabilize populations in some areas, particularly in protected zones, anthropocentric pressure such as agricultural expansion into crocodile habitats and human-crocodile conflict still affects wild populations (50,51). Crocodile farming is not the answer to these issues despite being lucrative once established, which is the primary driver for private breeding venues. Driven by luxury demand for exotic crocodile skins and meat, this industry grossly undermines true conservation efforts and animal welfare principles.

A total of 177 crocodiles were kept and exploited at four of the six visited facilities. The first facility claims it actively breeds crocodiles to maintain the internal population for guests to visit. It reported that 'excess' animals are taken to a government-run rescue facility. However, on visiting that facility, we found no crocodiles – it is likely that this facility is instead selling crocodiles for profit. Another wildlife farming facility used to keep over 1,000 crocodiles, but had downsized, partially due to a severe disease outbreak that killed up to 20 crocodiles per day. This case is a prime example of disease impact when animals are kept in such close confines with poor sanitation and veterinary practices.

While this facility insisted it does not sell live crocodiles or meat, the number of eggs present – around 100 – far exceeds that needed to maintain the internal population of around 10 crocodiles. A sign at reception also advertised Nile crocodile oil for medicinal purposes, featuring the venue's logo, suggesting this is also sold on request.

The tour guide also offered to supply investigators with breeding stock to start their own crocodile farm, in direct contrast to their claim of not selling live animals. Animal-visitor interactions also happen regularly at this venue, where guests can pet young crocodiles and feed adults.

Another facility actively breeds crocodiles, again claiming this is to expand its internal population and that crocodiles are not sold. However, the owner was also willing to sell the researchers breeding stock so long as they had permits from KWS. Crocodile meat is sold in an adjacent restaurant – while the owner claimed he buys the meat from another farm in Mombasa, that farm is over 500kms away. Given this distance, it is far more likely that the meat comes from his own facility. As well as breeding and likely butchering crocodiles for meat, the animal welfare issues observed at this venue included an unhygienic environment with filthy water in the enclosure.

Several crocodiles at this venue were suffering from health conditions, including skin lesions, wounds caused during crocodile fights, and obesity.

While another venue said it no longer actively bred crocodiles or sold crocodile meat, it still offered animal-visitor interactions: a crocodile feeding performance, in which crocodiles are teased with chicken and compete to win the meat, and crocodiles (as well as hippos and giraffes) are used as photo props.

## Tortoises

Tortoise farming in Kenya has a relatively recent history, beginning in the late 20th century. Initially driven by the international demand for exotic pets and traditional medicine, farming efforts focus on native species such as hingeback, pancake and leopard tortoises. The unnatural conditions in which these animals are kept often lead to stress and health problems. Two of the six visited venues bred tortoises, while a third kept tortoises as part of a zoo-style exhibit. The three venues housed a total of 545 tortoises.

At one farming venue, we observed at least 40 adult and juvenile tortoises, including at least 28 leopard tortoises, and a number of terrapins in water basin. *Two exhibited cracked or broken shells, while eight had retracted their head, limbs, or tail for a minute or longer. This behavior is a defensive mechanism typically employed in the wild to protect vital body parts from potential threats.* In captivity, however, research finds that prolonged hiding or defensive posturing in reptiles, including tortoises, can be a sign of distress and poor welfare (22). The facility, which also houses crocodiles, openly breeds tortoises but again claims this is to maintain internal population. Staff said that they released excess tortoises at a government facility, but on visiting this government facility, no tortoises were present. Just like the excess crocodiles and birds bred at this venue, it is highly likely that some of the animals are sold into

the commercial wildlife trade.

The other farming venue houses hingeback, pancake and leopard tortoises. The owner reported that over 500 tortoises are used as breeding stock. Breeding is carried out for export (primarily to China and Europe) and to provide breeding stock to other farmers. For example, during the visit, the owner told investigators, that he recently supplied a breeding tortoise stock to a new facility located in the south coast of Kenya. *Alongside breeding, the venue also actively extracts tortoises from the wild, in clear breach of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, 2013.*

During our visit, the owner received several calls from community members asking him to collect wild-caught tortoises from them. The owner reported tortoises are bought for 300-500 KSh per adult (\$2.33-3.88) and 100 KSh for juveniles (less than \$1). *We also witnessed the delivery of a sack full of tortoises, tied onto a motorbike, and a carton containing a juvenile leopard tortoise, all of which had been taken directly from the wild. The arrival of so many tortoises on a regular day suggests that wild extraction is the primary source of tortoises at the venue.* While illegally capturing and breeding tortoises was the focus of the venue, visitors were also allowed to handle the tortoises.



