

## Dholes in the vicinity of Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra after 189 years: first photographic record

The Dhole, or the Indian Wild Dog *Cuon alpinus* (Pallas, 1811), is of the order Carnivora and family Canidae. It is a social carnivore that lives in packs. It is widely distributed and native to India (Kamler et al. 2015). The Dhole is basically a terrestrial animal, preferring to live in different types of dense forests interspersed with open woodland. It needs shade from the sun, suitable prey species, and water to drink or lie in, a thing Dholes frequently do in hot weather (Prater 2005).

It is known to occur in the northern and eastern parts of Maharashtra State (Pradhan & Talmale 2012). It has also been reported in camera trap surveys from the Wai region, Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, and Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary in the state of Maharashtra (Punjabi et al. 2017).

While returning from Ahupe Devrai (Sacred Groves), a part of Bhimashankar Wildlife



A Dhole *Cuon alpinus* pair in the vicinity of Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Pune, Maharashtra. ©Umesh Vaghela.

Sanctuary, on 2 October 2023, at 1625 h, we sighted a pair of Dholes in open woodland with grassy meadows and a small waterhole in Tirpad area (19.1640 N & 73.6524 E), Maharashtra. I immediately

took photographs with my mobile camera for record purposes and further study. We observed that the pair was wandering around, and one of the Dholes defecated in the open.

We observed with the help of binoculars that the pair possessed a straight, bushy black-tipped tail and a rust-reddish coat on its dorsum. Its body size was definitely smaller than that of a wolf, and it lacked arching brows and an elevated forehead. It had short legs, a thick muzzle, and its short ears were rounded. We confirmed it as a Dhole (Menon 2009; Pradhan & Talmale 2012). We also confirmed its identity with mammalogist Dr. S.S. Talmale, Zoological Survey of India.

On a perusal of the literature, it was revealed that there is no previous scientific record of Dhole in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (Pradhan & Talmale 2009). The recent IUCN Red List assessment shows Bhimashankar as part of the distribution range of the Dhole (Kamler et al. 2015). Sykes (1834) noted that the tribal inhabitants of Bhimashankar were 'quite aware of the existence of packs of Indian wild dogs', confirming their presence almost two centuries ago. However, the species is now locally extirpated (Punjabi pers. obs.), and there are no recent confirmed records (published or verbal) of the Dhole from Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (Punjabi et al. 2017).

After 189 years, this is the first photographic record confirming the occurrence of the Dhole in the vicinity of Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary (part of northwestern Ghat), Pune, Maharashtra. Further extensive surveys are recommended to determine its existence and population status in the sanctuary area.

## References

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**Acknowledgements:** The author is grateful to Raghuraj Erande, Vishwanath Bhagwat of ALIVE Charitable Trust, and Shivraj Pimpude of Jnana Prabodhini Navnagar Vidyalay, Nigdi, Pune, Maharashtra, India. We are grateful to Dr. Anil Mahabal, Scientist (retd.), Zoological Survey of India for his valuable suggestions. We are also thankful to Dr. Shyamkant Talmale, Zoological Survey of India for identity confirmation of the species.

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**Citation:** Vaghela, U. (2024). Dholes in the vicinity of Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra after 189 years: first photographic record. *Mammal Tales* #52, In: Zoo's Print 39(8): 32–33.