



8 June 2017

Wildlife ranchers work with the EWT to give African Wild Dogs a chance to roam free

Start

Through the help of concerned wildlife ranchers, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) was recently able to successfully relocate three Endangered female African Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) from an area of potential high carnivore conflict in Limpopo to a safe area within the Waterberg region.

With the increase in the price of game animals over the last decade, conflict between carnivores and farmers over the killing of game is a reality in the region. There have been many cases where Endangered species such as Wild Dogs and Cheetahs have been directly persecuted through the use of poisons, gin traps, and organised hunts, and some have even been deliberately driven over on our roads. However, it is very encouraging that some landowners' attitudes are changing for the benefit of Endangered species conservation and that they are aware of the legislation that protects these animals.

This kind of promising change in attitude was highlighted when, on Sunday 28 May 2017, the EWT received a report of three Wild Dogs on a wildlife ranch between Thabazimbi and Dwaalboom in Limpopo. The farm owner, Piet du Toit, did not want the Wild Dogs on his property, however he also did not wish to persecute the animals and wanted to relocate them to a safe area. He contacted the local vet, Dr Louis Greef, who was willing to dart the Wild Dogs, and in turn contacted the EWT for assistance in relocating the carnivores. The EWT keeps a database of all Wild Dog sightings outside of protected areas in South Africa and a single male Wild Dog had been reported at Lindani near Melkrivier a few days previously. The decision was therefore taken to move these three female Wild Dogs to Lindani in the hope that the solitary animal would join up with them, giving them all a greater chance of survival. The owners of Lindani, Peg and Sam van Coller, were more than happy for the dogs to be released on the property, and the necessary permits were obtained from Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET).

Initial attempts to dart the dogs were unsuccessful, and the next sighting was just before sunset, resulting in the need for a new plan, which involved darting the animals from a helicopter the next day. Derek van der Merwe, Conflict Mitigation Field Officer of the EWT's Carnivore Conservation Programme, veterinarian, Dr Sune Ferriera, and farm managers Andries Hills and Wim Anholds assisted in the capture of the three Wild Dogs and they were safely transported and released on Lindani on 29 May by the EWT. The Wild Dogs were seen on Lindani the following morning, and again on 4 June, and are doing well, seeming unperturbed by the move.

With less than 500 Wild Dogs left in South Africa, the safe relocation of three females is significant, and gives hope, specifically to the population in the Waterberg region. The small, free-roaming population of Wild Dogs in the Waterberg is estimated at between only five and 15 in number, and is genetically valuable. This makes this group of Wild Dogs critically important in a species that is on the verge of extinction, and makes the introduction of these three females even more exciting. The EWT thanks community members and partners such as Piet du Toit, Wim Anholds, Andries Hills, LEDET, Dr Louis Greef, Dr Sune Ferreira, and Lindani landowners, Peg and Sam van Coller, for their involvement in our efforts to protect Wild Dogs and offer them a chance to flourish.

The public is also invited to help us save these iconic animals in areas where there may be a risk of conflict with humans, by sending information and photographs of sightings to Derek van der Merwe at DerekV@ewt.org.za. Derek can also be contacted if you would like to know more about conflict mitigation measures that benefit both farmers and carnivores.

The EWT's Wild Dog work is supported by Investec Properties, Jaguar-Land Rover South Africa, Land Rover Centurion, Vaughan de la Harpe, GCCL2 - Richard Bosman, Painted Wolf Wines, South African National Parks Honourary Rangers, Elizabeth Wakemen Henderson Fund and IQ Business.

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