



**ENDANGERED
WILDLIFE TRUST**
Protecting forever, together.

8 November 2019

The EWT and Gorongosa celebrate the continent's largest African Wild Dog reintroduction

Start

Thanks to a huge restoration effort implemented after Mozambique's brutal civil war that destroyed most of the country's wildlife, Gorongosa National Park is now an extensive protected area with an abundance of game. The restoration of Gorongosa – funded by entrepreneur and philanthropist, Gregg Carr – has been a huge effort involving national government, including the recruitment of more than 270 field rangers, and a lengthy recovery period for the Park's fauna and flora. Even so, more effort is required to bring back most of the area's apex predators, including the African Wild Dog.

To this end the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) teamed up with EKZN Wildlife and Wildlife ACT, in 2018, to relocate a pack of 14 African Wild Dogs from Zululand to Gorongosa National Park. Following a successful bonding between the male and female dogs of the newly formed pack, these African Wild Dogs were released into the reserve. They thrived from the outset, with both the alpha and the beta females falling pregnant and giving birth to a total of 18 pups. In addition, a third female, together with three males, split from the pack and produced an additional 10 pups. All 28 pups survived the six-month mark and the African Wild Dog population tripled in the space of a year.

However, a reserve of this size requires more than one African Wild Dog pack to recreate a resilient and viable population, and to consider their restoration into the area a success. A second pack, with unique genetics, was urgently required to bolster restoration efforts. Working closely with our conservation partners – including the Carr Foundation and the Bateleurs – the EWT sourced a pack of 15 Wild Dogs from the Kalahari Desert in South Africa.

On 29 October 2019, the vision of a more resilient population became a reality as our team assembled just before sunrise at a boma in the Khamab Kalahari Game Reserve to sedate a second pack and airlift them to Mozambique. The difficulty of capturing 15 African Wild Dogs cannot be underestimated. Fortunately, the EWT's team included Dr Rowan Leeming – a veterinarian renowned for his African Wild Dog knowledge and experience – who was able to safely and quickly immobilise all the individuals. Taking off safely from the Kalahari, the flight stopped to clear South African customs at Polokwane, before the two-and-a-half hour flight to Gorongosa. Fortunately, customs officials met the flight as it landed at the dusty Gorongosa airstrip – expediting the import process – before rushing the Wild Dogs into their new holding boma with the help of Gorongosa's rangers, and they could be woken from their 10-hour journey. In a matter of minutes, the pack were on their feet and greeting one another in their new home. "It was then that the realization of this momentous occasion sank in," says the EWT's Wild Dog expert, Cole du Plessis. "These African Wild Dogs are the pioneers that will restore Gorongosa's Wild Dog population and set a blueprint for future restoration projects." He adds,

“this species is still considered Endangered, but success stories such as this bring hope for their preservation.”

Wild Dog conservation in Gorongosa

Successful African Wild Dog coordination and management in South Africa has resulted in an increasing African Wild Dog population in the country over the past 20 years. These increasing numbers allow the prospect of introducing African Wild Dog into areas of southern African, where over decades the species has been extirpated. Gorongosa National Park has been identified as a keystone area for the reintroduction of the African Wild Dog. In 2016, the African Wild Dog was considered ‘extirpated’ in 25 of the 39 countries in which they once roamed. In Mozambique, much of the territory was considered ‘unknown’ or ‘extirpated’; however, Gorongosa National Park was identified as a ‘recoverable’ site. This rare conservation opportunity prompted the formation of a partnership between the Gorongosa Project and the EWT. This led to the largest African Wild Dog reintroduction ever executed.

In 2017 there were no African Wild Dogs in Gorongosa National Park. Then in 2018, 14 African Wild Dogs were reintroduced, and this group has grown to 42 individuals. A second pack of 15 African Wild Dogs has now been reintroduced. This population now numbers 57 African Wild Dogs, two years after the first reintroductions were made.

The EWT is grateful to our partners who have made these reintroductions possible, including Khamab Kalahari Game Reserve, Gorongosa National Park, WAG-SA, the Bateleurs, Wildlife ACT, EKZN Wildlife and North-West Parks and Tourism.

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About the Endangered Wildlife Trust

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has worked tirelessly for over 45 years to save wildlife and habitats, with our vision being a world in which both humans and wildlife prosper in harmony with nature. From the smallest frog, to the majestic rhino; from sweeping grasslands to arid drylands; from our shorelines to winding rivers: the EWT is working with you, to protect our world.

The EWT’s team of field-based specialists works across southern and East Africa, where committed conservation action is needed the most. Working with our partners, including businesses and governments, the EWT is at the forefront of conducting applied research, supporting community conservation and livelihoods, training and building capacity, addressing human wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion.

A beacon of hope for Africa’s wildlife, landscapes and communities, the EWT is protecting forever, together. Find out more at www.ewt.org.za

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