



"THE HOO-CALL"

NEWSLETTER OF THE **NAMIBIAN WILD DOG PROJECT**

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EDITORIAL

The second edition of the **Namibian Wild Dog Project** newsletter focuses on main events, achievements and challenges in 2006. 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. Keep your comments coming.

The **Wild Dog Project** Team

Last year was dominated by unprecedented rainfalls across most of Namibia, affecting life in many ways. Dry river beds flowed then flooded, some for the first time in a decade. Immense pans filled and wetlands birds arrived en masse. Long-dormant seeds from rare plants germinated and flowered and wildlife blossomed in equal measure.



Flamingos in front of Baobab tree

Paradoxically waterhole game counts in and around Nyae Nyae Conservancy and the Kaudom Game Reserve struggled to record 10% of game sightings compared to previous years, even for conspicuous species such as elephant. Abundant food and water resulted in dispersal patterns that were to astound all of us, creating a lot of additional driving and footwork, tracking the wild dogs.

When waters finally started receding huge mud traps formed, bogging us down for days.

So 2006 was a hard year for vehicles, teaching us the value of good spadework and a 6 ton winch!



Swamps made driving sticky



Icy nights sleeping by fire

Winter proved harsh and cold with temperatures dropping to -8°C in low-lying areas. We regularly awoke covered in frost or ice when rough bush camping under the stars, sleeping on the wild dogs' tracks so not to lose them the next day.

Vast bush fires took hold of the mass of drying vegetation late in the year, engulfing perhaps 700,000ha of Nyae Nyae in flames and keeping us on our toes with the wind our faces.



Immense bush fires



San tracker & medicine man

Suni, our 'canine tracking unit', proved stiff competition to the local San when visual tracks ran out, much to the widespread amusement of us all.

Wild dog Status

Our core population of African wild dogs, centred around Nyae Nyae Conservancy, proved hard to find and even harder to follow in the lush vegetation brought on by heavy rains. In 2005 all 6 known denning packs had bred between July and August. In 2006 we recorded just 3 packs denning from late February all the way through to October. This phenomenon remains unexplained. Nonetheless it appeared that the dogs fared somewhat worse in these wet conditions, perhaps as a consequence of increased energetic requirements to hunt dispersed prey. As yet no one has been able to test this hypothesis in Namibia or elsewhere, but an understanding would surely go some way to explain why wild dog populations fluctuate so significantly - helping refine their management.

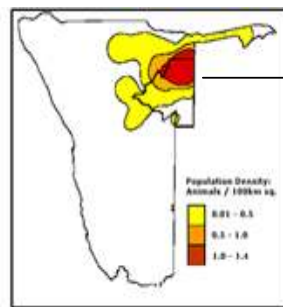
Nonetheless revised density estimates suggest 1.2-1.6 wild dog / 100km² in and around Nyae Nyae, the non-conflict, San-dominated area of eastern Tsumkwe District. While sounding low in relation to other wild dog populations (which can reach densities of 4.2 wild dogs / 100km²), we must consider the low primary production of predominantly semi-arid areas combined with the impact of human disturbance and depredation surrounding this largely unprotected population.

Human-wild dog Conflict

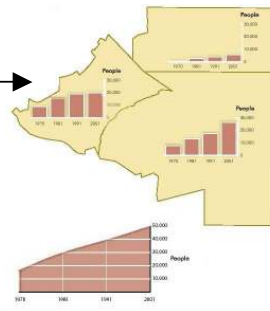
There are inherent biases in identifying wild dog mortality causes - animals dying in the bush are almost impossible to find in such vast open areas as N.E. Namibia. So most *recorded* mortalities came from conspicuous, human-related causes - road deaths and reports of direct persecution (snaring, poisoning, den disruption, shooting etc..).



The real *or* perceived impact of wild dogs on livestock is the primary cause of conflict



Wild dog density / distribution in Namibia






Trends in human population density

Livestock farming is the dominant land use for most rural communities across much of the wild dogs' range in Namibia.

Mortality data was collected in the core study area and opportunistically elsewhere. Nonetheless under-recording is inevitable. Farmers killing wild dogs rarely publicise their activities and many road mortalities go unnoticed or are scavenged quickly. In all 8 confirmed and 9 unconfirmed road deaths were recorded in contrast to perhaps 10-15 records of direct persecution, indicating a broad pattern - fast roads are probably the number 1 cause of mortality when running through core habitat. Livestock-dominated farming communities continue to widely persecute the wild dogs when in their areas, especially during breeding cycles, believing them to be responsible for excessive livestock losses. This conflict has its roots in inherited prejudices from former generations combined with poor livestock management and a reduction in availability of wild prey, forcing wild dogs to occasionally kill unattended stock when hunting in an area with limited game. In many cases local communities, making a living in marginal areas, with little education, see only the cost of wild dogs to their livelihoods and no benefits.


Conflict Mitigation

To combat these human-induced mortality causes the **Wild Dog Project** undertakes the following initiatives:

-  Researches, monitors and evaluates conflict and non-conflict case studies, testing varying mitigation techniques across a mosaic of cultural groups and land uses;
-  Investigates the effectiveness of road signs to reduce road mortalities; including their design and positioning;
-  Works closely with local farming communities, helping them integrate improved predator and livestock husbandry into their farming methods, in collaboration with local NGOs, Government Agencies, Traditional Authorities and Farming Organisations;







This includes, *inter alia*, dissemination of research findings and development of environmental education (EE) initiatives through:

- Radio shows in local languages (Tsumkwe and Okakarara Districts);
- Talks in schools, Conservancy meetings and to farmers;
- Training workshops in integrated predator and livestock management;
- A nature video club;
- Poster and leaflet distribution to major stakeholder groups;
- Articles in popular press;
- Field trips for youth to other EE centers around the country with a focus on predator conservation.

 **Wild Dog Project** support is endorsed by the registered conservancies in Otjozondjupa Region and is conducted in close collaboration with, in support of, and supported by the National Community-Based Natural Resource Management programme. The communal conservancies don't only see wild dogs as a problem, but an opportunity to improve people's livelihoods. This programme, through national policy and recent legislative reform, works to create incentives for communal farmers to conserve, manage and benefit from wildlife and tourism. The programme has three broad objectives:

- To rebuild and sustainably manage wildlife and other indigenous biodiversity;
- Generate income, diversify and improved livelihoods for communal farmers;
- Empower and build capacity for management and development skills, to help poor rural people break out of rural poverty and pro-actively determine their own futures.

In addition, the following **Wild Dog Project** initiatives supporting African wild dog conservation were undertaken in 2006:

-  The 2nd in a series of 3 annual seroepidemiological and demographic studies focusing on disease prevalence in domestic dogs in the core wild dog population;
-  The participation in an international multi-site seroepidemiological study on health threats to wild dogs through contact with domestic dogs, based out of UC Davis University, California.
-  Discussions with key stakeholders on the potential for a reintroduction of wild dogs to Etosh national park;
-  Formation of www.wildlifecoalition.info, a local network of carnivore biologists and conservationists, with the aim of providing multi-faceted research and management support based on common interests and goals;
-  Hosted BBC film crew for *Wild in Africa* production;
-  Conducted 2 specialised wild dog-based tours linking in with San cultural activities, promoting economic value of species;

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