

What is a Painted wolf?



The “African painted wolf” (*Lycaon Pictus*), also known as the African painted dog, Cape hunting dog or African wild dog, is one of Africa’s most fascinating and endangered mammals.

The Painted Wolf is named from the scientific name of the African wild dog – *Lycaon Pictus*. *Lycaon* is derived from the Greek word *Lykos* for wolf and *Pictus* is latin for picture. *Lycaon Pictus* is part of the family *Canidae* but is only very distantly related to domestic dogs, dingos, foxes and wolves, the former being part of the sub family *Caninae* – African wild dogs are the only member of the sub family *Simocyoninae*. Hyenas are not related to any canines.

The African Wild Dog is a medium sized canid found only in Africa, especially in savannas (grasslands) and other lightly wooded areas. They are about the size and weight of German Shepherd, with large round ears, a deep muscular chest, a rather large head with a strong jaw and a unique pattern of colouring for each dog.

These inspirational and beautiful animals have enormous courage, energy, stamina and tenacity, as well as a wonderful harmonious social structure.

Painted wolves are often misunderstood. They are extremely effective and organised hunters, which has led people to consider them cruel killers. This has resulted in significant persecution and local extinction in many parts of Africa. In addition, habitat destruction and disease (wild dogs are highly vulnerable to diseases affecting domestic dogs) not to mention competition from other predators such as lions, has certainly not helped.

They are incredible animals whose social organisation and interdependent behaviour are a source of inspiration to those who are familiar with, or work with wild dogs. Painted wolves

are highly social animals with a well-defined behaviour and a range of vocal expression and body language. They are also among the only predators where females and the young are given preference during feeding and where sick or injured dogs are protected and encouraged by the other dogs in the pack. They are not territorial in the same sense that lions or hyenas are, and require a large range over which to hunt.

Painted wolves are Africa's second rarest predator after the Abyssinian wolf.

Their numbers have been reduced in the wild to about 5000 to 6000 dogs, of which there are only viable (considered to be sustainable) populations in four countries – South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Botswana. They are a key species whose success in an area is an indication of the general health of that part of the country. This makes them the most worthy of all Southern African carnivores to focus conservation efforts upon. They do not do at all well in compromised environments.

Status: Endangered

Name controversy



A controversy began in the late 1990s when conservationists working to protect *Lycaon Pictus* said that their most common name, “African wild dog”, was a source of confusion and prejudice. Conservationist Greg Rasmussen wrote in 1998:

“The name ‘wild dog’ developed during an era of persecution of all predators when the name applied to feral dogs, hyenas, jackals and the Cape hunting dogs (Pringle, 1980). ‘Painted’ aside from being a direct translation of the specific epithet, accurately describes the unique varicoloured markings of each individual. Apart from being misleading, continued use of the name ‘wild dog’ does little more than further fuel negative attitudes and prejudice which is detrimental to conservation efforts.”

Rasmussen is one of the founders of the Painted Hunting Dog Research Project [<http://www.painteddog.org/>]. He advocates using the name “painted hunting dog”.

Other names include Wildehond in Afrikaans, and Mbwa mwitu in Swahili.

(Other names: African hunting dog, African wild dog, Apeete, Aye Dur, Cape hunting dog, Cynhyene, Eeyeyi, Eminze, Imbwa, Inpumpi, Kikwau, Kite Kya Negereni, Kulwe, Licaon, Liduma, Ligwami, Loup-peint, Lycaon, Mauzi, Mbawa, Mbwa Mwituu, Mbughi, Mhuge, Mulula, Muthige, Nzui, Omusege, Osuyiani, Oulay, Painted dog, Prude, Sudhe, Suyian, Suyo, Suyondet, Takula, Tri-colored dog, Wildehond, Yeyii).

Biology

Adults typically weigh 17-36 kilograms (37-79 pounds). A tall, lean animal, it stands about 30 inches (75 cm) at the shoulder, with a head and body length averaging about 40 inches (100 cm) and a tail of 12 to 18 inches (30 – 45 cm). Animals in southern Africa are generally larger than those in eastern or western Africa.

The African wild dog reproduces at any time of year, although mating peaks between March and June during the second half of the rainy season. Litters can contain 2-19 pups, though 10 is the most usual number. The time between births is usually 12 – 14 months, though it can also be as short as six months if all of the previous young die. The typical gestation period is approximately 70 days. Pups are usually born in an abandoned den dug by other animals such as those of the aardvark. Weaning takes place at about 10 weeks. The adults feed the pups by regurgitating food when they return to the den after hunting. After three months, the den is abandoned and the pups begin to run with the pack. At the age of 8 – 11 months they can kill small prey, but are not proficient until about 12 – 14 months, at which time they can fend for themselves. Pups reach sexual maturity at the age of 12 – 18 months.

