CONSERVATION ACTION TRUST

# EKZN Wildlife - Elephant Fact Sheet

18 May 2026

## Background

In early 2026, EKZN Wildlife published proposals to remove 1,050 (subsequently increased to 1,220) elephants from five protected areas due to perceived overpopulation above carrying capacities (CC), causing biodiversity loss, noting that culling would be necessary if suitable sites for relocation could not be found. It is widely accepted that there are no such sites.

## Current Situation

The elephant situation is being portrayed as a crisis requiring urgent and extreme solutions however, there is little evidence for this:

1. There is no mention of elephant-induced biodiversity loss in the EKZN Wildlife Annual Reports for 2022/2023 or 2023/2024. The 2024/2025 report was not available online.
2. Prior to 2026, there was only one media report of elephant-induced biodiversity loss (2024), and prior to that, one in 2016.
3. The most recent peer-reviewed paper on EKZN Wildlife elephant-induced biodiversity loss was published in 2017.
4. There is no publicly available scientific basis explaining how these “carrying capacities” were derived, when they were calculated, or when they were last updated.
5. A WESSA study from 2016 stated an “ecological CC of around 1,000 elephants” for HiP, not 320.
6. There is no corresponding body of published, site-specific research demonstrating that exceeding these thresholds has resulted in irreversible biodiversity loss.
7. These thresholds appear to have been exceeded for extended periods, yet without any clearly documented ecological collapse.
8. If such limits can be exceeded for years without demonstrable system failure, their sudden invocation as evidence of crisis demands careful scrutiny.
9. Rather than functioning as objective ecological boundaries, these figures appear to reflect management preferences within highly controlled and artificially structured systems.
10. To present them as evidence of imminent ecological collapse is therefore not only questionable, it risks fundamentally misrepresenting the nature of the problem.

**EKZN WIldlife Protected Areas Elephant Carrying Capacities (CC)**
**(prepared 13/4/26)**

| Protected Area | Size km2 | Calculated elephant numbers at CC | Calculated CC /km2 | Elephant numbers 2025 | Elephants/km2 2025 | Planned removals | Revised planned removals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hluhluwe–iMfolozi** | **960** | **320** | **0.3** | **1250** | **1.3** | **650** | **800** |
| **Ithala** | **296** | **125** | **0.4** | **290** | **1.0** | **170** | **200** |
| **Tembe** | **300** | **150** | **0.5** | **240** | **0.8** | **120** | **120** |
| **iMkuze** | **400** | **120** | **0.3** | **175** | **0.4** | **50** | **50** |
| **iSimangaliso** | **443** | **??** | **??** | **134** | **0.3** | **60** | **50** |
| **TOTAL** | | | | **2089** | | **1050** | **1220** |