

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

- FALL 2024 -

BRINGING NEW HOPE
TO PAINTED DOGS

TO FOSTER COEXISTENCE,
START WITH LIVESTOCK

FOLLOWING INDONESIA'S
GIANT CROCODILES



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network



WCN and the Painted Wolf Foundation have partnered to create the Painted Dog Fund, the only fund in existence completely focused on the conservation of this species, with the goal of doubling the number of Africa's painted dogs by 2055. Visit painteddogfund.org to learn more.

WCN also supports Painted Dog Conservation (PDC), who protect painted dogs in and around Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park. PDC's knowledge of painted dogs, tireless efforts, and their deep ties to their local community have helped painted dogs thrive for decades.

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PAINTED DOG FUND

Bringing New Hope to Painted Dogs

As the sinking sun pulled shadows over Kenya's vast Tsavo landscape, Joseph Kyalo Kimaile watched four painted dogs drinking from a drying water hole. Last year, this pack had 18 individuals, and now only four remained. He didn't know what happened to the others, so as Tsavo Trust's Chief Conservation Officer, he was determined to keep these four dogs safe. Painted dogs are his favorite animal, and with support from the Painted Dog Fund, a new Wildlife Fund launched by the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) and the Painted Wolf Foundation (PWF), Kyalo has a better chance of protecting Tsavo's remaining painted dog packs.

Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks are the largest in Kenya, and both are found within the wider Tsavo Conservation Area,

one of the world's largest wildlife sanctuaries. Lions, rhinos, and "Big Tusker" elephants all call this landscape home. Painted dogs also reside in Tsavo, although their numbers have widely fluctuated as they repeatedly succumb to snaring, disease, and human-wildlife conflict. Until recently, this endangered predator seemed to be doing well here, but their population is now in rapid decline. No one yet knows why and there are no safeguards in place within the parks to protect the species.

Tsavo Trust has had incredible success over the past decade conserving elephants and rhinos, and are now turning their attention to Tsavo's painted dogs. In 2023, Kyalo and his colleagues approached PWF for support, and the two organizations have been working together for the past year to develop a sustainable conservation



TSAVO TRUST'S JOSEPH KYALO KIMAILE IN THE FIELD MONITORING PAINTED DOGS.

strategy for the species. This strategy will help Kyalo's team understand the dynamics of resident packs and the attitudes of nearby communities that share this landscape with the painted dogs. This species requires very specific conservation approaches, and Kyalo's team needed expert advice and significant funding to implement these approaches across this vast region.

The Painted Dog Fund is investing in Tsavo Trust to bring long-term hope to painted dogs in both parks. With their new grant and by working with PWF, Tsavo Trust can better monitor and protect the area's remaining packs. They will also be able to launch an extensive rabies vaccination program for local domestic dogs to help prevent the disease from spreading to painted dogs or other wildlife. Strategies like these are key to species recovery. By funding projects that directly protect the species, bolster security in their rangelands, and encourage collaborations between conservationists, communities, and land management agencies, the Painted Dog Fund aims to double the number of painted dogs across Africa over the next 30 years.

With the sun now set, the four painted dogs left the water hole to begin the night's hunt. Kyalo watched them vanish into the brush with a renewed sense of hope. For too long, he felt powerless to defend these incredible canines, but now he sees a light at the end of the tunnel for his favorite animal. Thanks to the Painted Dog Fund, he knows his team will have the funding and resources they need to give Tsavo's painted dogs a brighter future. ■

To Foster Coexistence, Start with Livestock



Cheetahs rarely attack adult cattle, only targeting calves on occasion. To track bigger threats to cattle, like lions, CCB enlisted the aid of research students to GPS-collar several lions around New Xade. CCB will also receive support from WCN's Lion Recovery Fund to extend this project into new areas and reduce conflict between farmers and lions.

The cow's ear swatted away a fly above its bright orange GPS collar, sunlight glinting across the screen of the credit card-sized device attached to it. Throughout Africa, conservationists working near pastoral communities fit carnivores like cheetahs and lions with GPS collars, as tracking their movements helps prevent livestock predation. In New Xade, Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB) and their partners are trying something new—instead of just collaring predators, they're collaring the livestock. Tracking the movements of cattle tells CCB where and when carnivores are hunting them, providing valuable data to help CCB reduce livestock predation and promote coexistence in this key cheetah habitat.

New Xade lies between Central Kalahari Game Reserve and Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in Botswana. This is CCB's target area—a vast landscape linking cheetah populations in both protected areas and providing connectivity for cheetahs in neighboring Namibia and South Africa. Some of the highest densities of cheetahs in the world are found here, as are high levels of human-wildlife conflict. Although most livestock predation comes from lions, leopards, and painted dogs, some pastoralists in New Xade don't know which species to blame. They just find the remains of their cows or sheep and blame all predators, including cheetahs. CCB has alleviated

human-wildlife conflict throughout Botswana's sprawling Ghanzi District, where New Xade is located, for over 20 years. Upon discovering that New Xade's community needed more support, CCB interviewed more than 70 of their farmers to determine what safety methods they employed for their herds. While most did secure their herds in enclosures at night, some stragglers would inevitably get left behind; the farmers feared venturing into the bush at night to retrieve their missing livestock, often finding their carcasses days later.

