



## ILLEGALLY CAPTURED WILD DOGS RETURNED TO THE WILD

19 May 2014

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) recently successfully released a pack of 15 Wild Dogs that had been illegally captured in Limpopo.

A farmer in the area had captured the free roaming dogs and held them in a boma on his farm. Because he was temporarily holding a group of seven female dogs on behalf of the EWT, he called Kelly Marnewick, the Manager of the EWT's Carnivore Conservation Programme (EWT-CCP), and informed her that he had caught the canines. Ms Marnewick advised him that the best course of action for the dogs was to release the animals back into the wild immediately but the farmer was not satisfied with this option as he claimed the animals posed a danger to local game and livestock. He wanted the animals relocated elsewhere for release. It has not however, been established that these dogs were in fact causing any degree of conflict with local farmers and were in fact a threat to any livestock at all. Relocation of Wild Dogs is also not that simple and is not a viable course of action for four reasons.

- First, the population of Wild Dogs in the Waterberg is so small that removal of an entire group may push the population to extinction.
- Second, there are no protected areas in South Africa that have space for the dogs. There are currently eight reserves that house reintroduced Wild Dogs and these are all currently at capacity.
- Third, a larger pack of 15 dogs is more resilient than a pack of eight dogs. The reason is that if eight dogs in a pack of 15 are killed the pack can continue to breed and survive but if the pack is reduced to just eight members and even four of that eight die, the pack is likely to die out as breeding is no longer viable.
- And fourth, research has demonstrated that the relocation of animals does not resolve human-wildlife conflict. The only way to deal with conflict is by supporting landowners and helping them to implement non-lethal predator control such as the introduction of livestock guarding dogs.

It was also evident that the farmer wanted to breed with the dogs and undertake research that is not necessarily indicated for the future wellbeing of this Endangered species.

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

**NPO Number:** 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature  
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Ms Marnewick then spent the following weeks post this removal of the dogs from the wild working with the Limpopo Economic Development, Environment & Tourism (LEDET) to get the relevant permissions to collar and release the dogs back into their natural habitat, and arranged the veterinary assistance to support LEDET in the release. Despite the farmer not being in possession of any permits to have caught or kept these animals on his property, he refused to allow the EWT to remove the dogs from his camp. The EWT once more referred the matter to the LEDET and involved the Centre for Environmental Rights who encouraged all parties to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation that was drafted in order to protect the animals and act in the best interests of conservation. The dogs were finally seized by LEDET. A satellite collar was fitted to one of the dogs and genetic samples and identification photographs were taken from each dog. The entire pack was transported to an undisclosed venue in Limpopo province where they were released and their movements will be monitored via the satellite collar.

Said Ms Marnewick: “African Wild Dogs are protected in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act 10 of 2004) and the Threatened or Protected Species Regulations of 2007 (ToPS). They are categorised as an Endangered Species (EN) – *Indigenous species facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future, although they are not critically endangered*. The activities of capturing, transporting, hunting or killing ToPS listed species require a permit from the relevant conservation authority, and where no permits have been issued for such activities, it is deemed a crime.”

Limpopo is one of the last remaining provinces in South Africa that still has free roaming Wild Dogs. This means that they were not reintroduced and did not escape from any fenced reserves, but rather they occur naturally outside of fenced reserves. Genetic testing conducted on the Waterberg Wild Dogs has demonstrated that they are genetically distinct from the Wild Dogs in the Kruger National Park and in other smaller reserves in South Africa. This makes this group of dogs critically important in a species that is on the verge of extinction. Because Wild Dogs occupy such vast ranges (each pack can range over more than 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>) it is extremely difficult to determine the population dynamics of Wild Dogs in the Waterberg. However, recent estimates put their numbers at between 3 to 4 packs of Wild Dogs left in the area with some smaller groups of dispersing animals.

“There are just 450 Wild Dogs left in South Africa and it is crucial that those remaining in the wild remain free roaming and protected. The pack that was captured and finally released constitutes more than 3% of the total remaining national population of this species. Conflict between carnivores and farmers over the killing of game is a reality in Limpopo but many farmers have chosen to implement conflict mitigation measures in partnership with the EWT such as the use of Livestock Guarding Dogs in the interests of being part of the movement to conserve this species and ensure its survival for future generations. The EWT works closely with a large number of farmers in the region

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and most have indicated no problems with the free roaming dogs at all. Most were in fact happy to see them released again,” concluded Ms Marnewick.

If you know or hear about any activity that will bring harm to Wild Dogs, have any photographs or sighting details or require information about Wild Dogs and conflict mitigation measures that benefit farmers and carnivores please contact Derek on [Derekv@ewt.org.za](mailto:Derekv@ewt.org.za).

The release operation was funded through the EWT’s Bosman Wild Dog Emergency Response Fund. We are also grateful to Dr Peter Caldwell and his team from Old Chapel Vet Clinic for their assistance and to Lambert van der Westhuizen of West Dunes Aviation for being on standby with his chopper. Thanks too to the Centre for Environmental Rights for working to ensure that these dogs were released.

The EWT’s Wild Dog work in Limpopo is supported by Investec Properties, Jaguar-Land Rover South Africa, Land Rover Centurion, Vaughan de la Harpe, GCCL<sup>2</sup> - Richard Bosman, Painted Wolf Wines, South African National Parks Honourary Rangers and IQ Business.

*End*

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