



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM VARLEY

Conserving the endangered Wild Dogs of Southern Africa

By Greenline Reporter

Scientific Name: *Lycaon pictus* (listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List) derived from the Greek name for “wolf” and the Latin word for “painted,” referencing the animal’s mottled coat of yellow, black, white, and brown. Also known as Wild Dog, Painted Dog, Painted Wolf and the African Hunting Dog. Each animal has its own unique coat pattern. The species descended from a unique lineage going back at least a million years and are more closely related to wolves than to domestic dogs.



African wild dogs are the most endangered large carnivore in southern Africa. They once ranged throughout the savannah, grassland, and open forest areas of sub-Saharan Africa. At the turn of the twentieth century the population was estimated to be 500,000 and were found in nearly forty African countries. Today their numbers have declined by a staggering 98% and viable populations remain primarily in National Parks in Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Swaziland and South Africa with the highest populations in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Updated IUCN statistics estimate numbers to be around

6,600 individuals, with about 1,400 being mature adults. Assuming an average of ten dogs per pack there may be as few as 660 packs left in the wild today.

They are highly social, amiable and charismatic animals and their packs can number from six to well over twenty with a dominant breeding pair. They are medium in size, incredibly striking with large rounded ears, long muzzle and long legs with four toes on each foot. But their most distinguishing feature has to be the unique markings, no two individuals are the same. Their long intestine ensures their bodies can absorb as much moisture from their food



PHOTOGRAPH BY TRENT BRADFORD-WALSH, AWCFC

as possible, giving them a great advantage in dry arid areas as they can go for extended periods without a regular supply of water.

Litters typically include six to twelve pups, but can number up to 20, although infant mortality is high. The entire pack shares the responsibility of protecting the cubs with both males and females babysitting the young. The tiny, helpless newborns open their eyes after thirteen days and are weaned by twelve weeks. Dogs will return from a hunt and regurgitate food for the pups.

Being extremely intelligent, wild dogs are proficient hunters, working cohesively together as a pack. They are persistent in their pursuit of prey and can run at speed for kilometres without tiring, taking it in turns to fall back as others take the lead in the hunt. They are carnivorous and opportunist predators, primarily hunting larger mammals, with impala being their most common prey. However, they will supplement their diet with rodents and other smaller animals. Before a hunt, the dogs will become excited through their vocalisations, tail wagging, licking and touching. They are not aggressive when feeding and will share a kill even with members who were not involved in

"Death from road fatalities, snaring, contact with humans and domestic dogs, habitat loss, lack of prey and being attacked by lions threaten wild dog populations."

the hunt. Pups will be given priority at a kill, even over a dominant pair.

Wild dogs are constant wanderers and their home ranges are expansive, anywhere between 300 sq km and have been recorded over 3,000 sq km. Unlike many other species, once they reach maturity it is the males that stay within their natal pack while females will migrate and join new packs.

The main threats to wild dogs are both human activities and natural predators with lions in some areas being the biggest cause of pup mortalities. Death from road fatalities, snaring, and contact with human settlements and domestic dogs expose them to disease transmission. Habitat loss and lack of prey can lead to conflict with farmers over livestock.

Connecting parks and reserves in Africa is helping to create larger areas for this wide-ranging species, and conservation measures to protect the dogs outside Park ranges will go a long way to ensuring their survival. Dedicated conservation efforts, research and education in Zimbabwe has seen the African wild dog become a symbol of national pride and the populations are doing extremely well in Gonarezhou, Hwange and Mana. 🐾

Wild Dog Conservation efforts in Zimbabwe



AFRICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND (AWCF)

The African Wildlife Conservation Fund (AWCF) is a registered Trust working in the lowveld area of southern Zimbabwe, to conserve African wild dogs and other large carnivores. Their study area covers the Zimbabwean part of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area which includes parts of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and holds almost one tenth of the remaining African wild dog population. Because of their wide ranges, conservation efforts have to be carried out on a large scale, and include a wide range of stakeholders.

