

PRESS STATEMENT: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

17 Mountain Bongo Arrive in Kenya, Marking a Historic Milestone for Conservation

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On Sunday February 23rd, 17 mountain bongos were safely repatriated from Loxahatchee, Florida to a specially designed sanctuary on the northeastern slope of Mt Kenya. The bongos' arrival significantly advances Kenya's long-term recovery of this iconic and critically endangered flagship species. Driven by a multi-stakeholder partnership, this repatriation and recovery project leverages resources and expertise at many levels, engaging local, national and international partners. The new bongo sanctuary is managed by the **Meru Bongo and Rhino Conservation Trust (MBRCT)**, Kenya's first-ever, conservation-related, public-private-community partnership.

The repatriated bongos were donated to the government of Kenya by the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation (RSCF) in Florida, USA, which has researched, bred and managed mountain bongos since 1991. The complex shipment was achieved through close collaboration between **RSCF, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Tusk Trust, DHL and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).**

Dr. Paul Reillo, RSCF Founder and President, commented: *“There is simply no higher calling for humanity than to protect what remains of nature. The mountain bongo's story of decline and recovery has been entirely on our watch, and the species' future depends on all of us. The bongo's resilience is a story of hope for wildlife and people alike, merging elevated partnerships, proven expertise, vital resources and amazing courage. This humbling, profound project exemplifies true wildlife conservation in real time.”*

In consultation with the project team, RSCF carefully selected 17 bongos comprising 12 females and five males from its large breeding herds. To prepare them for travel, they were segregated for pre-shipment testing and preparation, as per KWS protocols, in a specially designed corral-chute system. They were vaccinated for pathogens and given a pioneering, recombinant-DNA vaccine to help protect against tick-borne disease. The vaccine was developed specifically for the bongo project by the Infectious Diseases Laboratory (IDL) at the University of Georgia, USA in collaboration with Kenya's International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). For three weeks RSCF staff shifted the animals daily within the corral system to minimize stress during the crating process.

On 22 February, all 17 animals were successfully crated and given a long-acting sedative to ease their 30-hour journey. The animals left Palm Beach International Airport on February 23rd in a Mountain-Bongo-branded DHL Boeing 767 that carried the antelopes 7146 nautical miles to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Kenya. The bongos were

transported in custom-built crates, alongside six tons of pelleted feed. Three US animal-care experts, including a wildlife veterinarian, accompanied the animals during their journey.

Mike Parra, CEO DHL Express Europe, said: *“We are so proud to be able to leverage the power and expertise of our global network to assist in transporting these critically endangered Mountain Bongo to their new sanctuary in Kenya. The logistics of moves such as this are incredibly complex, with the welfare of the animals being everyone’s top priority. A huge thank you to our partners at Tusk, Rare Species Conservatory Foundation and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, and everyone involved in making this important conservation mission a success”.*

Upon their arrival, the Kenya Wildlife Service transported the animals 250 kilometers by road, where they were released into a 20-acre sanctuary on the slopes of Mt. Kenya. The sanctuary, set aside for the bongos by the Kenya Forest Service and built by the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and MBRCT, helps propel Kenya’s National Bongo Action and Recovery Plan. It serves as a secure home and breeding ground for the mountain bongos, to support re-establishing a sustainable bongo population across the Mount Kenya ecosystem and beyond.

Mike Watson, CEO of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy says: *“Bringing the mountain bongos back to Kenya is a great moment in the restoration of the country’s natural heritage. For decades, these animals have been largely absent from the very forests where they belong, and this project will be crucial in reversing that loss. Seeing them set foot on Kenyan soil again is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when organizations work together.”*

During her impassioned speech after the animals’ arrival, Kenya’s Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Rebecca Miano, highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach to conservation. *“Conservation is not the responsibility of a single entity, organization or government. Rather it is a shared duty requiring the involvement of all, including government, community, private sector, international collaborators and individuals. It demands innovation, it demands resources, and above all a collective will to act as guided by the highest moral imperative. This moment by all means marks a significant milestone in our collective efforts to conserve and even restore one of the world’s most endangered species.”*

The mountain bongos’ return to Kenya occurred approximately 20 generations since their export to Europe and the U.S. in the early 1970s. The 2025 repatriation marks the culmination of decades of careful planning, breeding, and reintroduction work aimed at restoring bongo populations across their former range.

As one of Kenya's flagship species, the mountain bongo personifies Kenya's high-mountain forest ecosystems. Bongo conservation offers far-reaching benefits to the landscape, contributing to the conservation of many other species of fauna and flora that share its habitat. But the mountain bongos' return is not just a victory for conservation, it is a victory for communities as well. MBRCT Trustee, Faith Murithi said: *"Bongos are the most wonderful animals I have ever seen in Kenya. The bongos arrived well, and we are proud for them to be here. We will take the initiative once again to care for these animals."* The return of the mountain bongo has already resulted in the creation of 17 jobs for local community members and support for local schools and health clinics is underway.

KEY FACTS:

- Less than 100 mountain bongos remain in the wild.
- The mountain bongo antelope is the world's largest and most endangered forest antelope, endemic to Kenya's high-mountain forests.
- The 2025 bongo repatriation marks approximately 20 bongo generations since their original export to the U.S. and Europe during the early 1970s.
- Bongos have been bred and managed for species recovery by the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation (RSCF) in Florida, USA since 1991. RSCF partnered with the United Nations to spearhead the first bongo repatriation to Kenya in 2004. All of the animals were donated by RSCF to the Kenyan government. The mountain bongos were segregated for pre-shipment testing and preparation, as per Kenya Wildlife Service protocols, in a specially designed corral-chute system.
- Principal project partners are members of the Meru Bongo and Rhino Conservation Trust: Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forest Service, Meru County Government, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Kamulu and Ntimaka Community Forest Associations and the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation. Other project partners include Tusk Trust and DHL.