

Project Update: September 2008

The aim of the Mountain Bongo Community/School Wildlife Clubs is to conserve and protect this Critically Endangered sub-species of bongo, by working together with local communities and schools. The project works in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Services.

Area	School
North Aberdares	Kamburaini Primary School
Mid Aberdares	Mwiega Bondeni Primary School
South Aberdares	Gichami Primary School
South Aberdares	Karurumo Primary School

New Schools – part of programme from June 2008:

Area	School
Mt Kenya	Kiangemi Primary School
Mt Kenya	Githirathiru Primary School

Future School

Eburu is an area for a new Bongo Wildlife Club, due to bongo being identified as living in small numbers in this area of forest, through surveillance activity.

To be progressed during the Autumn Term 2008.

The Bongo Wildlife Clubs project

The Bongo Wildlife Clubs consist of approximately 40 children in each school, with ages range from 10-12years (Grade 5 &6). The Wildlife Clubs each have a Patron, and community involvement. They are well supported and encouraged by the teachers and Headmaster. The schools were selected to be part of the project due to their proximity of identified bongo locations.

Background of the Bongo “Surveillance” Project

The Mountain Bongo Surveillance Project has carried out a systematic survey over the last 3 years in the bongo’s natural habitat essentially in the Aberdares and most recently on Mt Kenya. It is the first detailed survey of bongo for over 30 years, using new technology such as GPS and scientific analysis.

The mountain bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus isaaci*) is the largest and heaviest of the forest antelopes.

The Bongo Surveillance Project team has completed an extensive tracking programme in the Aberdares and Mt Kenya. During this process the team have successfully collected bongo dung for DNA analysis. This has formed the basis of some most valuable evidence. In addition camera trap records have also provided visual records of the remaining bongo and their locations.

It was feared that, as few bongo had been seen over the last few years, they may have disappeared completely from these forests. This initial research was invaluable and proved a plan of action was vital to protect these remaining herds. The evidence collected indicates there are potentially fewer than 150 mountain bongo remaining in the wild.

Way Forward to Conserve the Mountain Bongo:-

- 1). Working in collaboration with the communities and with key partners such as Kenyan Wildlife Services.
- 2) Identifying and protecting these key areas where bongo are living is an immediate priority.
- 3) By engaging the support of the community through the local schools, there is an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to conservation and protecting the bongo and its natural habitat.

The project set out to achieve the following aims:-

- To support four to six schools with an educational programme in the Aberdares and Mt Kenya region, in locations, near to identified mountain bongo.
- By arranging familiarisation visits, for the pupils and community to Aberdares National Park, Mt Kenya Mountain Bongo Repatriation Project.
- To support an activity programme for the pupils of the local Wildlife Clubs.
- Tree planting programme.
- To inform the children and communities of the importance of the value of Mt Kenya and the Aberdares, for water, biodiversity, tourism, and employment.

What has been Happening?

The schools and associated communities have been so supportive of the programme and have participated in a number of ranging activities coordinated locally by the Wildlife Club Schools Coordinator – Peter Munene.

This is the report of Peter Munene – Bongo Wildlife Clubs Coordinator

Special Activities:-

- **Mountain Bongo Drawing** Competition – The selection of best entries were presented and nominated in collaboration with KWS.
- **Presentations to schools** – from Bongo Surveillance teams on their tracking activities, and the impact of the involvement of the project to their own lives.
- **Tree Planting project.** 250 plants per school donated by Shah Chemist, Nairobi Indigenous trees, planted included cedar and *Podocarpus*. The schools have been keen to be part of this project. Difficulties encountered in maintaining the trees have been mostly due to lack of access of water. At North School Kamburaini the nearest water is collected by donkey/jerry cans from 10 km away to service all school needs. Peter is working with the headmaster to look at options such as repairing existing water tanks and creating a well. The schools will be supported where possible in maintaining the trees, and this will vary according to each school's need.
- **Born Free Foundation Film Unit Educational Films:-**
As part of the educational programme for the Bongo Wildlife Clubs and for the community also, visits to the 6 schools were arranged during June (14th-21st). This was very successful and an educational experience for all attendees.

