



20 Years
ANNIVERSARY

20 YEARS OF MOUNTAIN BONGO CONSERVATION



A 20TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION

2004 - 2024

OUR REMARKABLE JOURNEY

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

2024 marks a significant milestone for Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy (MKWC) as we celebrate our 20-year remarkable journey of conservation excellence.

Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy has over the years emerged as a leading global centre that has made a significant contribution by spearheading the breeding and rewinding of the critically endangered Mountain Bongo antelope. The Breeding and Rewilding Programme aims to restore and reintroduce the antelopes into their natural habitat. Today, our Mountain Bongo Programme is a critical contributor to the realization of the Kenya Government's Mountain Bongo National Recovery Action Plan launched at the Conservancy in 2019.

Over the last two decades, we have nurtured four generations of Mountain Bongos after repatriating them from various zoos in North America and introducing them into the existing captive herd to breed. In 2022, we established the world's first Mountain Bongo Sanctuary – The Mawingu Mountain Bongo Sanctuary – a 776-acre reserve area dedicated to rewilding.

Within the first year of opening Mawingu Sanctuary, we were able to successfully translocate 10 adult Mountain Bongos, and already four calves have been born within the Sanctuary. As of April 2024, I am happy to announce that we now have a total population of 78 Mountain Bongos, of which 14 are in the Sanctuary. This is a testament to the work of our Conservancy team, led by Dr Robert Aruho, working in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Forest Service.

In January 2024, Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy proudly gained membership into the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the global authority on nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Joining the IUCN solidifies the significance of our efforts in preserving, conserving and rewilding the Mountain Bongo which is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN red list with fewer than 100 individuals left in the wild.



We are just at the outset of our journey, but we have already made commendable strides in charting a path that we remain dedicated to follow.

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, donors and visitors who have encouraged and supported us in getting this work done over the past two decades. Special thanks to the team at MKWC for their hard work and dedication in making all of this possible.

I invite you all to continue with us on this journey as we look to the future with hope and determination, striving towards our goal of growing the Mountain Bongo population to 750 individuals over the next 50 years as envisioned in the National Recovery Action Plan.

Nyawira Kariuki

Chairperson, Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy Trust

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Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy is a leading global centre that has made a memorable contribution towards the breeding and rewilding of the critically endangered Mountain Bongo.

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ABOUT US



At the core of our effort is the critically endangered Mountain Bongo, a forest antelope endemic to Kenya, whose population in the wild has drastically declined over the years. No species should reach such a precarious state.

Through the Conservancy's Breeding and Rewilding Programme, we are restoring the habitat and returning the Mountain Bongo to their natural home in the wild.

At the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy, we are actively contributing to the efforts led by the Government and the private sector to restore, preserve, and protect the region's natural habitats and wildlife.



The MKWC Animal Orphanage serves as a live classroom where visitors can witness first-hand the current pressing conservation challenges and their impact on various wildlife species. Here, animals injured, orphaned, or displaced by habitat destruction are brought to receive treatment and, whenever possible, they are released back into their natural habitats.



Our vital community conservation education programme plays a crucial role in our work. By directly engaging with young people through partnerships, organizations, community and schools, we inspire them to become future stewards of the planet, encouraging them to protect it.



The Mount Kenya montane forest, the natural habitat of the Mountain Bongo, has been shrinking over many years due to illegal logging and forest clearance for agricultural production, settlements and infrastructure development. To address this, we are actively restoring and replanting indigenous trees as part of our sustainable conservation efforts. In the last 6 years, MKWC has planted over 40,000 indigenous trees, covering 350 acres, and contributing to the enhancement of the area's forest cover forming part of the habitat for the fully rewilded Mountain Bongos.



Our habitat restoration programme is conducted in collaboration with neighboring communities. Tree seedlings used for planting and restoration are sourced from local Collaborative Forest Associations (CFAs), and community members participate in planting and caring for the trees until they are well-established.



All of these initiatives have been advanced by Mr. Humphrey Kariuki, the Patron of the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy, who has a lifelong passion for wildlife and a history of supporting conservation efforts in Kenya. In 2014, he became the principal benefactor of the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy.

Mr. Kariuki played a critical role in creating the world's first and only Mountain Bongo Sanctuary. The Mawingu Mountain Bongo Sanctuary is 776 acres of pristine natural forest, on lease from the Kenya Forest Service, which provides a more extensive area to continue rewilding the Mountain Bongo in preparation for survival in the wild.

