

For Immediate Release

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ROADMAP TO SAVE NATIONALLY ENDANGERED ROAN ANTELOPE

A roadmap to save the nationally critically endangered roan antelope has been started.

The national roan antelope conservation task force to steer the formulation of a national conservation and management strategy held its first meeting in Kisumu at the end of last month.

The roan antelope *Hippotragus equinus* was once widely distributed through the savannah woodlands of East, Central, Southern and Western Africa, but during the last 40 years it has declined rapidly throughout much of its traditional home.

Originally the roan occupied fairly large areas of Southern Kenya, occurring from Lake Natron to Lake Victoria and North to Mt Elgon and the Cherangani Hills, as well as in two pockets centred around Thika / Kitui and an area to the East of the Chyulu Hills.

By the early 1960s, the distribution had become much reduced, and the species was declining further in most of the scattered localities in which it persisted. In the last decade there have been no confirmed reports of roan from either the Eastern Mara and Oloolol (or Isuria) Escarpment, or the Mt Elgon region, and the last known refuge of the species in Kenya is the Lambwe Valley in the 120 square kilometre Ruma National Park, 425 km West of Nairobi in Nyanza Province. The population at Ruma National Park has declined from 202 individuals in 1976 to about 50 individuals today.

Established in 1966 as the Lambwe Valley Game Reserve, the park later changed its status in 1989 to Ruma National Park. But what is interesting is the fact that as it changed its status, the community requested that the name of the new park should be their own initiative and thus the name Ruma was picked.

The local community wanted it named after one of their most powerful son – the wizard Gor Mahia, who lived high on a hill which now forms part of the

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Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is a state corporation established by the Act of Parliament, CAP 376, with a mandate for wildlife conservation and management in Kenya. It also has a sole jurisdiction over 26 national parks and oversight role in the management of 33 national reserves and private sanctuaries.

Kanyamwa Escarpment, from where he used to watch over his people. That request was granted and so the park earned its name Ruma National Park. The decline in numbers and shrinkage in distribution of roan antelopes in Kenya has necessitated the formation of a national roan antelope conservation task force to steer the process of formulating a national conservation and management strategy. The national conservation strategy is expected to give guidance to efforts to conserve roan antelopes in Kenya by exploring all the options that are available to ensure the species thrives in perpetuity.

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