

## Project Update August 2010:



### A dog's life.

We often marvel at the sociality of life as a painted dog and their caring nature. Greg describes it as “a kind of three musketeers’ approach of all for one and one for all.” On the whole, this is indeed a good representation of life within the pack. The old, sick and injured are often cared for and fed, while pups take priority when it comes to feeding.

However it's not all nirvana. In their daily life the dogs exist on a knife-edge, expending huge amounts of energy in the search for food, avoiding conflict with larger, more powerful predators. Life in the wild for painted dogs is extremely tough and can be brutal. A fact we were recently reminded of as we stood over the body of Blaze, one of the males in our embattled Kutanga pack.



He had been with the pack at 7 PM as they hunted, the new moon providing them with enough light and extra cool hours for foraging. At 9 PM he was missing. The alarm bells were only sounded when Jealous caught up with the pack at 7AM the following morning and Blaze was still missing. We immediately started searching in the area where he had been seen last and quickly picked up the signal from his VHF radio collar. He was not moving. I called Jealous on the radio and he joined me to walk into the bush. We had done this many times before but the presence of a pride of seven lions in the area added to the nervous tension. The signal from Blaze's collar told us that he was not far away. As we approached, the signal did not change to a moving signal but remained at the familiar slow pulse of 30 beats per minute, a resting beat, but not something we wanted to hear in this case. We soon found his body.

Bite marks on his head and back right leg gave some indication as to his cause of death but as we turned his body over we were shocked to see that he had been castrated.

### Moonlight hunting.

We carried his body back to my Land Rover and drove to our Rehab where Greg was waiting. We speculated over the injuries and concluded that a honey badger was probably the likeliest assailant. However there were clearly other injuries and a post mortem revealed that he had also been kicked in the chest, suffering two broken ribs. We concluded that Blaze, in his weakened state after being

#### **Painted Dog Conservation**

P. O. Box 72, Dete, Zimbabwe

Telephone: 00 263 (0) 18 710

Email: [pdcoffice@painteddog.org](mailto:pdcoffice@painteddog.org)

Website: [www.painteddog.org](http://www.painteddog.org)

Painted Dog Conservation is a registered private voluntary organization in Zimbabwe P.V.O. 13/2005

kicked, had perhaps been attacked by the honey badger, but we will never know for sure. What we do know is that the Kutanga pack was left in turmoil again.



The injury and ultimately the loss of Alpha male Squirrel had caused some unusual in-fighting in the pack earlier in the year. No sooner had that dust settled than we were dealing with the loss of the new born pups and now this. The remaining members of the Kutanga pack appeared at our Rehab Facility the next day. Certainly no coincidence, a lot of haunting hoo calling indicated that they were looking for their lost pack mate. We feared that this incident may have been one too many for them to suffer and that the pack may dissolve. Squirrel had been the alpha male and after his death, Blaze had been seen mating with the alpha female. Thus we took advantage of them lingering near the rehab and managed to fit a GPS collar to the alpha female, Ester, and also a VHF collar to one of the other females. This quickly proved to have been worthwhile as the males started to hunt further afield, leaving the females outside our Rehab. Several days would pass before they returned to briefly interact with the females before heading away again. Occasionally the females would join them on the hunt but soon returned to the Rehab and this pattern of behaviour continues today. Collectively they are spending much more time outside of Hwange National Park. On two occasions it was necessary to deploy our anti-poaching units into the area through which the dogs were moving. Areas notorious for poaching and poorly protected by other stakeholders. On one such occasion our APU found the seven lions feeding on a buffalo that had died in a line of 30 snares. Nearby was the carcass of another lion that had also died in a snare. The dogs were 500m from this!

As an organisation we are geared up to deal with issues such as the above and we receive tremendous support from Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management, especially on the anti-poaching side of things, however others could and should do more. Our Bush Camp programme for the children is well documented and we intend to take this out into the community in a more proactive manner, as encouraged by the Minister of Environment himself and we are stepping up the working relationship with other NGOs in the region who focus more on development. Our Rehab facility is currently home to ten dogs, six of whom are being prepared for release back into the wild where they belong. There is no such thing as a normal day at PDC and we never stop. Jealous, Wilton, Dought and Foggie ensure the programmes run as smoothly as possible, while the rehab staff under Xmas and the APU under Zulu continue, committed to their work.



APU at work removing deadly snares.

**Painted Dog Conservation**

P. O. Box 72, Dete, Zimbabwe

Telephone: 00 263 (0) 18 710

Email: [pdcoffice@painteddog.org](mailto:pdcoffice@painteddog.org)

Website: [www.painteddog.org](http://www.painteddog.org)

Painted Dog Conservation is a registered private voluntary organization in Zimbabwe P.V.O. 13/2005