

African Wild Dog Project – February 2013

Population and Conflict Assessment of the African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) with a focus on the Greater Mangetti Complex, Kavango Region, north-east Namibia.

Phase 1 – February 2013 – February 2015

Project Background

The African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*) is one of Africa's most threatened large predators, and currently listed as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (last assessed in 2008), with a free-range stock estimated at between 600-1000 packs (Lindsey & Davies-Mostert 2009; Woodroffe et al. 2004). Resident African wild dog populations occur in just 12% of their historical range within Southern Africa. However, 30-40% of the region is lacking reliable status and distribution data (IUCN/SSC 2007).

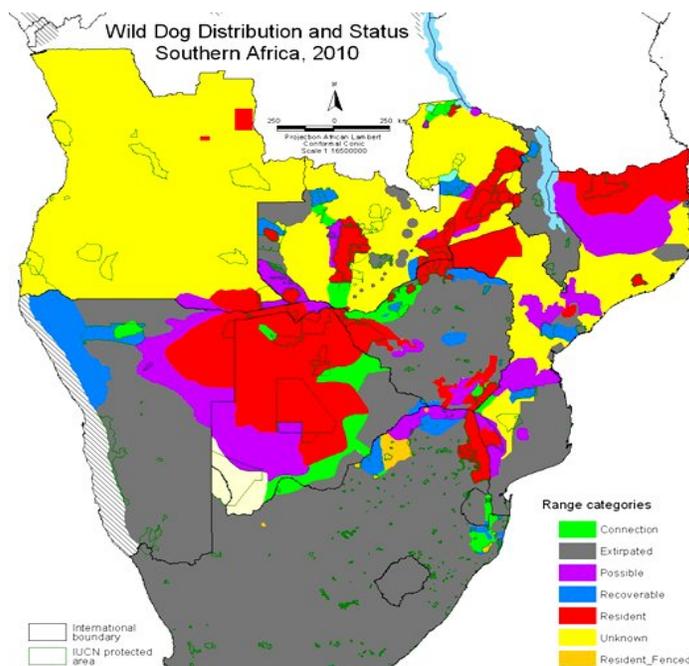


Figure 1. Wild Dog Distribution and Status Eastern - Southern Africa 2010

Source: <http://cheetahandwilddog.org/index.html>

All large carnivores need extended areas to survive; but the social structure, ranging ecology and conservation requirements of African wild dog means they require vast intact wildlife areas to maintain population viability. As human populations encroach on Africa's last wild areas, African wild dog can now only persist in countries with relatively low human population densities; this is as a result of habitat fragmentation, persecution, accidental snaring, road kills, disease, population size and prey loss.

The geographic range of wild dog in Southern Africa has experienced a staggering contraction over the past one hundred years, from a historical distribution formerly covering over 5 million km², to less than 700,000km² in 2007. Twelve percent of the total still appears to support resident African wild dog populations. Of the 10 countries in the region, only 22 populations are known to remain. The majority of African wild dog resident range exist outside protected areas on community and private lands yet the protected areas are often still the focus of most conservation efforts.

Project Rationale

From the records available it appears that African wild dog have been largely unable to maintain breeding range in commercial areas throughout Namibia. This is due to persistent unsustainable persecution levels and other ever increasing negative influences e.g. fast road construction, habitat fragmentation, conversion of wildlife areas, expansion of predator-proof fencing, prey reduction and disease.

Namibia's vast scale, suitable rangeland habitat and low population density should provide near-ideal conditions for wild dog to maintain range. Nonetheless, numbers are uncertain and wild dog have and continue to be severely persecuted by landowners. Namibia's free-ranging 'core' population is consistently estimated at low levels of between 300 to 600 animals, in less than 50 intact breeding units, of which most occur outside of formally protected areas (Stander 2003; Woodroffe et al. 2004; R. Lines, pers. comm.).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry has recently designated approximately 150,000ha of suitable African wild dog habitat in Tsumkwe District for small stock development, as well as another approximately 150,000ha in eastern Kavango adjacent to Khaudum National Park. This drastically increases the risk of human-wild dog conflict across much of the remaining African wild dog range.

In 2009, livestock farming contributed some 3.2% to Namibia's gross domestic product (NCBS, 2009). This figure represents why potential conflict species are usually not tolerated, as well as the need to develop techniques to protect livestock from predation.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that past outreach programmes have had any effect on farmer's attitudes towards conflict species and a better understanding is needed of African wild dog numbers and population dynamics within the free-ranging population, in order to develop realistic and appropriate mitigation techniques. It's hoped that this additional research will act as a vital baseline study which can then further contribute towards developing a National Action Plan.

The Kavango Region, including the Mangetti Complex, represents an area of known African wild dog presence, with frequent visual sightings (Stander 2003). Although the Mangetti Complex is considered a high conflict zone, it also the only area within Namibia that constitutes a viable natural dispersal area for wild dog, and is recognised as a potential (historical) corridor between eastern African wild dog populations and Etosha National Park. During the International Wild Dog Workshop 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) identified the Mangetti Complex as an area of low-level sampling with regard to African wild dog research and a priority in terms of its conservation in Namibia.