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is the Fundraiser and Coordinator for Bongo Surveillance Project. She has been supporting the Bongo Surveillance Project since 2005 and established the www.mountainbongo.org website.

Exciting News...Bongo have been found in the Maasai Mau forest, part of the Mau complex. The Bongo Surveillance Project (BSP) now have unique evidence from their camera traps placed in this area of forest over the last few months.

The mountain Bongo, *Tragelaphus eurycerus isaaci*, is one of Kenya’s most rare and beautiful antelopes. It is endemic to the Kenya highland forests. Since, last reporting in SWARA’s April 2010 edition BSP have made some very exciting discoveries through the team’s persistent monitoring and surveillance activities.

Mike Prettejohn, Project Manager for BSP, is delighted with the new discovery “This is a very rare find, indeed. This group could have up to 20 bongo. In view of the fact that there are fewer than 100 of this critically endangered sub species of bongo, remaining in the wild, this group is very precious and will need immediate protection”.



Top and below: Mau bongo – Massai Mau Forest – May 2013

This discovery is particularly encouraging as Western Kenya (Eldama Ravine) was originally the location where F.W. Isaacs, the collector for Oldfield Thomas at the Natural History Museum in London, announced the first formal notification of the new sub species. Isaacs sent a letter to The Times in 1901 and in 1902 the discovery was announced formally to the Zoological Society of London.

The BSP field team lead by Peter Mwangi made this new discovery whilst on surveillance in the Maasai Mau Forest, south from Olongorone, observing bongo spoor in this area over the last few months. With several failed attempts to place a camera trap earlier this year, they were rewarded with success during their May 2013 expedition. Photographs emerged of males, females and young. This area, unlike parts of the Southwest Mau, has extremely dense forest, with few elephant trails and little human encroachment. Besides the presence of this isolated group of undisturbed bongo, bushbuck and duiker prevail in healthy numbers. The rare yellow back duiker was recorded by the BSP camera trap in July 2013.

The monitoring of bongo during 2011 and 2012 in the SW Mau forest, close to Kericho has been challenging. The team returned to this particular area of forest as original surveillance three years ago had indicated bongo were present from the dung collected and tested previously. There were high levels of poaching. During the first three months the BSP team monitoring from the forest field base collected and dismantled some 300 ground snares and 21 elephant spears. Also noted



PHOTOS BY: BSP CAMERA TRAP

and reported during this period was active poaching with dogs, established poacher's camps, the burning of charcoal and illegal timber activities. Working, with the assistance of KWS and KFS this area has now improved and there is a substantial reduction in these activities. Elephant, bushbuck and duiker have returned in numbers to this area, as shown by the recent camera trap records. The BSP have records of bongo passing through close to this area, it is hoped they will permanently return. New tracks have been recorded and dung collected.

For the first time ever we also have live video footage of bongo from a donated new technology camera trap, being trialled for the first time in the Aberdares. The BSP systematically monitor the Bongo at the Honi in the Aberdares. Mike Prettejohn adds "After all these years to finally capture a video, also showing young, we can demonstrate bongo in this specific area are not only surviving, they are breeding well, with the protection of the Aberdares fence and regular monitoring from the team".

The BSP has records until most recently, of bongo in the north Aberdares. One of our best camera trap photographs has been taken here. The BSP also runs an effective conservation – education programme through the Bongo Wildlife Clubs. These are located near to last remaining bongo. The Bongo Wildlife Clubs now



It is Ragati Mt Kenya (Now labelled as an Eburu bongo)



PHOTOS BY: BSP CAMERA TRAP

This HONI group, in the Aberdares is now being recorded even in the daylight. The surveillance in the South Aberdares, from the Mathioyas to the Maragua River and the Chania and Gura further north has found bongo evidence passing through but sadly no records of a permanent group.

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extend to 19 schools. In the Mau there are 6 associated schools, Aberdares – 6 schools, Mt Kenya – 2 schools and Eburu – 5 schools. The outreach effort has reached over 15,000 people in communities living close to bongo habitat.

Vital scientific data is collected from the Bongo Surveillance expeditions, forming a crucial baseline about bongo locations, habitat utilisation and threats.