In one of the visited facilities breeding tortoises, young terrapins were found overcrowded in a small basin of water—an alarming display of neglect that puts their health and well-being at severe risk. Credit: World Animal Protection.



## Snakes

Snake farming in Kenya, like other wildlife farming practices, is primarily driven by commercial interests, with snakes being exploited for tourism and entertainment rather than conservation. A total of 10 snakes were found at two of the six facilities visited in Kenya, with varying levels of exploitation and welfare conditions. One facility - which is primarily a tourist attraction, but which also encourages breeding - keeps a variety of snake species, including pythons, cobras, and green mambas. Visitors are encouraged to handle the pythons, which raises significant welfare concerns. Improper handling from inexperienced tourists can injure snakes, and even general handling from caretakers can be stressful (10,20). We found one puff adder with a skin wound, and there was no evidence of proper hydration or feeding provision for the snakes. Despite the facility's claim of focusing on wildlife conservation, it appeared to prioritize tourist interactions, at the expense of animal welfare.

At another facility, which is primarily a crocodile farm, venomous snakes and pythons are also part of the attraction. A python-handling AVI was observed during the visit, where a guide demonstrated to visitors how to handle a 1.5-meter-long python. While there were no visible injuries or illnesses with the snakes at this venue, other species present had wounds. Although the handling sessions were relatively short, they expose the snakes to repeated disturbances, which may cause stress and compromise their wellbeing.

In both facilities, snakes are used as entertainment props for visitors rather than being kept as part of conservation efforts, with no consideration of their natural behavior and habitat needs. The lack of proper veterinary care, combined with frequent AVIs, suggests that these facilities prioritize profit over animal welfare and conservation.



In one of the facilities, pythons are used as 'photo props,' subjected to repeated handling by tourists—an exploitative practice that causes significant stress and puts the animals at risk of injury. This practice not only endangers the well-being of the pythons but should be outlawed to protect them from further harm. Credit: World Animal Protection.



## 5. Summary of Key Findings and Impacts

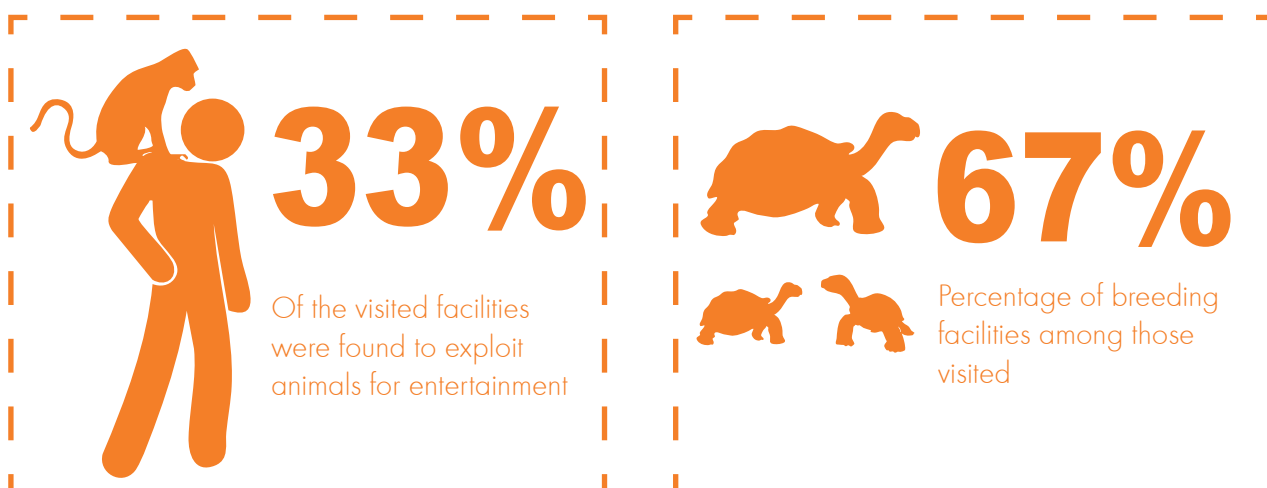
The investigation into captive wildlife facilities in Kenya revealed systemic welfare issues. These venues, often operating with minimal oversight, are driven by commercial interests that compromise animal welfare, conservation efforts, and biodiversity. The fieldwork showed that wildlife breeding is widespread, with 83% of visited facilities involved in breeding animals for commercial purposes, often at the expense of the animals' health and well-being.

