



Seventh Update – 1 October 2008

Snares...

On Friday morning one of our adult males, Savanna, was found with a nasty snare around his neck. We immobilised the dog later the same day to remove the snare and treat the wound. We also removed his radio collar so that it would not interfere with the healing process. The snare had resulted in a really deep cut, which suggests that he struggled for quite some time to break free. Fortunately he did somehow manage to break the wire, otherwise he may well have died in the snare. Despite the severity of the wound, he seems to be recovering nicely.



Three weeks back we lost another adult dog, Runtie. She was the runt of last year's litter and was far smaller in size when compared to her siblings. Unfortunately we do not know what happened to her. We now have 13 adults and 12 puppies in our pack.

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





Above: pups playing in the Limpopo riverbed

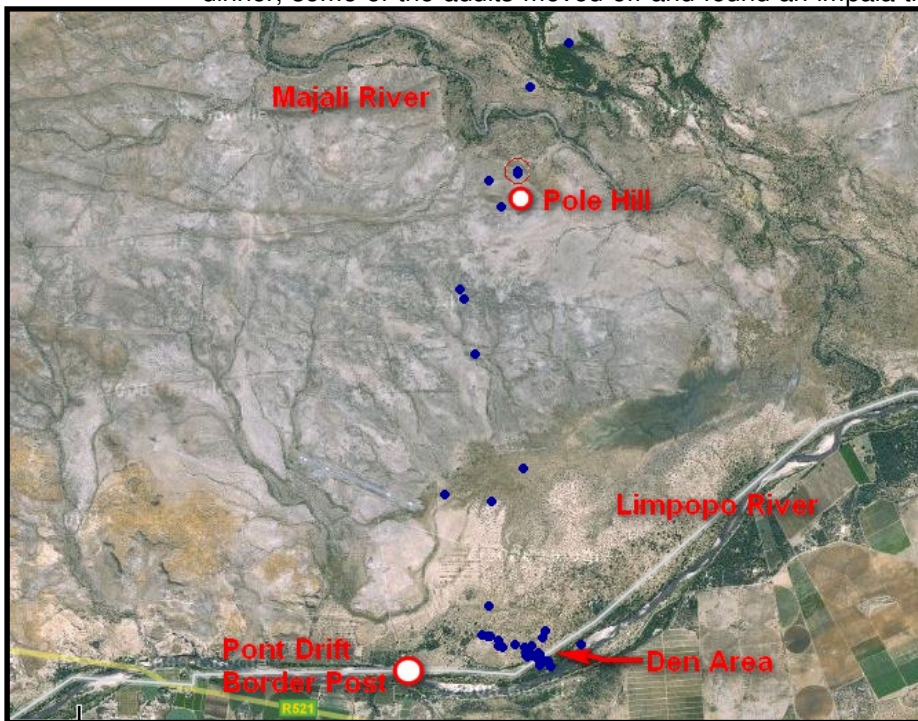
After spending a full three months at the den, the entire wild dog pack moved out on Sunday. Seeing 25 wild dogs moving through the bush together is quite an impressive site! They headed in a northerly direction and made their way up to Pole Hill. They used this hill as a base for three nights and early this morning they headed back down towards the Limpopo River. On Monday evening they caught an impala ewe within 45 minutes of going out hunting. This was right next to Pole Hill. It was great to see the pups on a kill for the first time.

Prior to this the adults would regurgitate food for them at the den. Unlike lions, wild dogs let the young feed first. In fact the pups defend "their" kill aggressively from the adults! They snap at any intruders and gang up in an attempt to compensate for their diminutive stature! The alpha male and female always remained close to the kill and pups. The pups are now very vulnerable to other predators and the adults seem to be extra-alert. While the pups happily indulged in their dinner, some of the adults moved off and found an impala that had been killed by a lone lioness.

She had moved off for some reason, perhaps for a drink in the Majali River, and the dogs quickly finished up her catch. They returned to the pups and some dogs regurgitated food to feed the pups, even after they had had almost an entire impala to themselves!

The pups are now three months old and are becoming very mobile. Recently they started with short excursions from the den. During the day, much of their time was spent in the Limpopo riverbed. Here they would play and lie around in the shade of some large trees. The adults would go out early and late to hunt and bring food back to the pups.

Below: Kalahari feeding some of the pups



Left: Map showing the wild dogs' movement during the last 10 days. Four GPS fixes are taken each day by the collar (2 am, 2 pm)



BioBoundary work

Wild dogs cover large distances and often come into conflict with people and their livestock, or contract diseases from domestic dogs. In an attempt to restrict wild dog movement in our study area, we are experimenting with a novel approach referred to as the BioFence or BioBoundary. Dr Tico McNutt from the Botswana Predator Conservation Trust has been working on the concept for several years and this is the first actual field experiment. In brief, wild dogs are territorial and respect the boundaries of neighbouring packs. Communication between wild dog packs is based on chemical communication with urine and faecal markings informing dogs about their neighbours' whereabouts and much more. We are attempting to simulate occupied wild dog territories towards the periphery of the reserve and in doing so create a "BioBoundary". We have had some very encouraging results after the release of the pack in April 2008. It is however a first and we are consequently learning as we go.



Since the dogs were based around the den for three months, they did not cover large distances, always returning to the pups. With the dogs now leaving the den, it is almost the same as a "release" and gives us an opportunity to modify certain methodology pertaining to these experiments. Tico and his wife Lesley flew in last Thursday and brought with them another 120 scent marks which had been collected from one of their study packs in the north of Botswana. We assessed this component of the project and plotted the way forward for the next few months. It is a very exciting trial and we will keep you up to date as things progress.

Thank you

The Northern Tuli Game Reserve Wild Dog Project is totally dependent on donations. These come both in the form of money or equipment. We would like to thank all of you have contributed to the project and helped us keep things running! Thanks also to our project partners for their ongoing support. Anyone who would like to make a contribution to the project can contact either Geoff Norris (Chairman, Notugre; [norrises@ibi.co.za](mailto:norris@ibi.co.za)) or myself. There are also tax-back options for donors based in the USA and RSA.

Recently Jacques van der Merwe, manager of Tuli Safari Lodge kindly donated a high-lift jack to the project. Thanks a lot for this, hopefully we will not need to use it too often!

The Land Rover Club of South Africa has generously offered to buy a set of proper off-road tyres for the project vehicle. The current set are good tyres but not intended for daily use in these rocky conditions. They have deteriorated rapidly and we look forward to taking receipt of the new tyres later in the month.



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 (crjackson@zoology.up.ac.za) and I will add you to the mailing list. Please note that I do not have regular email contact and may not respond to email for several weeks at time, and this also hampers getting regular updates out.

Until next time,
All the best

Craig Jackson



Disclaimer

I have compiled this document as a means to update interested persons on the current happenings of the NTGR wild dog project. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, its landowners, or the project partners and/or sponsors.