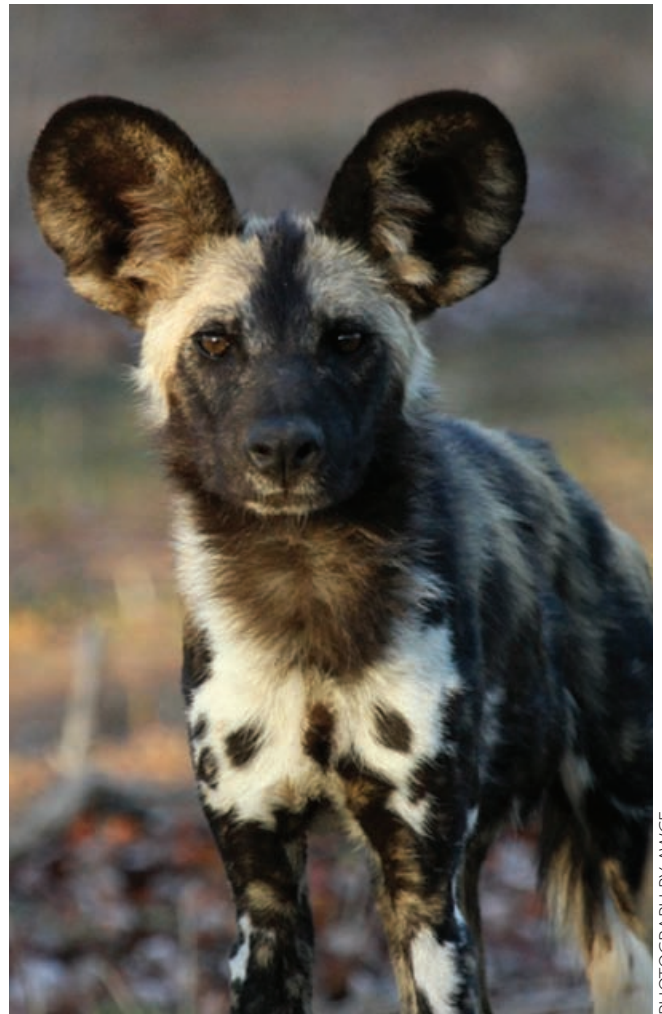
AWCF has a multi-disciplinary approach to conservation with the goal of making programs sustainable. This includes management-driven research, hands on conservation, such as removing snares from injured dogs, rabies vaccinations, anti-poaching, policy dialogue, education, and community engagement. AWCF works with 123 local primary schools and 37 communities to improve knowledge and understanding of conservation issues, and to foster more positive relationships between communities and protected wildlife areas.

The good news is that AWCF's efforts are yielding positive results. The African wild dog population in the area is increasing, even to the point that it's starting to act as a source for other areas. 🐕

For more info: www.africanwildlifeconservationfund.org

DR ROSEMARY GROOM

Dr. Rosemary Groom is a dedicated conservation biologist. She grew up in Zimbabwe and has spent the last thirteen years working in wildlife conservation in East and Southern Africa on various projects, from reptiles to large african herbivores. For the past five years she has been involved in large carnivore conservation in Zimbabwe, as field projects director for the African Wildlife Conservation Fund (AWCF). The endangered African wild dog is the focal species for the program, but Rosemary also oversees the Gonarezhou Predator Project, focusing on african lions as well as wild dogs. She is a member of the IUCN canid specialist group and is currently also the Southern African coordinator for the Rangewide Conservation Program for Cheetah and Wild Dogs.



PHOTOGRAPH BY AWCF



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Top Left hand page: A litter of pups enjoy their first outing under the watchful eye of adult guardians.

Top right: Close up of wild dog. Directly above: Dr Rosemary Groom.

Following page: Painted Dog Conservation, education and awareness.