### Animal Welfare Concerns

Animal welfare was found to be consistently neglected across all sites visited. Common issues included inadequate shelter, untreated injuries, and visible stress behaviors in animals. Veterinary care was notably lacking, with several venues having no regular access to veterinary services, leaving animals vulnerable to illness and injuries. In one case, a facility owner claimed to manage animal health without veterinary assistance, relying instead on basic treatments. The welfare conditions observed suggest that these facilities prioritize profit over the physical and mental well-being of the animals.

### Commercial Wildlife Breeding

Breeding facilities made up 67% of the venues, with many involved in the sale of live animals, meat, or animal products. Around 33% of these venues sold wildlife meat, catering to the demand for exotic products in high-end markets. The practice of breeding animals for commercial purposes raises serious ethical concerns, particularly regarding the treatment of the animals and the sustainability of such operations. In some cases, facilities were found to actively extract animals from the wild, exacerbating the impact on already vulnerable populations.



### Exploitative Tourism Practices

Tourist-focused facilities, comprising 33% of the total sites visited, were found to exploit animals for entertainment. Animal-visitor interactions (AVIs), such as handling tethered birds or feeding large mammals, were common but often detrimental to animal welfare. Birds, for instance, were seen tethered with visible wounds and no access to food or water, enduring long hours in the sun for tourist photos. The commercial pressure to provide these experiences exacerbates welfare issues, as animals are forced to interact with visitors repeatedly, often with minimal respite. Despite the high entrance fees at these venues, the revenue did not translate into better care for the animals.

## Negative Impacts on Conservation and Biodiversity

The commercial breeding of wildlife under the guise of conservation undermines genuine conservation efforts. The extraction of animals from the wild for breeding purposes threatens local biodiversity and disrupts ecosystems. Furthermore, the focus on profit-driven breeding operations, rather than species protection, highlights a significant disconnect between the claimed conservation goals of these facilities and their actual practices.

The ongoing extraction of wild animals raises concerns about the sustainability of these operations and their impact on endangered species.

## Public Health Concerns

The lack of proper veterinary care and the unsanitary conditions observed at many facilities pose potential public health risks. The close contact between visitors and animals during AVIs increases the risk of zoonotic disease transmission. In some venues, animals were kept in unhygienic conditions, further heightening the risk of disease spread. The absence of adequate health monitoring and treatment protocols for animals not only affects their welfare but also poses a broader public health threat.

The exploitation of captive wildlife in Kenya's breeding and tourism facilities has far-reaching negative impacts, from compromising animal welfare and public health to undermining conservation efforts and threatening biodiversity. It is not enough to implement stricter regulations, and this would not address the inherent cruelty of farming wildlife.



Close contact between visitors and animals was observed in one of the facilities visited. AVIs increases the risk of zoonotic disease transmission. Credit: World Animal Protection.

## 6. Limitations

Our report offers a critical overview of wildlife farms, highlighting issues of animal welfare and potential conservation challenges. However, it should be recognized that our findings likely represent only a fraction of the actual situation. The scope of farms, the breadth of species affected, and the depth of potential cruelty that occurs out of sight are vast and complex. The report underscores the need for comprehensive investigations to fully understand the impacts of wildlife farming and to advocate for the necessary reforms.

## How does Kenya fit into the regional / global picture? How is the research important for other countries that may be engaged in or looking to ramp up commercial wildlife farming?

Our research reveals that animal welfare at wildlife breeding facilities in Kenya is gravely compromised, with suffering throughout the entire process. The illegal capture of wild animals to supplement farm populations and fuel the commercial trade inflicts cruelty on the individual animals while endangering the sustainability of their natural habitats and wild populations. The breadth of these farming operations, encompassing a wide range of species, and the clear evidence of mistreatment underscore that our findings are just the tip of the iceberg.

While our research focused on Kenya, concerns about the exploitation of wildlife through breeding and trade extend beyond national borders. Wildlife farming is emerging as an economic practice in other parts of East and Southern Africa, raising similar ethical and ecological concerns. Countries that are considering or expanding commercial wildlife farming may face comparable challenges in terms of animal welfare, sustainability, and biodiversity protection.

