



Audubon Nature Institute
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For Immediate Release

Critically Endangered Eastern Bongo Born at Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center

One of the first births at the recently launched Alliance For Sustainable Wildlife (ASW)

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(New Orleans, La.) - It didn't take long for the groundbreaking conservation partnership between Audubon Nature Institute and San Diego Zoo Global to script a significant success story: the birth of a baby Eastern bongo, a critically endangered species of antelope battling for survival in the jungles and forests of Africa.

Just months after its first animals arrived at Audubon's West Bank campus in Lower Coast Algiers, staffers at the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center welcomed the female bongo calf on the morning of December 11.

The bongo is the largest forest-dwelling antelope species and one of the most distinctive, sporting a glossy chestnut or orange colored coat, large ears, eye-catching vertical white stripes and long horns that spiral as high as three feet.

The Audubon Nature Institute/San Diego Zoo Global collaboration – known as the Alliance for Sustainable Wildlife – is akin to a modern-day ark designed to preserve species that are vulnerable in the wild and to sustain populations in human care.

The plight of the bongo is a textbook case for the initiative.

There are only about 100 of the animals remaining in the wild and their numbers continue to dwindle due to habitat loss from illegal logging, hunting and transmission of disease from grazing cattle.

“Zoos may be the last hope for the Eastern bongo,” said Michelle Hatwood, curator of Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center.

“Bongo conservation in the wild is ongoing, but the effort continues to meet many challenges. Audubon Nature Center has joined zoos around the world to make sure this beautiful animal continues to exist.”

The bongo newborn was conceived at the Audubon Species Survival Center shortly after its parents arrived in mid-April from San Diego Zoo Safari Park.

Both parents were born in zoos and are part of the Species Survival Plan administered by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). That plan reviews the animals throughout its accredited facilities and makes recommendations about which should be moved where, given their genetics and personalities and the needs of potential mates at other zoos.

The (as-yet-unnamed) calf weighed in at a healthy 46 pounds. Hatwood said. Both mother, known only as “3,” and father, Kibo, are five years old and experienced parents.

Hatwood continued: **“The mother is displaying all the right behaviors to successfully raise her calf, including making sure curious herd mates behave around the little one.”**

Audubon officials expect the bongo collection – which now comprises six females and one male – to continue to grow inside the new, four-acre enclosure.

“This is a water-loving, forest antelope,” Hatwood said. “And Louisiana has the perfect habitat for this beautiful species to thrive.”

Once the new calf reaches the age when it would disperse from the herd naturally, Hatwood said the Species Survival Plan will determine the next move.

The bongo may remain at the Species Survival Center or it could be sent to another zoo - a decision that will consider both the animal’s needs and the genetic health of the AZA’s zoo population.

“Bongo are one of the first species of antelope I’ve ever gotten the privilege to work with,” said Hatwood. “They are secretive, curious and they have a special place in my heart. I hope they continue to flourish in AZA zoos so future generations can fall in love with them too.”

BONGO FACTS

- The bongo is a shy, elusive creature that is seldom seen by people due to its nocturnal lifestyle.
- They turn and flee almost immediately when threatened and can disappear quickly into the surrounding forest, running with their horns laid back against their body to avoid being tangled up in vegetation.
- Its chestnut-colored coat is darker on its underside and patterned with vertical white stripes, which helps the bongo remain camouflaged in the dense jungle.
- Their long ears give them very sensitive hearing. A long prehensile tongue allows them to grip leaves and strip them from branches with ease.
- The bongo’s legs feature white and black bands and their long tail has a tufted tip.
- A thin mane runs along their body from the shoulders to the rump.
- Bongos produce a variety of calls, communicating with grunts, snorts, moos and bleating to warn others of approaching danger.

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Audubon Nature Institute operates a family of museums, parks and research facilities dedicated to celebrating the wonders of nature. Through innovative live animal exhibits, education programs, and scientific discovery, Audubon makes a meaningful contribution to preserving wildlife for the future. Audubon Nature Institute flagships include Audubon Park, Audubon Zoo, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, Entergy Giant Screen Theater, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium, Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center, Woldenberg Riverfront Park and Audubon Wilderness Park. Ron Forman is President and CEO of Audubon Nature Institute.

