



## Update – January 2010



Initiated in 2007, The Northern Tuli Game Reserve Wild Dog Project is already in its third year. After a five month stint in an enclosure, the pack has now been roaming the reserve for almost two years. During this time 25 pups have been born, 19 dogs have dispersed in four separate dispersal incidents and there have been nine mortalities (3 pups, 6 adults). The pack currently numbers 15 in total, and is comprised of five adults and ten pups (seven months old).

In an attempt to further wild dog conservation in the region, we have been working closely with Limpopo-Lipadi Game Reserve, which is approximately 70km away from the NTGR. Nine wild dog pups were raised on the reserve after the adults had been killed in the Ghanzi region of Botswana. Since the siblings were raised in captivity, they cannot merely be released on the reserve as they have not hunted for themselves, nor know what lions and hyenas are all about. They also need unrelated dogs to form a viable pack.

In order to create a functional pack, the dogs need to be bonded with wild-caught dogs. This process involves removing one sex and bonding the remaining dogs with wild-caught dogs of the opposite sex. This procedure mimics natural pack formation in the wild. Normally dispersal involves single-sex groups leaving their natal packs and searching for new mates. New packs are thereby made-up of unrelated males and females.

We initially intended to capture a few of our younger males prior to them dispersing and use them in the bonding process. They unfortunately beat us to it and all six left the pack. None of their sisters had left the pack, so we then planned instead to send three females to Limpopo-Lipadi. This process was complicated by the dogs spending some time just across the border in South Africa. Once all the permits were finally in order, we arranged for the vet to come out and once again attempted to locate and capture the dogs. When we eventually located the pack, the females had left... It was literally a matter of hours... After a lot of planning and arrangements, we all went back empty-handed and very frustrated. With no radio collars, there was no way that we were able to track these dispersing animals.

Our luck changed later in December when the dispersing males were reported some distance away in South Africa. They had not yet found themselves any lady friends, and two dogs were captured. These males are currently being held in a holding facility and will be moved to Limpopo-Lipadi as soon as the permits are in order. The male dogs from the Limpopo-Lipadi pack will be sent to a project in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where they will be bonded with wild-caught females. In this way all the dogs will contribute to the conservation of the species, and none of them will spend the rest of their lives in captivity.

### Background to NTGR Wild Dog Project

A pack of 18 wild dogs was reintroduced to the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in November 2007. Initially held in an enclosure, the pack was released on 5 April 2008. The project aims to establish a viable pack of this endangered species within the Limpopo Valley region of eastern Botswana. A research programme has been established in addition to a community outreach initiative, educating local communities about wild dogs, predators and conservation in general.



### PROJECT PARTNERS





#### South African Farmers

When the wild dogs moved into South Africa last year, we had to deal with some unhappy farmers, some of which had to be convinced not to shoot the wild dogs. This is also an area where several lions and other species have been shot over the years. Given the delicate status of our reserve's lion and wild dog populations, we can ill afford to lose any more animals. Despite the previous problems, there was never any form of communication between the reserve and the farmers. The wild dogs' wanderings highlighted this point and a process was set in motion to meet with all the neighbouring farmers. After initial one-on-one consultations, Pete le Roux arranged a general meeting in December. This meeting provided a platform for the relevant people to get to know one another, learn more about their neighbours, ask questions and express any concerns. Information was provided on the status of the lions and wild dogs specifically and it became evident our neighbours did not know that there is only a single adult male remaining, for example. They were under the impression that there were far more, so consequently were not too perturbed to shoot lions that may visit their properties. Last year the reserve lost three adult males alone, two of which were shot on South African soil. The meeting was very productive and positive and further discussions and between the two groups are planned.

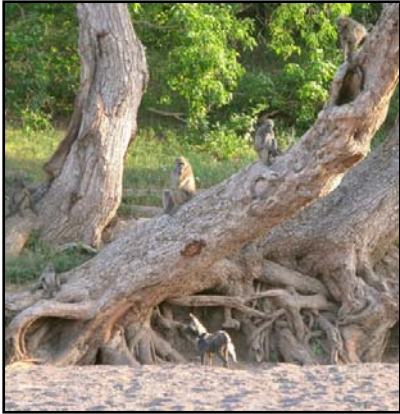
#### Project management

After two years spent with the wild dogs, I will be spending more time at the University to work on my PhD. We have a new member in the team, and his name is Dewald van Wyk. He will be doing his Masters Degree on the wild dogs and will be taking over the day-to-day data collection and running of the project. Dewald will also be building on the relationships which have been developed with the South African farmers. The two of us will be working closely together and having an extra person on board will allow us to broaden the research that is conducted on the wild dogs.



#### General movements

After the females left the pack in late November, the pack returned to the reserve. It is great to spend time out with the dogs again. In addition to hunting, you are always bound to see something interesting when they are on the move. During the past week I have twice seen them interact with a baboon troop. The pups, now seven months old, are the most playful. It is not merely a case of the dogs chasing the baboons, the baboons do their fair share of dog chasing as well. It appears as if the larger baboons try to act very brave and pretend to be totally unperturbed by the dogs. They sit on a low branch or even on the ground close to the tree, sitting casually, pretending to look away into the distance, occasionally yawning to show off their massive teeth, and pay the dogs no attention. The dogs approach



cautiously and as soon as they get too close, the baboon makes a quick dash at them before doing an about turn so as to be close to a tree should it be needed. Some of the young baboons try to adopt a similar attitude alongside the adults, but they just can't quite bring it upon themselves to look in the opposite direction when the dogs are not far off. This results in lots of frantic movements as they look away briefly, but then jerk their heads around to check up on the dogs' position. Some of the really small baboons also climb into the tree directly above the dogs and shake the branches, causing leaves and twigs to rain down on the dogs. It's a good laugh and great to watch!



### Email list

Should you have received this update "via the grapevine" and would like me to email it to you directly in future, please send me an email ([craig.jackson@bio.ntnu.no](mailto:craig.jackson@bio.ntnu.no)) and I will add you to the mailing list. Please also see the blog at [www.tulipredatorproject.ning.com](http://www.tulipredatorproject.ning.com).

Until next time,  
All the best

Craig Jackson