

# War kills animals too; scientists study the damage and how to help

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.18.18

Word Count **754**

Level **850L**



Three-year old lowland gorilla Itibero holds a toy given to her to play with July 18, 2006 at the Diane Fossey gorilla center in Goma, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. She and other orphaned gorillas at the center were rescued from poachers and are now cared for by gorilla specialists trying to preserve the dwindling population of great apes in Congo. Years of war and chaos have depleted the population. Photo by: John Moore/Getty Images

Researchers often study how wars affect people. However, they don't always look at how it affects wild animals.

Unsurprisingly, war hurts them too, according to a new study in the journal Nature.

## **War And African Wildlife**

It's especially true if the conflict repeats or drags on, the study says.

Scientists examined exactly how war disrupts African wildlife over more than 60 years. Researchers found the frequency of war, meaning how often conflict breaks out, is a key part of why wildlife numbers decline. The intensity of those conflicts plays less of a role.

You don't need much conflict or fighting until wildlife populations start to decline, Joshua Daskin said. He's a scientist at Yale University and helped lead the study.

During wars, it can be hard to focus on protecting wildlife, Daskin says. Wars may hurt a country's level of business and jobs, for example. Money gets spent other places.

### **Land mines, Bombs And Other Downsides For Animals**

There has not been much research on how violent events affect animals. There are ways that war can both hurt and help animals.

There are many downsides to war for animals. Land mines and bombs can injure and kill animals. Armies sometimes destroy animal habitats on purpose. They may dump plant poisons on forests, for example. The United States did this during the Vietnam War. Or, they may pay for their fight by selling ivory from elephant trunks. Ivory is a prized item. Many countries are working together to end the sale of ivory.

When governments fall apart, there is less enforcement of laws protecting animals. Money troubles during wars can force desperate families to hunt wild animals for food.

### **If Humans Leave, Animals Can Survive**

On the other hand, wars can also force humans from their homes. When humans leave a place, it can be good for plants and animals, said study co-author Robert Pringle. He is an ecologist at Princeton University. He studies the relationship between animals and their surroundings. With fewer people, illegal hunting and habitat destruction might slow down, and mining might stop, he says.

Pringle and Daskin both do research in Mozambique's Gorongosa National Park. Mozambique is a country in southeast Africa. A 15-year civil war there nearly destroyed all wildlife. Pringle and Daskin spend a lot of time in this particular park. They were curious about other places, too. Is war generally good, bad, or neither for wildlife?

### **Studying Protected Areas In Africa**

The pair studied protected areas in Africa between 1946 and 2010. Protected areas, like national parks, are clearly-defined lands that have been recognized, often by law. They are places notable for their natural or cultural value. They receive special protection as a result.

The researchers counted all fights that killed at least one person, in a broader battle that caused 25 human deaths in a year. They found conflicts in more than 70 percent of the areas during that time period.

Daskin then studied populations of large plant-eating animals. He did this partially because these animals are important to the land's health. They're also easier to count and track. Giraffes, warthogs and wildebeests are just some examples.

### **What Hurts Wildlife The Most**

Next, the authors looked at connections between wildlife populations and variables that can influence them, like drought and the presence of mining. They also looked at how long conflicts lasted, and how intense they were.

In all, wildlife was most affected by conflict frequency, that is, how often conflict happened. Wildlife populations stayed stable in peaceful times. However, with a slight increase in conflict, wildlife populations suffered.

Surprisingly, more intense conflicts did not necessarily hurt wildlife more. Pringle and Daskin note that conflict causes people to feel less secure. Their government might break down. People leave their homes. Fewer people can help wildlife.

### **There Is Still Hope**

The researchers emphasized that their findings were not all gloomy. There were very few cases of animals going extinct because of war.

War is bad for animals, but not so horrible that we should give up, Pringle said.

He and Daskin hope their findings can help governments and wildlife groups lessen the influence of war on animals. There is hope, they say. Gorongosa National Park lost about 90 percent of its wildlife during the war that ended in 1992. Now, it's back to 80 percent of what it was before the war, Daskin said.

This can happen when people make an effort to protect wildlife and believe in its importance, Daskin said.

## Quiz

1 Read the paragraph from the section "War And African Wildlife."

*Scientists examined exactly how war disrupts African wildlife over more than 60 years. Researchers found the frequency of war, meaning how often conflict breaks out, is a key part of why wildlife numbers decline. The intensity of those conflicts plays less of a role.*

Which phrase from the paragraph MOST helps the reader understand the meaning of "disrupts"?

- (A) examined exactly
- (B) over more than
- (C) numbers decline
- (D) less of a role

2 Read the paragraph from the section "What Hurts Wildlife The Most."

*Next, the authors looked at connections between wildlife populations and variables that can influence them, like drought and the presence of mining. They also looked at how long conflicts lasted, and how intense they were.*

What is the meaning of the word "variables" as it is used above?

- (A) places without animals
- (B) events that cause war
- (C) numbers of animals
- (D) different situations or events

3 One MAIN idea of the article is that researchers found that war is generally bad for wildlife populations.

What is another MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) Some countries are trying to make it illegal to kill elephants for their ivory.
- (B) There has not been much research done on wars and wildlife.
- (C) Gorongosa National Park had a civil war that ended in 1992.
- (D) Wildlife populations are most affected by how often conflicts happen.

4 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the section "If Humans Leave, Animals Can Survive"?

- (A) When there are fewer people due to war, it can be good for wildlife.
- (B) There are things people can do to protect wildlife during wars.
- (C) All parks lose almost all of their wildlife during long wars.
- (D) Some people believe that wildlife is important for national parks.