Females disperse from their birth pack at 14 – 30 months of age and join other packs that lack sexually mature females. Males, typically, do not leave the pack they were born to. This is the opposite situation to that in most other social mammals, where a group of related females forms the core of the pack or similar group. In African wild dog packs, the females compete for access to males that will help to rear their offspring. In a typical pack, males outnumber females by a factor of two to one, and only the dominant female is usually able to rear pups. This unusual situation may have evolved to ensure that packs do not overextend themselves by attempting to rear too many litters at the same time. The species is also unusual in that other members of the pack, including males, may be left to guard the pups while the mother joins the hunting group. The requirement to leave adults behind to guard the pups may decrease hunting efficiency in smaller packs.

Social structure



In packs, there are separate male and female hierarchies that split up if either of the alphas die. In the female group, the oldest will have alpha status over the others, so a mother will retain her alpha status over her daughters. For the males, in contrast the youngest male or the father of the other males will be dominant. When two such loner separate-gender groups meet, if unrelated they can form a pack together. Dominance is established without bloodshed, as most dogs within a group tend to be related to one another in some way, and even when not, this can occur.

They have a submission-based hierarchy, instead of a dominance-based one. Submission and nonaggression is emphasised heavily – even over food they will beg energetically instead of fight. This is probably because they need as many uninjured pack members as possible in order to hunt and provide food for the pups and their guards.

Unrelated African wild dogs sometimes join up in packs, but this is usually temporary. Occasionally, unrelated African Wild Dogs will attempt hostile takeovers of packs.

Hunting and diet



The African wild dog hunts in packs. Like most members of the dog family, it is a cursorial hunter, meaning that it pursues its prey in a long, open chase. Nearly 80% of all hunts end in a kill. Members of a pack vocalise to help coordinate their movements. Its voice is characterised by an unusual chirping or squeaking sound, similar to a bird.

After a successful hunt, hunters regurgitate meat for those that remained at the den during the hunt, such as the dominant female and the pups. They also feed other pack members, such as the sick, injured, the very old that cannot keep up, or those that stayed back to watch the pups

The African wild dog's main prey varies among populations but always centres round medium-sized ungulates, such as the impala, Thomson's gazelle, and wildebeest. While the vast majority of its diet is made up of mammal prey, it sometimes hunts large birds, especially ostriches. Other predators, mainly lions and hyenas, sometimes steal the prey that wild dogs catch.

Some packs also include large animals in their prey, such as zebras and warthogs. The frequency and success rates of hunting zebra and warthogs varies widely among specific packs (whereas the rates for wildebeest and smaller ungulates do not). Hunting larger prey requires a closely coordinated attack, beginning with a rapid charge to stampede the herd. One African wild dog then grabs the victim's tail, while another attacks the upper lip, and the remainder disembowel the animal while it is immobilised. This behaviour is also used on other large dangerous prey, such as the African buffalo, giraffe calves, and large antelope – even the one-ton giant eland. The dogs often eat their prey while it is still alive. This disembowelling was a reason to regard the African wild dog as repulsive, but recent studies have shown that prey of the African wild dog die more quickly than prey of the lion and the leopard, which kill their prey by grabbing the throat and suffocating the animal.

Remarkably, this large-animal hunting tactic appears to be a learned behavior, passed on from generation to generation within specific hunting packs, rather than an instinctive behaviour found commonly within the species. Some studies have also shown that other information, such as the location of watering holes, may be passed on in a similar fashion.

Threats



The African wild dog is endangered by human overpopulation, habitat loss and hunting, and their capture from the wild by wild animal dealers.

It uses very large territories (and so can persist only in large wildlife-protected areas), and it is strongly affected by competition with larger carnivores that rely on the same prey base, particularly the lion and the spotted hyena. Lions often kill as many wild dogs as they can, but do not eat them. Hyenas usually follow wild dogs to steal their kills. One on one the hyena is much more powerful than the wild dog but a large group of wild dogs can successfully chase off a small number of hyenas because of their teamwork. It is also killed by livestock herders and game hunters, though it is typically no more (perhaps less) persecuted than other carnivores that pose more threat to livestock.

Most of Africa's national parks are too small for a pack of wild dogs, so the packs expand to the unprotected areas, which tend to be ranch or farm land. Ranchers and farmers protect their domestic animals by killing the wild dogs.

Like other carnivores, the African wild dog is sometimes affected by outbreaks of viral diseases such as rabies, distemper, and parvovirus. Although these diseases are not more pathogenic or virulent for wild dogs, the small size of most wild dog populations makes them vulnerable to local extinction due to diseases or other problems.

