



"THE HOO-CALL"

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAMIBIAN WILD DOG PROJECT

August 2007
VOLUME NO. 4

EDITORIAL

This, the fourth e-Newsletter, focuses on some of the research techniques that we employ during our fieldwork season from May until the rains break towards the end of the year. We also highlight recent project activities and developments for wild dog conservation in Namibia.

The Wild Dog Project

How many African wild dogs do you have in your study area..?

...is almost always the first question that is asked when visitors come to see the project, and inconveniently one of the hardest for us to answer.

Limiting factors

Most studies of wild dogs have focused on managed protected areas where a combination of established road networks, regular feedback of sightings and ID photos from tour operators and other interested parties, together with high wild dog density, makes direct monitoring of the local population easier. In the western Kalahari, which represent vast tracks of unprotected yet suitable wild dog habitat, this is not the case. Use of indirect monitoring techniques is essential.

Traditional skills meets modern science

Archaeological finds indicate the San Bushmen have inhabited Southern Africa for millennia. During this time they have refined their understanding of the natural world to allow survival in one of the most inhospitable waterless regions of the world. Many researchers regard their interpretation of indirect signs in the bush as the origin of science itself.

While much of this learned wisdom is vanishing fast there are still a few trackers left whose interpretive skills are near miraculous to the uninitiated. It is with these individuals that we work to monitor local wild dog populations.



75,000 years of accumulated bush skills at work for 21st Century endangered species conservation

Sightings are followed up meticulously and numbers of dogs are calculated from their spoor - the footprints and other signs left. Home range data and prey selection are calculated by following the tracks on foot for long distances, sometimes 25km through the bush in a day. During these ground follows we rarely get a sighting of the dogs, they're usually far ahead. But we can extrapolate what they are doing and the interactions they have with other animals such as lion and hyaena that they compete with.

Over time a picture of population size, composition and related ecological data develops. But it's slow and hard work when we might be lucky to see the dogs we are tracking once a month.

In the 913,000ha of Nyae Nyae Conservancy we estimate a population of perhaps 75-113 adults in 6-9 packs denning within the unfenced area.

Population facts

Perhaps the most impressive phenomenon about this population is their water independence and ranging ecology. The dogs can go weeks without drinking and feed largely on steenbok and duiker antelope - both also water independent species, in an area where the extremes of temperature vary from -8°C in winter to 46°C in summer and no rain falls for upto 8 months of the year.

Home ranges exceed $2,500\text{km}^2$ where the average for 5 other well studied protected area populations is 750km^2 .



Over 5m ha of wilderness in NE Namibia and NW Botswana is home to ~ 500 free-ranging wild dogs. Perhaps 10-15% of the total population.

Other project news

In March the Wild Dog Project supported a training workshop for local community members in integrated predator and livestock management to help mitigate conflict with predators.

Thanks to Cheetah Conservation Fund, Integrated Rural Development & Nature Conservation and Nyae Nyae Development Foundation staff for lecturing and supporting funding.



Local community rangers training course, march.

International collaboration is a key objective of the Wild Dog Project in recognition of the need for region-wide solutions for wide ranging species.

Since the beginning of 2007 we have become involved in 2 new collaborative studies:

1. *Multi-site study of wild dog disease*; UC Davis University, California;
2. *Parasites in wild dogs & conservation implications*; Dept. of Vet Science, Murdoch University, Australia.

In addition an agreement as been reached with the Wild Dog Action Group in South Africa (WAG-SA) to start a wild dog metapopulation management programme on private reserves in Namibia. This fledgling programme will increase the capacity of Namibia to build a wild dog population within private protected areas, creating a founder population that would be suitable for an Etosha National Park reintroduction. With 95% of the current population largely roaming outside formally protected areas this is an important conservation goal.

Our weekly **Environmental Education (EE)** radio show continues unabated, accessing the entire 3,000 inhabitants of Nyae Nyae Conservancy. Thank you NBC Tsumkwe Radio for you great support and enthusiasm.

Anton Kolbooi, our local EE officer, continues his work with local school children and community members, running a nature video club, presenting at schools and managing associated environmental activities in the local area. HIV-AIDS awareness is mainstreamed in all activities as from 2007.

Breaking news

This month, only the fourth free-ranging wild dog in Namibia in 10 years to be captured for population monitoring was collared and released unharmed. Tjeka-M1 (as yet unnamed, officially) recovered from the 45min procedure well and has been followed hunting regularly. Data on his lifecycle will help give us a better understanding of the population to aid conservation planning.



John Lemon, Ana Maria Puerta & Jollo Tsemkxao working on Tjeka-M1

Data indicates that the most severe human impact on wild dogs in Tsumkwe District (where the core population in Namibia is centred) is probably road kills.

To date we have been unable to locate accident victims in time to provide veterinary care and evacuate them in this vast 2,000,000ha area. But last week we recovered our first survivor who was treated locally by Wild Dog Project vet, Ana Maria, and flown to Windhoek for surgery after we battled for 2 days to keep it alive with limited medical resources. Unfortunately the dog died in surgery. We are appealing to donors to support additional veterinary capacity, allowing us to provide appropriate emergency medical support.



Project staff member Kxao Nxao helping recover a wild dog hit by car

Thanks to Harnas Foundation, Etienne Fourie & Ulf Tubbersing for emergency assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wild Dog Project would like to thank the very valuable contribution made by the following individuals & organisations:

Field support: /ui G/aqo, /Kaece Debe, Kxao Nxao, Ana Marie Puerto, Anton Kolbooi, Dr Mark Jago, Dr Flip Stander, Dr Ingrid Wiesel, Josephine Henghali, Dave Houghton

A. Alberts & staff, MET Tsumkwe
Mr & Mrs Arno Esterhuisen, Tsumkwe Lodge
Mr & Mrs Kai-Uwe Denker, African Hunting Safaris
Dr Chris Brown & Staff, Namibia Nature Foundation
Manfred & Ute Rumrich
Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), Tsumkwe
Nyae Nyae Conservancy
Nyae Nyae Development Foundation
Large Carnivore Management Association of Namibia
UNiSON communications
AfriCat Foundation
Harnas Foundation
Rufford Foundation

Cheetah Conservation Fund
Painted Dog Conservation Inc, Australia
Royal Zoological Society Scotland
Tusk Trust
NedBank Go Green Fund
Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
Cymot
Dunlop Tyres
Zighenzani Africa Safaris
Wild Dog Safaris
British High Commission
Wildlife Coalition
Diesel Electric Otjiwarongo