



## **TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR KENYA'S ROAN**

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### **BACKGROUND BRIEFING**

THERE ARE ONLY 12 ROAN ANTELOPES (*HIPPOTRAGUS EQUINUS LANGHELDI*) LEFT IN KENYA. UNLESS IMMEDIATE ACTION IS TAKEN, KENYA WILL LOSE THIS BIOLOGICAL TREASURE.

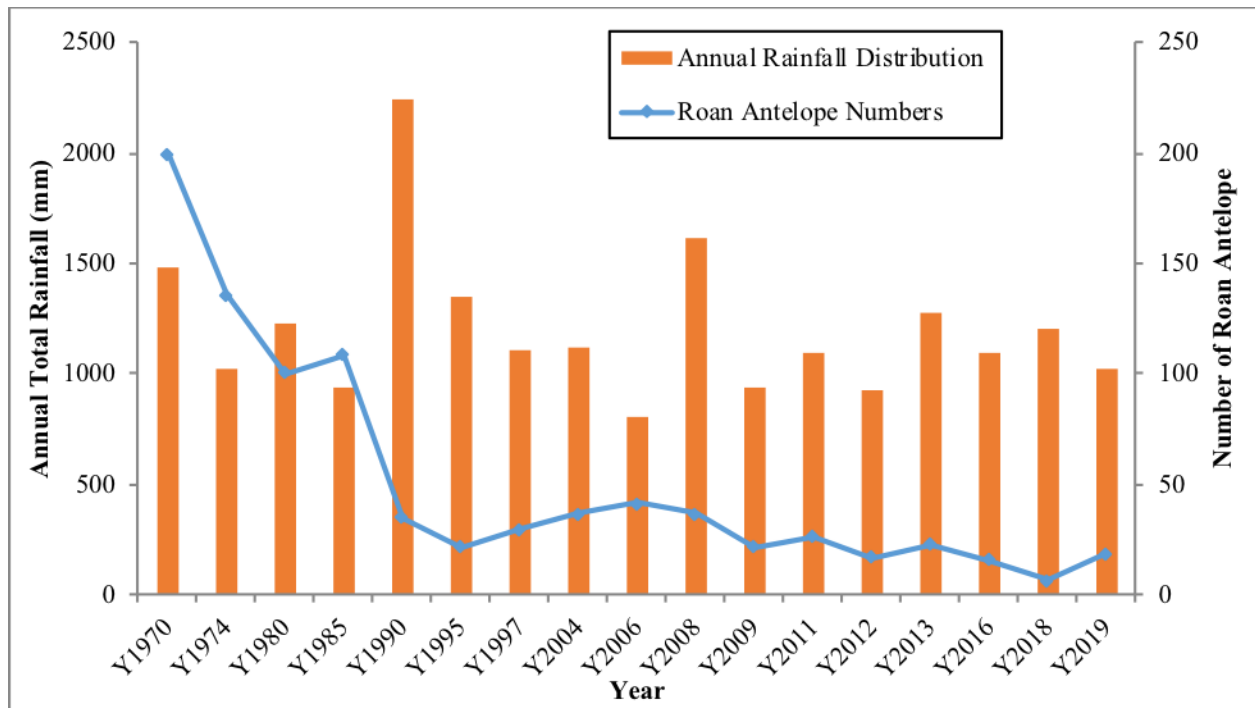
Once widely distributed through 34 countries in eastern, central, southern and West Africa, the Roan population has seen rapid decline over the last 40 years. It is estimated that 76,000 remain across Africa, with 2/3 of the population decreasing. Roan are primarily concentrated in four countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Zambia, and Tanzania. In Kenya, Roan historically occupied a large range from South-western Kenya, northwards to Mt Elgon, Cherangani Hills, Thika, Kitui, and East of Chyulu Hills. They are now locally extinct in most former ranges, with just 12 remaining in Ruma National Park (RNP).

