

Mountain Bongo Surveillance Project



Conservation status

The Mountain or Eastern Bongo is one of only two Bongo sub-species existing in Africa. The other sub-species is the Low-land Bongo which is found in the low-land forests of West Africa, the Congo Basin, Central African Republic and South Sudan.

The Mountain Bongo is a critically endangered species only found in Kenya. Fewer than 100 individuals are believed to survive in the wild. Their known distribution is restricted to parts of the Aberdare and Mt. Kenya forests east of the Rift Valley, as well as small, especially vulnerable groups in the Mau and Eburu forests west of the Rift Valley.

The Bongo is susceptible to disease such as rinderpest and various predators such as lion have taken their toll. But the most serious threat is the growing human population living near the forests. With population increase there is a greater demand for meat regardless of source. Poaching, together with illegal logging activities over recent years, has been a real threat to the Bongo and their habitats.

Conservation efforts

The Bongo Surveillance Project (BSP), established in 2004 and supported by Rhino Ark, is dedicated to the protection and monitoring of the Mountain Bongo and their habitats. The BSP works closely with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the Kenya Forest Service (KFS). The Bongo inhabits home ranges up to 15 km². It is an ideal "umbrella species" and, therefore, a symbol of Kenya's remaining high-forest ecosystems. Saving the Bongo can help conserve a significant part of Kenya's mountain forest ecosystems, thereby protecting both biodiversity and Kenya's vital hydrological resources.

Preventing the extinction of the Bongo, while ensuring the continuing recovery of this sub-species, can only be achieved by local conservation. Thus the BSP works closely with local communities that are key to the success of the programme.

The BSP team collects essential research data during their specialised field studies, forming quantitative information to monitor the surviving Bongo groups. Through this monitoring, together with the outreach on education and awareness, the BSP has the potential to preserve a flagship species for Kenya's forests.

Monitoring and Surveillance – The Bongo Surveillance Unit (BSU) is a group of experienced trackers from local communities supporting conservation. They conduct regular patrols, collect evidence of Bongo presence, report on any illegal activity and remove snares and traps. The BSU collected over 300 snares and 19 elephant spear traps in a two month period during 2012/3. Through their reports, a clearer picture is emerging on the actual range and population of Bongo. The surveillance also provides vital scientific data to form an information baseline about Bongo habitat utilisation and threats.

Education and Awareness

– The BSP is spearheading the establishment of Bongo Wildlife Clubs to raise awareness in the local community about the environment and the Bongo in particular and organize education programmes for schools.

Mountain Bongo characteristics

- **Colour: bright chestnut with old males almost black; 12 to 14 vertical white stripes**
- **Size: height of 1-3 metres; length of 1.8-2.4 metres**

Fencing – The Aberdare Fence, supported by Rhino Ark through fund raising for construction and maintenance, serves as a deterrent to would-be poachers and logging gangs, while keeping wildlife away from neighbouring farmland. It has provided a safer environment for wildlife, and the Aberdares are home to most of the remaining Mountain Bongo population.



Community Projects - The BSP implements small-size projects to engage communities in conservation. These include: micro-smart solar power grid and solar lamps, improved agricultural practices, afforestation, rain water harvesting, fish farming and bee-keeping.

Re-introduction – In the 1960's and 70's, wild Bongo from Kenya were exported to zoos in the USA. In 2004, a project to reintroduce descendants of the exported Bongo back to Kenya was initiated. Male and female Bongo have been repatriated to Mt. Kenya under this project, which aims to re-establish a self sustaining population in the Bongo's native habitat.

With additional funding, the BSP would be able to strengthen and expand its conservation activities. Visit www.mountainbongo.com for the BSP wish list and support the conservation of the Mountain Bongo and its habitat by making a donation through www.justgiving.com/mountainbongo.