Kenya's situation should serve as a warning to other nations in the region where commercial wildlife farming is either in its infancy or rapidly expanding. Countries looking to replicate Kenya's approach may unknowingly adopt insufficient regulations that fail to protect sentient wildlife from exploitation. While some might advocate for stricter regulations to mitigate suffering, no amount of regulation can justify the unethical nature of farming wild animals. **Wild animals have an intrinsic right to live freely in their natural habitats, and the commodification of their lives for profit fundamentally violates that right.**

Kenya's experience with commercial wildlife farming is not a model to emulate, but rather a cautionary tale. The focus must shift from attempting to regulate an unethical industry to preventing it altogether. Wild animals belong in the wild, where they can live out their lives as nature intended—not in captivity, where they are bred, traded, and exploited for human gain.

## 7. Call to Action and Policy Recommendations

The exploitation of wildlife through commercial farming in Kenya must end. Our research reveals widespread cruelty and suffering across wildlife breeding facilities. Wild animals, inherently sentient beings, are commodified and subjected to inhumane conditions, all for profit. This practice is unethical, unsustainable, and poses a grave threat to public health, animal welfare and biodiversity. It is not enough to regulate this industry; we must **prevent its expansion altogether. Wild animals belong in their natural habitats, not in captivity where they are bred, traded, and exploited for human gain.**

We call on the Kenyan government, corporations, and individuals to act now.

**This generation of farmed wild animals must be the last. Stakeholders must enact policies to protect wildlife in their natural environments and to ensure that commercial exploitation ends.**

Kenya should lead by example, setting a precedent for other nations considering or expanding commercial wildlife farming.

**The time for change is now—wildlife must thrive in the wild, not suffer in captivity. Wild animals belong in their natural habitats, not in captivity.**



## Recommendations

To address critical issues raised, the report recommends several measures for immediate, medium-term, and long-term action.

### 1. Immediately:

- **Conduct a comprehensive national audit:** Undertake a comprehensive audit to systematically document all commercial captive facilities in Kenya and establish the number of facilities, assess the species and number of animals housed and evaluate their welfare conditions. The audit should also review the legal status of these facilities to ensure compliance with national and international wildlife regulations while assessing adherence to ethical and operational standards.
- **Conduct public awareness campaigns:** Launch county and national campaigns to raise awareness about the inherent animal cruelty of wildlife farming and the ethical and ecological importance of protecting wildlife in their natural habitats. Education should be aimed at the general public, tourists, and businesses that engage in wildlife-related industries.
- **End direct visitor interactions with animals:** Prohibit direct Animal-Visitor Interactions (AVIs) (such as handfeeding and animal petting) at tourist facilities, as they often compromise animal welfare and are a risk to zoonotic diseases. Tourist experiences should focus on observing animals in environments that respect their natural behaviours, rather than forcing animals to engage in unnatural and harmful activities for entertainment.
- **Conduct animal rescue and rehome:** Rescue and relocate animals living in inhumane conditions to accredited sanctuaries where they can receive proper care. The immediate priority is to assess and rescue animals in urgent need, ensuring their welfare and rehabilitation in appropriate facilities. This process should be conducted in collaboration with relevant authorities, animal welfare organizations, and sanctuary networks to guarantee sustainable and ethical rehoming solutions.

### 2. In the medium term:

- **Strengthen legislation and enforcement:** Update and enforce Kenya's Wildlife Conservation and Management Act to prioritize animal welfare and the protection of wild animals in their natural habitats. Government should impose stricter penalties on illegal wildlife trade and the capture of wild animals for farming. Close loopholes that allow for the laundering of illegally caught animals under the guise of legal farming.
- **Suspend establishing of new facilities:** Enforce an immediate stop on the expansion of wildlife farming in Kenya. This includes breeding, trading, and the commercial use of wild animals for products, entertainment, or as exotic pets. Wildlife farming should not be allowed to grow unchecked, given its detrimental impact on animal welfare, biodiversity, and public health.

### 3. In the long term:

- **Phase out commercial wildlife farming:** Establish a clear, time-bound road map that will lead to ultimately closing down the existing wildlife farming operations in Kenya and a permanent ban on these exploitative practices. This should include providing support for transitioning affected workers and communities to alternative, sustainable livelihoods that do not rely on wildlife exploitation.
- **Promote sustainable alternatives:** Support local communities with alternative income-generating activities that are wildlife-friendly, such as ecotourism or conservation-based initiatives. Investment in these areas will help reduce the reliance on wildlife exploitation while simultaneously protecting Kenya's rich biodiversity.

Wildlife farming is not a sustainable solution for Kenya or any other nation. It perpetuates animal suffering, undermines conservation efforts, and poses serious risks to public health. The Kenyan government, private sector, and individuals must come together to end this practice and ensure that wild animals are protected in their natural environments.

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