Ruma National Park, which covers an area of 120 km<sup>2</sup> in southwestern Kenya, was established initially as a Game Reserve in 1966 and subsequently as a National Park in 1983 with one of its

core values being to protect the locally endemic Roan antelopes. Despite investment into anti-poaching and overall Park management the Roan population within Ruma National Park has shown a steady decline over the past 50 years. The prime reason for this was initially poaching by the local community for meat and traditional practices (e.g. use of horns for traditional musical instruments and skin for burial ceremonies). Once this threat was contained the population had reached such low levels that predation from leopard and hyena on the Roan antelope calves was the major reason for their continued decline. Ongoing climatic changes, in particular more frequent and longer droughts, further cause the Lambwe River, the only source of water in RNP, to dry up thus putting enormous stress on Roan, whose body condition easily deteriorates due to dehydration.

Similar situations of precipitous population declines have been recorded within Kenya for the Hirola. Targeted conservation efforts placing the Hirola in a predator-proof sanctuary have resulted in population increase to a point where the animals can be reintroduced into the wild at a scale that can accommodate losses from predation. Based on expert advice from South Africa and similar examples in southern Africa where Roan Antelope have been brought back from very low numbers to viable breeding populations, Kenya Wildlife Service through the National Recovery and Action Plan for Roan Antelope in Kenya 2020-2030 will implement the recommendations of the plan to rescue and supplement the small remaining population.

**Roan population trends in the Ruma National Park:**



## WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS OF POPULATION DECLINE?

The rapid Roan population declines are attributed to a variety of threats, including:

1. Predation of young Roan Antelope by Hyenas
2. Habitat deterioration due to fires
3. Poaching
4. Suitable habitat loss due to bush encroachment and wild fires
5. Water scarcity and access to water for Roan Antelope
6. Inbreeding suppression
7. Disease threats
8. Climate change and drought
9. Competition with other grazers



*A group of roan antelopes in Ruma National Park (Picture Courtesy of Kenya Wildlife Service).*

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The situation for Kenya's Roan is acute and extremely time-sensitive. We have a window of opportunity to reverse the negative population trend before any further losses result in population collapse. Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has therefore partnered with Back to Africa, a

South African not-for profit organisation specialised in wildlife restoration projects. Through field visit, staff interviews and existing data on Roan population parameters and threats, a **two-step crisis action plan** has been developed:

### 1. STEP ONE (*in situ*)

Establish a predator-proof sanctuary in one corner of Ruma National Park where the Roan Antelope currently live, and remove all the predators through trapping and release into the main park. This will leave the Roan in a safe enclosure in prime habitat for the animals. Enclosing the population for control and surveillance will further enhance security and enable sufficient water provision, as well as allow for genetic manipulation.

### 2. STEP TWO (*ex situ*)

Infusion of new genes into the population. Finding a solution to the genetic bottleneck that has occurred in the RNP Roan population is critical for its survival. To this end efforts are being made to source outside *langheldi* genes to refresh the population. Sourcing wild Roan from neighbouring countries is being pursued, as well possible importation of East African Roan from European zoos, with a potential captive breeding project being proposed at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in the Laikipia area of Kenya, which can create a seedbed for genetic refreshment of the existing population.

## WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

The costs of the project are outlined below. We are currently seeking financial support for Step One of the Action Plan, namely the construction of the predator-proof sanctuary for Roan in Ruma National Park.

RUMA ROAN CAPEX	RESPONSIBLE BODY	USD (\$)
EIA	KWS	8,000
Ranger accommodation 1 unit	Contract	45,000
Water articulation (50 cu Tank 3 troughs each 1000 mt from tank)	Contract	65,000
Fence 15.00 Kms	Contract	435,000
Landcruiser x1		60,000
Tractor 75 hp 4x4		45,000
Trailer x1		4,500
Gyro mower x1		8,000
2000 Lt water bowser x2		8,000

Radios 5 x hand helds		4,000
Domestic water for rangers	Contract	2,500
Rangers power supply @ 7500 each		15,000
<b>Equipment &amp; infrastructure sub-total</b>		<b>700,000</b>
Contingency @ 9.5%		66,500
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>766,500</b>

