



21 September 2017

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### **Who let the Dogs in? Endangered African Wild Dogs introduced into northern Kruger National Park**

The Kruger National Park's resident population of 250 of the most Endangered carnivore in the country has now been bolstered by the addition of eight new African Wild Dogs as part of a project that is heralded as a first for the Kruger National Park and a major victory for Wild Dog conservation.

In a move to conserve South Africa's most Endangered carnivore, the African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*), the [Endangered Wildlife Trust](http://www.ewt.org.za) (EWT), in collaboration with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW), South African National Parks (SANParks), and WildlifeACT Fund, is excited to announce a landmark event in the conservation of Wild Dogs in South Africa. On 16 September 2017, the EWT and collaborators introduced a new pack of eight Wild Dogs into the northern region of the Kruger National Park.

The release of these Wild Dogs was extremely successful with the new Wild Dog pack leaving the boma within ten minutes under the expert guidance of the EWT's carnivore specialists. The introduction of Wild Dogs into Kruger National Park has never been attempted before but in a bold move to conserve South Africa's Wild Dogs the introduction of a new pack into the park is fundamental to boosting the Kruger National Park's population of Wild Dogs.

After the pack was released, an incredible event occurred when a lone female Wild Dog in the area joined up with them and now appears to be leading them through their new home range. Not only is this remarkable, but within 24 hours, the new pack had already evaded a pride of lions and successfully made a kill while starting to explore their vast new home. The intensive monitoring of this pack has revealed that an alpha pair has already formed with a three-legged male (known as Foxtrot) appearing to be the dominant individual and is displaying intense mate-guarding of one of the females. Foxtrot unfortunately lost his leg due to a snaring incident and snares continue to pose a significant threat to this Endangered species.

The EWT has been monitoring the population of Wild Dogs in the Kruger National Park since 1995 and it's been noted that the northern region of the Kruger National Park (the section north of the Olifants River) has experienced an enormous decline in Wild Dogs between 1995 and 1999. Since 1999, extensive research has shown that Wild Dog packs have only recently re-established themselves in the northern region of the park. However, this recolonisation is slow despite the potential connectivity with populations to the east in Mozambique (Limpopo National Park), to the north in Zimbabwe (Gonarezhou National Park), and to the south (southern Kruger National Park) leaving Wild Dogs at a

worrying low number. The EWT and collaborators have been trying to understand why the original decline happened and why recolonisation has been slow. Unfortunately, this remains a mystery to experts who can only speculate as to the reasons why this area has been hard hit for Wild Dogs. Potential threats may have been disease, snaring, low prey numbers or a high lion density but historical information indicates that the area should have multiple Wild Dog packs. Therefore, the introduction of a pack back into this area is a bold attempt to actively reduce this decline and assist the most Endangered carnivore in the country.

This collaborative initiative was designed to determine if a pack of Wild Dogs can be introduced into vacant areas and if successful, add to the success of the national Wild Dog population by increasing genetic diversity and assessing the potential risks to the Wild Dog population in northern Kruger. In a project that was negotiated for over a year, enormous effort was made by the EWT, EKZNW and WildlifeACT Fund to apply for permits, capture and relocate the Wild Dogs. A group of four males from the uMkuze section of Isimangaliso Wetland Park (KZN) and a group of four females from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (KZN) were transported and bonded in the temporary holding boma in northern Kruger National Park to form a new pack.

One conservation team, based in KZN, successfully captured the four females from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park on Sunday, 30 July, and drove more than 900 km to the boma in northern Kruger. A second team captured and relocated the four males from the Mokopane Zoo (acting as a temporary holding facility for the four males from uMkuze), and drove 600 km to the boma in northern Kruger. The two teams met at the boma late afternoon of 31 July, where the Wild Dogs were vaccinated against Canine Distemper Virus and Rabies, had relevant blood and other samples taken, fitted with tracking collars and bonded with each other.

The Wild Dogs all woke up in the boma and have subsequently successfully formed a new pack. This new pack remained in the boma for six weeks to ensure that they settled into their new environment and all potential homing drivers reduced before being released. The EWT has been bonding and reintroducing Wild Dogs in South Africa for 20 years. We have experienced extremely high success rates with reintroduced packs establishing themselves in new homes and breeding to produce the next generation of pups. Nowhere else in the world has substantial and coordinated reintroduction efforts been made over multiple decades to boost the population of an Endangered species like Wild Dogs, making an introduction of this nature into South Africa's flagship park a unique achievement in Wild Dog conservation.

The EWT will monitor the pack continuously to obtain valuable data that will help to identify potential risks, as well as monitor the success of the Wild Dogs in northern Kruger. Tracking collars have been fitted all eight individuals to support this monitoring.

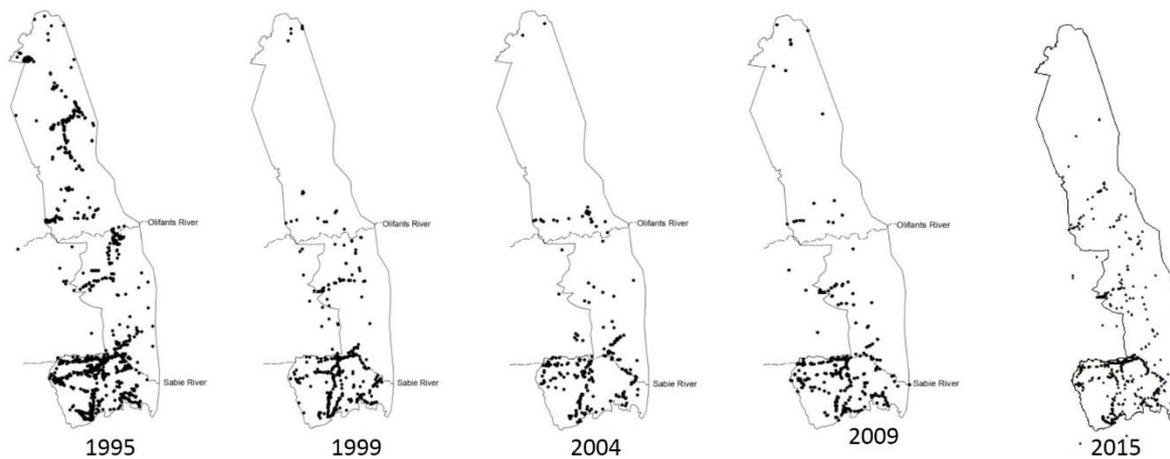
Northern Kruger provides the last large open safe space left for Wild Dogs in the whole of South Africa (~1,000,000 hectares) and was identified as the ideal area to introduce the eight Wild Dogs to learn how such an introduction will affect the population of Wild Dogs in greater Kruger.

The EWT, its partners and collaborators including the National Zoological Gardens (Mokopane Zoo), the Wild Dog Advisory Group of South Africa (WAG-SA) and the KwaZulu-Natal Wild Dog Advisory Group and SANParks as the custodians of the new pack of Wild Dogs, are very excited about this landmark project and the contribution it will make to Wild Dog conservation and our understanding of the Wild Dog population in the Greater Kruger National Park.

Donors who have made this possible include Land Rover Centurion, Richard Bosman, Investec, Vaughan de la Harpe, Q20 and Land Rover South Africa.

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**About The Endangered Wildlife Trust:** The EWT is a credible, impactful player in regional conservation, committed to identifying the key factors threatening biodiversity and developing innovative methodologies and best practice to reduce these and promote harmonious co-existence and sustainable living for both people and wildlife. Read more about the EWT's work at: [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za) or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



*Map showing changes in Wild Dog distribution from 1995–2015*

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