



(Trevor Ohlssen, Wikimedia)

Parks don't guarantee conservation success, a [new study](#) by David Western and colleagues in PLoS ONE reminds us. Compiling census data from 270 studies over the last 25 years, they found that large mammal populations in Kenya are declining just as rapidly within national parks as in other parts of the country. Poaching, the authors say, is not likely to account for the declines, because Kenya's parks have high quality security services. But the parks are poorly designed, covering "only a modest portion of the annual migratory range of large herbivores." And they may not be managed as intensively as necessary for some species. Western told [EcoTone](#) that elephants which have been limited to the relatively small spaces of parks are turning formerly woody areas into grasslands, reducing the suitability of the parks for species like giraffe and impala. Interestingly, Western and his co-authors point to another study showing that wildlife on private and community reserves in Kenya are doing better, perhaps because of stronger local support for conservation efforts associated with higher local economic returns. The unsurprising bottom line: protected areas may be necessary to wildlife persistence, but their mere existence is far from sufficient.