To help farmers avoid losing their animals, CCB collaborated with peer groups, veterinarians, and visiting master's students to begin GPS-tagging cattle in New Xade. These tags transmit near-real-time movement data to both the farmers and CCB day and night. An alert is sent if a cow's activity increases dramatically or stops entirely, indicating danger. CCB also convinced many farmers to begin counting their livestock daily, as opposed to once or twice a year, to quickly determine if any are missing at the end of each day. If so, then a team of community rangers, which CCB also helped organize, are sent out to patrol the pastures on horseback and round up stray cattle at dusk before carnivores can find them.

These measures, along with deterrents like motion-triggered lights on enclosures and guard dogs for smaller livestock, are reducing conflict incidents in New Xade and helping make the area safer for livestock, cheetahs, and other predators. Responses from the farmers have been enthusiastic, with many impressed by the results of CCB's interventions. Since piloting this tracking program and the dusk patrols, only one cow has been lost to painted dogs, and cheetahs have been absolved from any misplaced blame.

With plans to deploy more cattle tracking collars and adapt the project, CCB's new approach to address an old problem is creating a safer environment for all who reside in this important cheetah corridor. ■



Carnivores aren't always to blame for livestock losses—disease and injury can also be the cause. If a cow dies while out grazing, its tracking collar data is still useful. By alerting CCB in near-real-time, they can locate the carcass quickly to determine the cause of death—and potentially clear cheetahs and other predators from blame—before scavengers disrupt those valuable clues.



Following Indonesia's Giant Crocodiles



HERDHANU JAYANTO (CENTER) AND HIS COLLEAGUES PREPARING A CAPTURED ADULT TOMISTOMA TO BE TAGGED AND RELEASED.

Raising his oar, Herdhanu Jayanto cleared a fallen branch from the narrow bend, the early morning peace periodically jolted by the calls of hornbills and macaques. With the route clear, his teammate tugged the engine's cord and it roared back to life. Their journey began before the sun first raised an eyelid, and as the boat cut through a flurry of insects along the brackish river, Herdhanu knew it would be six more hours before reaching the trapping site. But long excursions into remote wetlands are expected when searching for the tomistoma, an endangered and largely unknown crocodile found in Indonesia. With support and skills received from WCN's Rising Wildlife Leaders Scholarship Program, Herdhanu is helping his small team make big strides for this crocodile's conservation.

Not much beyond basic ecology has been learned about tomistomas, also known as false gharials or Sunda gharials, since their discovery in 1837. Roughly 2,400 of these giant crocodiles remain, and are likely decreasing due to substantial habitat loss. Indonesia has lost approximately 74 million acres of forest in the last two decades, with much of that deforestation occurring in Sumatra. Berbak National Park is considered the species' last stronghold in Sumatra, so in 2020, Herdhanu and his colleagues founded KONKLUSI, which focuses on protecting tomistomas and other overlooked species in Berbak and neighboring parks. But to create the most impact for tomistomas, Herdhanu had to expand his skill set.

In addition to continuing his conservation studies, Herdhanu plans to increase the frequency of KONKLUSI's field expeditions and use thermal drones to better monitor tomistoma movements.



In 2021, Herdhanu participated in WCN's Scholarship Program, which supports the higher education and professional development of local conservationists. The Scholarship Program empowers rising wildlife leaders like Herdhanu by removing financial barriers and providing them with learning and mentorship opportunities to advance their knowledge and experience. This support was invaluable for Herdhanu, whose scholarship granted him access to new field training, allowed him to provide for his family during his studies, and recently helped him earn his degree in environmental science.

Using this new expertise, Herdhanu leads KONKLUSI's efforts to track tomistomas within Berbak's swamp forest. Venturing deep into the park, the team stays in empty fisher huts or ranger stations for weeks at a time, performing early morning and late-night surveys. They set harmless traps throughout the river system, and when a tomistoma is captured, Herdhanu attaches a GPS tag to track its movements upon release. This is the first comprehensive range

assessment for tomistomas, providing Herdhanu's team with information to manage their remaining population and estimate migration routes. It's patient work, given the species' shy and clever nature, and some expeditions end with no taggings. But KONKLUSI has successfully tagged five tomistomas since 2022 and uncovered new insights about their range requirements—crucial data that they share with park staff. By developing a long-term partnership with Berbak's management, KONKLUSI's data will inform their strategies to better protect tomistomas and their remaining habitat.

Herdhanu credits his recent professional growth to his WCN scholarship, and is continuing his educational journey to further increase his skills. With more holistic study, he and KONKLUSI will bolster safeguards for tomistomas and their vulnerable ecosystem, one long boat ride at a time. ■

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KONKLUSI facilitates conservation projects for tomistomas (shown here) and other little-known Indonesian species, such as Siamese crocodiles, Malaysian giant turtles, and Attenborough's long-beaked echidnas.



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