

WILD DOG

Lycaon pictus

OTHER NAMES

African Wild Dog, Cape Hunting Dog, Painted Hunting Dog

DESCRIPTION

Shoulder Height

- 0.6 - 0.8 m

Weight

- 20 - 30kg with males very slightly larger than females

Key identification features

The African Wild Dog is a lean, long-legged dog. The head is large, with a heavy muzzle and powerful jaws. The coat is blotched with black, white and tan, each individual with a unique pattern. Ears are upright, large and rounded; the tail is bushy with a white tip. It has four toes on each foot, with no dew claws.



Habits

This species is highly social, living in packs that are very variable in size, but averaging 10 to 15 adults and sub adults. Usually only the dominant female will successfully raise a litter and births may take place throughout the year, although they are most common between March and June. Litter size is the largest of any canid, averaging ten pups, which remain at the den for around three months. Outside of the breeding season, Wild Dogs cover vast home

ranges. They are primarily crepuscular, with most hunting taking place during the cooler morning and late afternoon hours.

Wild Dogs are very vocal and have a wide range of calls, including the unmistakable long-range "hoo" call which is used to unite pack members after they are separated in the hunt.



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ECOLOGY

Diet The African Wild Dog is the most carnivorous of all canids (members of the canidae, the 'dog' family). They feed on a wide range of mammals ranging in size from Steenbok to adult Blue Wildebeest and zebra. They hunt by cooperating closely in a group, allowing them to hunt prey much larger than themselves.

Medium-sized ungulates (25-90 kg) form the most important prey for Wild Dogs. Rodents, hares, small carnivores and birds (including Ostrich) have also been recorded in their diet.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Wild Dogs were once distributed throughout sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of forests and extreme deserts. Today Wild Dogs have disappeared from much of their former range; virtually eradicated from West Africa, greatly reduced in central Africa and north-east Africa. The largest populations remain in southern Africa and the southern part of East Africa. Their current distribution is very fragmented.

Population densities in well-studied areas suggest that approximately 5,500 free-ranging Wild Dogs remain in Africa, with numbers currently stable. Fewer than 450 individuals survive in South Africa with numbers increasing due to conservation efforts to expand their range.

Wild Dog numbers fluctuate extensively because of high reproductive and mortality rates. The Wild Dog is considered one of ecotourism's "Big Seven".

Wild Dogs are classified as Endangered globally and nationally (IUCN Red List). To find out more go to www.iucnredlist.org or see The Red Data Book of the Mammals of Southern Africa.



WHY ARE WILD DOGS THREATENED?

In South Africa, the Wild Dog is listed as Endangered due to ongoing threats, conflict with human activities and because the population is estimated to number fewer than 250 mature individuals. Wild Dogs need large home ranges, therefore habitat fragmentation has led to population declines. Also Wild Dogs have a mistaken reputation for attacking livestock, and therefore are often persecuted by humans.

Recently, road accidents and incidental snaring have become major threats to this species. They are also threatened by infectious diseases, especially canine distemper and rabies.

WHAT IS THE EWT DOING TO CONSERVE THE WILD DOG?

The African Wild Dog is the flagship species of the EWT's Carnivore Conservation Programme (EWT-CCP). Conservation activities have included long-term monitoring in the Kruger National Park, as well as a proactive reintroduction programme to establish a managed metapopulation in medium-sized reserves throughout South Africa. The EWT recently launched the 'Kruger Rare Carnivore Program', which works to investigate threats to Wild Dogs and factors affecting their numbers and movement in the Greater Kruger ecosystem.

The KZN Wild Dog project, launched in 2006, aims to expand the range of Wild Dogs through northern KZN through identification of appropriate land and linkages, incorporation of these into Wild Dog spatial range, and the fostering of supportive farming and rural communities. The EWT is also developing a Biodiversity Management Plan for Cheetahs and Wild Dogs, which will be incorporated into legislation.

HOW YOU CAN HELP?

Report illegal trade, persecution and retaliatory killings of Wild Dogs. Report any sightings of Wild Dog outside of protected areas.

Support conservation organizations such as the Endangered Wildlife Trust – go to www.ewt.org.za to find out how.