

Namibia sells only a third of elephants on offer in criticised auction

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Namibia's plan to sell "high value" elephants to local and overseas buyers via auction has secured sales of only a third of the 170 animals on offer, according to the country's environment ministry.



Elephants graze within the Maasai Mara game reserve in Narok county, Kenya. Reuters/Mbnicah Mwangi

Namibia says the auction helped it strike a balance between the conservation of elephants and management of the risks they pose when they encroach onto land used by humans, but conservationists have questioned the government's claims of human-elephant conflict.

Over 100,000 people signed an online petition condemning the auction, which closed on 29 January. Ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda told Reuters the negative publicity may have affected demand for the elephants, with affordability or a lack of buyers meeting the conditions of sale also possible factors.

"We hoped to sell all 170 elephants, even if it was to a single buyer, provided they meet the requirement," he told Reuters, adding the remaining elephants will remain in their current habitats for now.



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Potential future auction

"Perhaps in future we may run another auction if the situation dictates," he continued.

Namibia's conservation drive saw its elephant population jump from around 7,500 in 1995 to 24,000 in 2019, according to government figures, garnering international support. But it has recently looked to relax rules around trophy hunting and the export of live animals, arguing it could use the funds to protect the species.

As well as raising money, the auction will see those elephants sold captured, removed from their current habitats and relocated elsewhere.

The ministry did not name the three buyers who purchased the elephants but said when it announced the auction they would have to meet criteria such as having game-proof fences for the property where the elephants would be held.

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