



AS IT IS

New Hope for Kenya's Forest Antelope

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An environmental group says a program to save one of Kenya's most famous animals has returned a group of mountain bongos to the wild.

The International Union for **Conservation** of Nature, or IUCN, said disease, illegal hunting and forest loss have left fewer than 100 wild mountain bongos.

But last week, conservationists released five of the large creatures into the 3.1 square kilometer Mawingu Mountain Bongo **Sanctuary** near Mount Kenya.

"The mountain bongo is one of Kenya's most important **iconic** animals," said Najib Balala. He is the country's minister of tourism and wildlife. He spoke after **cutting the ribbon** at the sanctuary's opening ceremony on Wednesday.

The bongo's release is the high point of a breeding and rewilding program that began in 2004.

Rewilding is a term that means planning the introduction of a rare animal back into the wild.

The goal is to have 50 to 70 bongos in the sanctuary by 2025, and 750 by 2050, the government says.

"This is like the first step in the recovery," said Isaac Lekoolool, head of veterinary services at the Kenya Wildlife Service, or KWS.

Mountain bongos once moved in large numbers. But the few remaining animals live in forested areas around Kenya. Their bodies have thin, white stripes making them easy to recognize.

The IUCN said local people are hunting the animals including with dogs.

Robert Aruho is head of veterinary services at the Mount Kenya Wildlife Conservancy, or MKWC. He said, "This **species** is being driven to extinction in the wild unless something is done quickly."

Extinction is a term that means the complete disappearance of a species.

Aruho added that MKWC has set up community conservation, education, and empowerment programs to bring attention to and help reduce the human threats to the animal.

MKWC has also involved local communities in planting over 35,000 local tree species around Mount Kenya to help the damaged forest.

To help maintain genetic health in the breeding program, approval has been given to import bongos from Europe and America, Aruho said.

I'm John Russell.

Jefferson Kahinju reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for Learning English.

Words in This Story

conservation – *n.* a careful preservation and protection of something such as animals or a natural place

sanctuary – *n.* a place where someone or something is protected or given shelter

iconic – *adj.* widely recognized and well-established

cut the ribbon – *idiom* to officially open a building or center

species – *n.* a group of animals or plants that are similar and can produce young animals or plants : a group of related animals or plants that is smaller than a genus