Statistics

Status and trends

IUCN Status

1970s – 1980s: Vulnerable

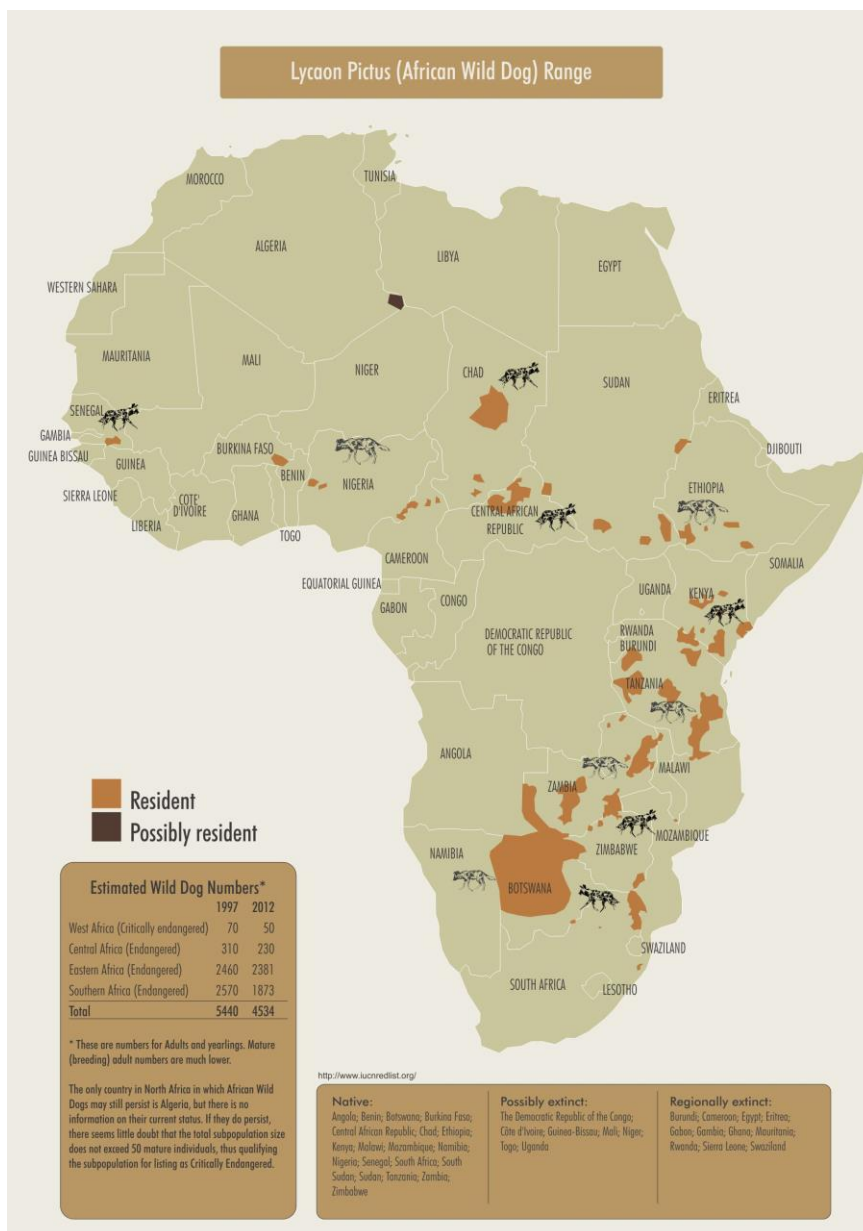
1994: Endangered

1996 – 2003: Endangered

2004: Endangered (Population Trend: Decreasing)

[More detailed information, references and sources](#)

Population Estimates and Locations



Source: [Animal Info – Endangered Animals website](#)

Combined World Population Estimates

Note: Figures given are for wild populations only

Late 1970s: Less than 7000

1980: Probably fewer than 7000

1984: Probably does not exceed 10,000

1990: Perhaps 2000

1991: Probably no more than 5000

1997: 3000 – 5500

1999: 3000 – 6000

2001: Perhaps as few as 3000

2004: 3000 – 5500

Source: [Animal Info – Endangered Animals website](#)

Mortality and Survival

Natural causes (39%)

- Lion predation – 12%
- Hyena predation – 4%
- Other predation – 5%
- Other wild dogs – 5%
- Disease – 8%
- Accident – 6%

Human causes (61%)

- Road kill – 24%
- Snared – 10%
- Shot – 15%
- Poisoned – 12%
- Other – 1%

Causes of pup mortality

Natural causes (80%)

- Lion predation – 31%
- Hyena predation – 6%
- Other wild dogs – 34%
- Disease – 8%

Human causes (20%)

- Road kill – 12%
- Snared – 8 %

Source: [Animal Info – Endangered Animals website](#)

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BBC – Pictures of African wild dog Puppies

Save the African wild dog