



# "THE HOO-CALL"

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAMIBIAN WILD DOG PROJECT

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## EDITORIAL

This is the first edition of the newsletter of the Namibian Wild Dog Project. Objective of these pages is to keep you - supporters, friends and collaborators of the Wild Dog Project at home and abroad - better informed and updated on what is actually happening here on the ground. We hope you will enjoy reading and look forward to your comments.

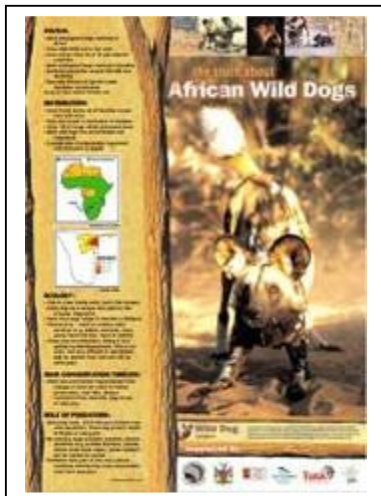
The Wild Dog Project

## INTRODUCTION

Protected areas in Africa are generally too small, fragmented and poorly funded to support viable, free-ranging populations of species such as the African wild dog that naturally exist at low densities and are highly mobile. A key to their long-term survival is the vast mosaic of unprotected rangelands that traverse the continent. Interestingly these areas also offer the best opportunities to engage with local rural communities to implement cost-effective and sustainable wildlife-based development initiatives. As such, the Wild Dog Project is conducted in close collaboration with, in support of, and supported by the National Community-Based Natural Resource Management programme.

## NEWS & DEVELOPMENTS

### Education:



+ Over 1,000 posters and more than 5,000 accompanying leaflets have been handed out to schools, environmental education centres, traditional authorities, line ministries, conservancy offices, NGOs and other stakeholders around the country, with a focus on geographic areas where African wild dogs exist. The poster launch was given a full page spread in the national *Namibian* newspaper. N\$12,500 is being sought for another print/distribution run to fulfil demand.

+ Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (Tsumkwe office) continues with Environmental Education show in the local Ju/Hoansi language, resourced by the Wild Dog Project and Namibia Nature Foundation. Project updates and general environmental education information are broadcast on a weekly basis.

+ Two more 'Integrated Predator and Livestock Management' training courses have been supported by the Wild Dog Project in collaboration with the Cheetah Conservation Fund, the host NGO. Since 2003, over 450 farmers have completed this excellent week-long course with the financial and technical support of the Wild Dog Project.



+ The Wild Dog Project has also contributed N\$18,000 towards printing of the accompanying publication for distribution to communal farmers in areas where human-wild dog conflict is a major conservation issue.

+ The Wild Dog Project is seeking an agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and local Nyae Nyae conservancy to facilitate the development of Klein Dobe camp into a self-funding applied research and conservation education centre.

### **New Fieldwork Team:**

The Wild Dog Project would like to introduce its 2006 "field-team":

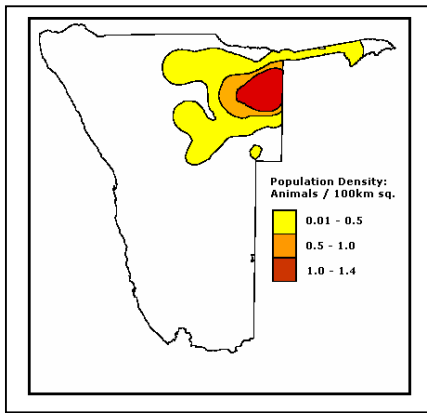


*From left to right:*

Robin Lines: Project Manager  
Nlaici Xommi: Assistant tracker  
/ui G/aqo: Head tracker  
/Kaece Debe: Community liaison officer  
Sonja Metzger: Veterinarian (not in picture)  
...and  
Sunie the Shenzi (centre): Canine unit

### **African Wild Dog Population Update:**

One of the main objectives of the Wild Dog Project is to monitor the population of African wild dogs in their core area, gathering baseline data on the likely impacts of conservation threats we may need to intervene against.



Data from the only other study estimated a population density in the core area of between 1 - 1.4 dogs per 100km<sup>2</sup>. This is low by many protected areas standards where dogs can reach densities of 4.2 per 100km<sup>2</sup>, but considered satisfactory for rangeland areas of low prey density and water availability.