Mr. Kariuki strongly believes in wildlife species protection and habitat restoration, which aligns well with Kenya's Government initiative to plant 15 billion trees by 2032. The Conservancy aims to plant 5,000 new tree seedlings in the Conservancy every year.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The Conservancy's pioneering work dates back to 1964 when the Government of Kenya, concerned about the declining numbers of Mountain Bongos in Mount Kenya and Aberdares, permitted Don Hunt, then Director of Mount Kenya Game Ranch and founder of the Conservancy, to export Mountain Bongos to American zoos as a safeguard for the species.

This move ensured that if the situation in the wild worsened, the Mountain Bongos would not become extinct and could be reintroduced later when the conditions became right.

Based on this proposal, the Government permitted him to export 36 Mountain Bongos to the USA. These Mountain Bongos bred successfully and became the founder population of the animals in the zoos in the United States. When the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy was established in 2004, 18 Mountain Bongos were repatriated from the USA to kick off the Mountain Bongo Breeding and Rewilding Programme.



2004 - 2024

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME



2004

The Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy was formed as a Kenyan non-profit trust. This is also the year the first Mountain Bongo were repatriated from zoos across North America kicking off the Mountain Bongo Breeding and Rewilding Programme.

2014

Mr. Humphrey Kariuki became the principal benefactor and Patron of the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy.

2019

The National Recovery and Action Plan for the Mountain Bongo was launched at Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy with the goal of growing the Mountain Bongo population to 750 in the next 50 years.

2020

The Kenya Forest Service (KFS) board of directors leased 776-acres of pristine wooded area within the Mount Kenya Forest to establish a Mountain Bongo Sanctuary.

2022

The first five Mountain Bongos were released into the Mawingu Sanctuary, the first-ever Mountain Bongo Sanctuary in Africa and the world, marking a historic milestone in the fight for the animal's survival.

2024

The Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy celebrates its 20th anniversary with the release of 10 Mountain Bongos into the Mawingu Sanctuary and with the importation of Mountain Bongo studs to improve genetic diversity.

BREEDING AND REWILDING THE MOUNTAIN BONGO

The Mountain Bongo, a stunning and critically endangered subspecies of antelope native to Kenya's dense highland forests, has faced a dramatic population decline due to various factors including habitat loss, poaching, disease outbreaks, and fragmentation of their forest habitat. Leading the charge in conservation efforts to re-establish the Mountain Bongo population and restore their habitat for their survival is the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy. This endeavour is executed through a two-step programme comprising breeding and rewilding.

The initial stage involves breeding the Mountain Bongo, with the primary goal being to raise sufficient offspring and prepare them for survival in the wild. In 2004, 18 Mountain Bongos were repatriated from North America and introduced to the existing captive herd at the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy to initiate the breeding programme. These animals successfully acclimatized and adapted to the local conditions, and successfully began to breed.

Throughout the acclimatization and adaptation phase, the population was managed by the team within the Animal Orphanage to facilitate close monitoring. As the Mountain Bongo population grew, they were organised into breeding herds and gradually transitioned into forest paddocks to commence the rewilding process. These herds consist of 8-10 females, one breeding bull and young calves born within the herd. Breeding efforts have proven successful, as evidenced by the continual rise in Mountain Bongo numbers at the Conservancy.

The rewilding stage aims to produce individuals fully primed to thrive in the wild. These individuals are intended to be provided to the Kenya Wildlife Service for translocation to reinforce wild populations or for reintroduction into their former ranges. To facilitate the rewilding of the Mountain Bongo, the Conservancy leased 776-acres of pristine forest land within Mount Kenya Forest from Kenya Forest Service in 2020 and established the Mawingu Mountain Bongo Sanctuary.

This Sanctuary serves as the site for full implementation of the rewilding process for the Mountain Bongo. Select individuals are chosen from the breeding herds to join the Sanctuary. Within the Mawingu Sanctuary, Mountain Bongos are free to roam and fend for themselves.

Presently, the Sanctuary is home to 14 Mountain Bongos, of which 4 have been born there, providing compelling evidence that rewilding the Mountain Bongo in Kenya is not merely a theoretical possibility but a tangible reality. This achievement stands as one of the most remarkable milestones in the 20-year history of the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy.



SUPPORT THE WORK OF OUR CONSERVANCY

To find out more please visit
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