The distances covered by the mobile film bus was 590 km for all 6 schools. The impact and learning is clear to read in the essays that were submitted after the film shows. Subjects of the films included poaching, bushmeat, wildlife and human conflict issues and solutions.

- **Sangare Patrons and Teachers – educational visit – 22 May.**

To learn more of tree care and conservation - Kamburani school

*Where competitions have been arranged, prizes and certificates have been awarded. These have where possible been donated by donors essentially from the UK.

Educational Lectures:

- i) Water
- ii) Forest and trees
- iii) Pollution
- iv) Soil

April and May

- Soil care and tree planting, preparation of ground for tree plants
- Understanding of “bigger picture” of the trees and forest and their importance.

Tree planting:- This activity has been educational for the community and has boosted morale to the community groups who have started small tree nurseries.

Environmental Speech Prize Giving Day

On the 28th May, Peter Munene delivered an Environmental speech to 200 parents and other interested groups at Karumo School on prize giving day. The speech covered conservation and tree planting. It was well received by school officials, Area chief and Area councillor who attended, together with all the pupils.

June and July

- Water – Water cycle, making safe water, water harvesting and storage.
- Water pollution.
- Activity – Harvesting rain water, use of dams, wells, water tanks.

Transport to schools for the coordinator is by public means and where possible using Bongo Surveillance transport, if team are on surveillance duties in nearby area. With inflation at over 30% this year and fuel prices, this area has been a challenge.

“Africa Our Home” – Pan African Conservation project educational books (www.paceproject.net) have been allocated to each of the schools and have added to the knowledge and ideas in each of these areas. Peter Munene is working out the best ways to utilise some of the activity sheets provided on the CD’s. The materials provided are an excellent resource to integrate into the programme. There are plans next term to create a quiz for the subjects taught from the “Africa Out Home” book.

Future Plans from New Term - September 2008

Aberdares and Mt Kenya Educational Centre Educational Visits

In October 2007 we managed 2 trips taking some of the Wildlife Club members to the Aberdares National park for an educational visit with KWS. This year with new funding we are taking further children from the Clubs in September 2008. We will submit more details in our next report.

We plan in October 2008, to take 3 trips to the Mt Kenya William Horden Educational Foundation Centre. The learning from these activities for the children will be to actually see the repatriated Bongo, that originated from Kenya 30 years ago and whose descendents have been returned in the last 4 years, as part of a research project.

Schools close from 20 November to January 2009 for the school holidays.

Conclusion

The outreach during this year now includes an additional 2 more schools and potentially reaches, up to 2000 individuals, as not only are school Bongo Wildlife Clubs members learning, other pupils in the school are hearing and over seeing their activities together with all the families, and extended members of the community.

Peter Munene our wildlife Club Coordinator has seen the Bongo Wildlife Clubs programme make a successful impact in the community. There has been an overall improved display of teamwork from club members and stakeholders. New funding has made all the difference in the delivery of the key objectives. The learning for the children has been created in a fun enjoyable way, but at the same time educating the community, of the real need to place conservation as a priority.

The project has seen recognition on an international basis with the publication of Mountain Bongo feature article in the SWARA magazine.

It has been positive to also see Kamburaini School taking the conservation message into their school vision and values. Their new school motto has been inscribed on a board, on entry to the school.

During the autumn term it is also planned to introduce the Bongo Wildlife Club members into the national Kenyan Wildlife Clubs Scheme, this will require some administration, and is being investigated. There are benefits to be gained, from maximising all available resources for the pupils.

Some new developments, during July occurred. Two actual photographs, of bongo were taken on location of mother and baby Bongo in the Aberdares. Also two bongo were captured on the camera traps on Mt Kenya, to verify after all these years, a group could actually exist on Mt. Kenya. Schools in the nearby area are engaged to help support and conserve the Bongo in this area.

Enclosed in Report:-

Photographs – Schools, Mountain Bongo (live photo), Signage schools

Speech – From Headmaster, Kamburaini School after Born Free Foundation visits.

Essay – from a school prize winner, Born Free Foundation – Mobile Educational Films visit.