The team collect bongo dung which is stored for genetic assessment. They also conduct camera-trap surveys in all the "bongo hotspots". In addition, whilst monitoring these areas they report and record all observations by GPS. This can include poaching and illegal timber activities. Over the years, this has involved extensive de-snaring exercises in known bongo habitats. New bongo ranges are also surveyed to verify presence or absence of the antelope as a comprehensive population recovery effort evolves. All data collected is mapped and can highlight if habitat

changes have had impact on bongo population.

The team of expert trackers is drawn from the communities residing in areas adjacent to bongo hotspots. They have a long-term commitment to protecting the remaining wild bongo and work closely with KFS and KWS. The Mountain Bongo is in need of immediate protection, as a forest-dependent species and flagship for Kenya's remaining high-forest ecosystems. With home ranges up to 15km² the bongo is an ideal "umbrella species"; saving the bongo can help conserve a significant fraction of Kenya's montane forest ecosystem thereby protecting both biodiversity and Kenya's hydrological resources. Timber extraction, forest degradation and poaching are the principal threats to the survival of the Mountain Bongo.

Camera trap images have also been taken of bongo in Kenya's Eburu.

The Mt Kenya bongos are monitored regularly. This group is located in remote and challenging terrain. See

PHOTO BY: PETER MUMENE, BSP SCHOOL COORDINATOR



Kariki Village - Aberdares, with Logiss Solar team after village installed Micro Solar Grid.

2013 camera trap photograph.

One of the Aberdares communities have most recently benefitted from the installation of a new solar micro smart grid. This donated new technology system from Logiss has given free solar lighting to the Kariki community in the N. Aberdares. The individual homes and the primary school are now saving on precious income and there is the added benefit of a reduction in respiratory health issues through use of kerosene. The BSP works in partnership KWS,

KFS, Rhino Ark and Mt Kenya Trust. It has in addition received support from individual donors, Finlays (Kenya) Ltd, international zoos from the USA/ Canada/Europe, the Eden Wildlife Trust, Rufford Small Grants and the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation, Tusk Trust, and CETRAD.

Previous Bongo related- SWARA articles – March 2004, March 2008, April 2011. ●

Description of Bongo and Behaviour

The Bongo is the largest and heaviest of the forest antelope and is one of the most brightly coloured of all, with the line of its back not straight but slightly hunched. A large male can weigh up to 450kgs. It can measure almost 8 feet from nose to tail, and can stand almost 5 feet in height. The bright chestnut colour of the Bongo becomes darker with age. There are 12 to 14 vertical white stripes on the shoulders, flanks and hindquarters, with other white patches about the face and legs. Their ears are very large and broad

giving excellent hearing. As young males mature they leave their maternal groups and join other smaller male groups, whilst the older males often remain solitary. The females remain in small groups. Bongos are shy, elusive animals. They are mostly browsers and are therefore restricted to areas with abundant year round growth of leaves and shoots of shrubs. They are fond of rotting wood and will range widely in their quest for appropriate vegetation.



The Mountain Bongo Diary

1970's – Survey by Kenya Game Dept – estimated 500 Mountain Bongo in Aberdares. Export of Bongo to Zoos worldwide 1980's – Wild Population severely damaged by outbreak of rhinderpest, lion, poaching and destruction of natural habitat

1988 – Last sighting at Ark – Aberdares.

1990's – Mountain Bongo believed to be close to extinction in Kenya

2003 – Mike Prettejohn (specialist bongo) requested by KWS to investigate status of Bongo 2004 – Team set up to determine if and where any Bongo surviving. KWS - photograph of Bongo thought to be first photograph for a decade. Repatriation of Bongo from USA Zoo to Mt Kenya Conservancy. (18 Bongo)

2005 – Evidence of Bongo collected through surveillance in Aberdares 2006 - First trap camera photograph of Bongo in the Aberdares. Surveillance extends to cover areas of Mt Kenya, The Mau, Eburu.

2006/2007 – UNDP grant to Bongo Surveillance project – Launch of Bongo Wildlife Clubs – community conservation programme

2010 – Bongo IUCN workshop – Strategy for bongo with key stakeholders

2013 – First Mau complex bongo camera trap photograph and Live video bongo footage (Honi Aberdares)