

# Kwazulu-Natal Wild Dog Project

Brendon Whittington-Jones\*

Wild Dogs *Lycaon pictus* have traditionally been viewed as cruel vermin, better dead than alive. In Zululand, a region within the province of KwaZulu-Natal in the North East of South Africa, they were extirpated many decades ago with Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve's (HiP) population disappearing by the 1930's.

Times change and so has the understanding of these socially dynamic, ecologically vital creatures. The time has come to re-think the Wild Dog.

The 1997 Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA) held for the African Wild Dog in Southern Africa recommended an expansion of the Wild Dog's range by exploring the potential of the expanding game ranch industry as possible options for Wild Dog reintroductions. To coordinate and manage the expanding network of Wild Dog populations nationwide, a multi-stakeholder forum, the Wild Dog Advisory Group (WAG) was also initiated.

Found only in 14 of the 39 African countries they are believed to have originally inhabited, Wild Dogs have the unenviable status of the most endangered carnivore in southern Africa. This has led to intensive efforts to establish genetically and socially viable Wild Dog populations through South Africa with the assistance of both state controlled conservation agencies and private landowners. Of the roughly 500 Wild Dogs in South Africa's fluctuating population, Kruger National Park (a state controlled park of approximately 2.2 million hectares in Mpumalanga province) holds between 120 and 430 Wild Dog at any one time. The entire KwaZulu-Natal province in the North East of South Africa is home to just 80 (although within the national metapopulation this is a vital proportion)!



**Wild Dogs *Lycaon pictus*.**  
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Only three reserves in the province, HiP, Mkhuze Game Reserve and Thanda Private Game Reserve (covering about 140,000 hectares in total) have precious populations of these animals, collectively managed as a viable population along with packs in the distant provinces of Limpopo, North West and the Northern Cape in what is known as the meta-population (which contains little more than 120 Wild Dogs). Zululand has been identified as a key area within the country to house a population of dogs and in light of such responsibility should be viewed with a sense of pride. Recent developments of private land owners consolidating large tracts of land into conservancies as well as changing attitudes towards conservation, biodiversity and the value of ecotourism are making our region particularly important for the future survival of this highly social and often misunderstood creature.

Of enormous importance to the KZN Wild Dog project is successful education and awareness of the plight of these creatures among the communities living in Zululand. Such proactive initiatives, it is hoped, will create a greater likelihood that Wild Dogs will be tolerated if they venture beyond the protected areas they are resident in for now. School visits, interactions with environmental clubs, distribution of information and identification pages and educational camps are all part of the multi-faceted approach to change negative and largely inaccurate perceptions towards Wild Dogs. The philosophy behind the camps is that if the children and tribal authority members can track and see Wild Dogs hunting, socialising, interacting with other species and the

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general environment, we believe there is a greater chance the participants will understand such behaviours, understand the role of the Wild Dogs in the ecosystem, and leave with a greater understanding of broader ecological principles and the human-induced impacts on this ecology. If we have truly succeeded they will leave with a passion for Wild Dog conservation.

Wild dogs disperse in single sex groups from their family packs from about the age of 1.5 years. They can cover great distances in short periods of time (49 km in 3 days was a reading gained from a satellite collar attached to such a wild dog in 2006!) searching for mates or other packs to link up with. Through several years of research on the wild dogs of HiP we are starting to scratch at the surface of

understanding where (and why they go where they go) dogs run when they are dispersing.

Routes in the past years have indicated paths covering over 140 km of community land. That is a lot of communities to slip through avoiding feral dogs, bullets and the wrath of those people assuming the worst if they catch a glimpse of these sleek, animated animals.

The project to expand and understand the current range of Wild Dogs through northern KwaZulu-Natal is carried out through a partnership between the Endangered Wildlife Trusts' Carnivore Conservation Group and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife; supported by The Green Trust and Land Rover South Africa, and in collaboration with The Smithsonian Institute.

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**Author Biography:** Brendan Whittington-Jones is currently Coordinator of the KwaZulu-Natal Wild Dog Project where he has been employed for just over one year. KwaZulu-Natal is the province along the north eastern coast of South Africa up to the Mozambique border (and boasts a city that is Durban, with the highest population of Indians in any city outside of India. Brendan works out of Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve which is in the province of KZN. His Head quarters are the Endangered Wildlife Trust based at the Johannesburg Zoo, South Africa. Earlier (2000-2003) Brendan worked as Manager/Ranger at Thula Thula Private Game Reserve 20km south of Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve. He left Africa for Baghdad to join his intrepid colleague helping out at the beleaguered Baghdad Zoo for over a year. He was based for some time end 2004 at Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs and then first half of 2005 commuting between North Carolina and Kabul Zoo. He invested some time in training in environmental management in between further Kabul Zoo consultancy visits. He worked on the website for SEAWASTE (Southern and East Africa information network on sea pollution and land based sources) before joining his current position. Brendan has visited India as a guest speaker at ZOO's SAZARC meeting. He is a member of a small group of correspondents keeping an eye on Kabul Zoo for lending a hand whenever it is deemed appropriate to do so. He is 31 years of age.

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## **Zoo community adds a new vertebrate species to the global biodiversity list: Rare endemic tiger gecko discovered off-shore northern Vietnam**

**Thomas Ziegler\***

Consistent with the International Conference of the Parties (Convention on Biological Diversity), which currently takes place in Bonn, Germany, a new splendidly coloured vertebrate species was recently discovered.

It is a tiger gecko that only occurs on Cat Ba Island, which is located off-shore northern Vietnam. Cat Ba National Park and Biosphere Reserve is not only famous for its beautiful steep karst cliffs projecting from the South Chinese Sea, but also due to a threatened primate species which can only be found on that island - the Cat Ba langur.

In the framework of a recent expedition consisting of international scientists that was initiated by the Zoological Society for Species and Population Conservation (ZGAP) another endemic vertebrate species was discovered on that island:

The beautiful tiger gecko was discovered by the project manager of the "Cat Ba Langur Conservation Projects", Dr. Roswitha Stenke, together with the scientists Nguyen Quang Truong from the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, Hanoi, and Dr. Thomas Ziegler from the Cologne Zoo.

To support the long-term conservation of this attractive species that probably only exists in low individual numbers and in order to prepare to better preserve the Biosphere Reserve, the scientists named the new species after the National Park in the issue 1771 of the international Journal ZOOTAXA that was published

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