

Project Update June 2007:

A familiar roller coaster ride during the last few weeks has left us all rather bewildered. The dogs of course are the ones responsible.

We had hardly recovered from the loss of Beans when a report came in from a farm along the main road towards Victoria Falls; they had seen a dog looking in a terrible state, with only one leg and pitifully thin. Jealous responded and with Esters help they managed to recover the dog and get it to our rehabilitation facility. He was too far-gone with shocking wounds, a snare had amputated his leg, and he had also lost one eye, though long ago. He did not last the night.

Close behind this incident came news that 6 dogs, 4 of them collared had been seen on one of the farms to the east of us in the Gwayi Conservancy area. Jealous again followed up on this, he was sure it was the Pilansberg pack based on the number of dogs reported and the location, after several hours of tracking he homed in on the signal from one of the collars. He had been right of course, it was the Pilansberg pack, however to his surprise and pleasure he soon realised that the Mashambo alpha female and her daughter had joined the Pilansberg males. We had lost track of the females, fearing the worse, following the death of the Mashambo alpha male.

His pleasure soon dissolved when he noticed that one of the males was badly snared around the neck. He kept with the pack until they stopped hunting, waited with them for an hour to be sure that they were now resting for the day then he raced back to the office to collect me. We drove back quickly and found the dogs resting in shady teak woodland. It was a relatively easy operation to manoeuvre the landrover through the trees, Jealous smiled as he does, commenting on the fact that there were no acacia thorns. We have done this so many times together. Hardly a word needs to be exchanged between us, a subtle hand signal is enough, pointing the way as his eyes pick out the injured dog, guiding me into a position where I can dart it.

The injured dog stood up. The range finder told me he was 28 metres away, which is further than I would normally like to dart from because the dogs present such a small target area, however I knew he would not allow us to get any closer as injured dogs always increase their flight distance from any apparent threat. Jealous turned the engine off and I took careful aim as the dog turned slightly. He was now presenting himself side on, he turned his head to look at me as if asking to be darted. My aim was true and the dart hit perfectly in the muscle of his hindquarters. He jumped slightly then walked away. Five minutes later he was down and I walked over, picked him up and carried him back to the landrover. The snare wound was deep. Copper telephone wire had cut into the muscle of his neck on one side. The snare had been caught on his collar on the other side, which was probably why he was still alive. Without the collar he would have been decapitated or certainly had his windpipe cut, resulting in death. We worked quickly to cut the wire away, clean the wound and inject him with anti biotic. A quick decision was made to take him to our rehabilitation facility, we felt his best chance of making a speedy recovery would be at our facility, where he could rest and eat. I was happy that the rest of the pack would come and find him and perhaps it would help in keeping them closer to us, in an area patrolled more regularly by our APU. Failing that, I knew that Jealous would have no trouble finding the pack when the time came to reintroduce the injured dog.

Sikhosana lobbied the telephone company again in Dete. It was their phone line that was again being used for snares. We have repeatedly offered a tractor, trailer and the man power needed to recover all the phone lines that have fallen down, however the phone company have declined to accept this offer, saying that the lines will be repaired. We have pointed out that soon there will be no lines left to repair.