Our 2004/5 data, comprising both direct and indirect monitoring techniques, indicates that a *minimum* of 118 adults in 11 packs (average packs size 10.7; range 2-22) use Nyae Nyae Conservancy and adjacent areas, including Botswana. This translates to a *minimum* density of 1.3 dogs per 100km<sup>2</sup>.

This snapshot is encouraging as we had feared that increased land conversion to livestock farming in adjacent areas during the past decade, with the resulting increase in conflict and depredation, would impact negatively on the core population. These so-called '*edge-effects*' are thought to be an important factor impacting on wide ranging species existing in and around isolated protected areas.

Only time and continued monitoring can tell if the trend in land use conversion will negatively impact on our African wild dog population.

### Finding African Wild Dogs in Nyae Nyae:

Collared dogs are located using VHF telemetry attached to a light aircraft. Ground tracking is only practically possible with hand-held radio receivers during their denning period when the packs are restricted to smaller areas of perhaps 10% of their total home range - but this can still be as much as 300 km<sup>2</sup> in Namibia. That's a lot of land when the odd overgrown bush track is the only means of access and you can only rely on the receivers picking up dogs within 2km. Thankfully GPS/UHF technology will soon largely supersede VHF as a means for data collection in this study.

Access to many areas is fraught with hazards, in this case some judicious burrowing by an armadillo that went unnoticed by Robin.



Uncollared packs are located using a combination of traditional San tracking skills and a lot of driving and walking. Our 5 person team, plus dog, pack the vehicle for a week in the bush, carrying all food, water and equipment we need. Every night we make camp in another spot, bedding down under the stars round a fire in temperatures that get down to  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  during the winter. Tracking starts at dawn. We drive bush tracks and check watering holes until we pick up spoor - the footprints left by the dogs in the substrate. If the spoor is fresh (<2 days old), we track on foot for what remains of the day, trying to find their resting spot or a new den. More often than not we come up with a blank, the dogs having moved on. Last year we had located 5 denning packs by August. So far this season we have driven over 2750km of transects and walked a further 250km through the bush and have yet to pick up any uncollared packs. Whether this is due to a population crash, perhaps as a result of a disease outbreak, is hard to tell. Heavy rains have changed the distribution and ranging patterns of most animals in the area and we believe this could also be affecting African wild dog behaviour.

### **Successful Ariel Tracking:**

The first round of radio tracking flights in early June took place with the support of AfriCat and were highly successful, having spent a month on the ground unable to locate any radio-collared packs. Within about 90 minutes of flying, both radio-collared female dogs from the "Djoxhwe-pack" were located 40km south of their last known location. Back on the ground, after a long and bumpy drive of 70kms (and 3 flat tyres...), the pack was found resting in the shade close to a small waterhole: 14 healthy-looking African wild dogs including all 4 pups from last year. A month later on a subsequent flight we found the pack denning 25km to the north with 6 very young pups in almost inaccessibly thick woodland.



Nyae Nyae Conservancy committee members accompanying Dave Houghton of AfriCat Foundation and Wild Dog Project staff on a tracking flight.

### **African Wild Dog Mortalities:**

Since the start of the year, we have recorded 3 mortalities in or close to Nyae Nyae. Two adults were run down in the past month on the main road through Tsumkwe District. A third died soon after the local Warden received it with horrific injuries due to having been snared and shot by farmers in Gam District to the South of Nyae Nyae.

### **Country wide Study on Rates & Causes of Mortalities:**

Road kills are an important cause of mortality for African wild dogs in many other African countries and the situation in Namibia seems to be similar. However, the vast majority of mortalities go unnoticed and unreported; better data on this is a high priority for us.

The Wild Dog Project is planning a countrywide study on present and historical rates and causes of African wild dog mortality. Questionnaires will be sent out to key stakeholder groups and existing data sources analysed. The objective of this study is to gain a better picture and understanding of the relative importance of various threats (e.g. high speed roads, diseases, human-induced persecution etc..), so that we can direct future conservation initiatives more efficiently.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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[www.wildlifecoalition.info](http://www.wildlifecoalition.info)  
Dunlop

Peoples Trust for Endangered Species  
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