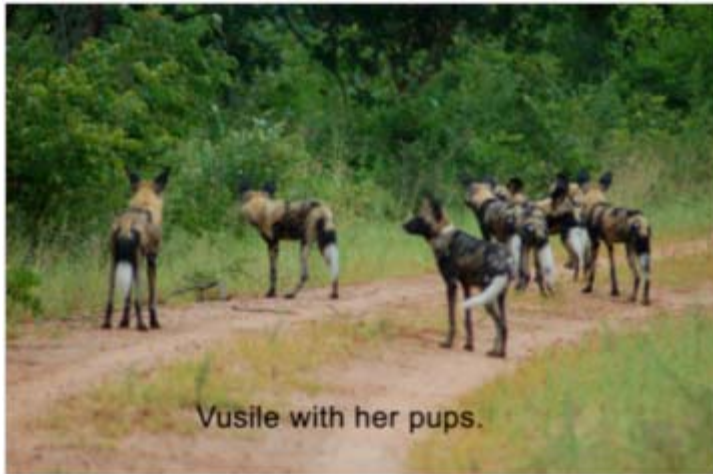


## Project Update March 2011

Apr 5, 2011

We ended 2010 with some room for optimism given the reports coming in about new dogs in the area. Happily this situation has largely continued with the Sisele pack, still a regular sight around Hwange National Park, Main Camp. The Sisele pack is a small pack of only two adults and six pups, however we know the alpha female very well. She turned up at our Rehabilitation Facility on her own in May 2009. Her two brothers, Sibuyile and Sithule, were already inside the enclosures and after some time I managed to successfully dart her and reunite her with her brothers, albeit inside our enclosure. We named her Vusile, which translates roughly as the “clever one.” Over the ensuing months we integrated these three with the “survivors” of Starvation Island and the entire pack was released into Hwange National Park as the ill-fated Bambanani pack in August 2009. The fate of the Bambanani was detailed in my October 2009 report. The pack soon ran into trouble with two males killed by speeding cars, three others killed in snares and at that time Vusile disappeared.



We received one sighting towards the end of 2009 and another in early 2010, which we believed was Vusile and, accordingly, maintained our hopes. It was only in October last year that we positively identified the female with six pups as Vusile, confirming that she is indeed the clever one. Her pups are the most beautiful, her alpha male partner seeming to be as smart as she is because raising six pups to this age is quite an accomplishment. We are driving out each day to keep a watchful eye on them with the aim of getting a collar on at least one of the adults so that we can better monitor them. We know how smart they are and sure enough they have avoided all our darting efforts to date.



Further south we have been trying to keep an eye on, or rather get a handle on, the Secheche pack, which was first reported on in September 2010. This pack has a combination of five adults and yearlings plus six pups, so is slightly better positioned than the Sisele. Though this pack is further away we have actually managed to collar one of the adult males, though not without the usual share of drama involving cars breaking down in the bush and subsequent long walks. Eventually though, the team of Greg, Esther, Hans and “Mk” successfully darted one of the adult males. He was targeted because it looked as though he had a broken jaw. Thankfully it was only a torn lip, an old wound, that just gave him a peculiar appearance.

With the Kutanga pack being ever present in the area as well, we are enjoying plenty of dog sightings at the moment, while we also wait for an opportunity when we can revisit Mana Pools and check on Tait plus her Vundu pack.

Wilton and his team hit the ground running in 2011 and have already hosted five schools from the local communities. The impact of the Bush Camp programme is huge and it’s simply great to see the children having the time of their lives. Wilton posted a lovely story on our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Painted-Dog-Conservation>) recently about two children that managed to avoid some buffalos and thus a life threatening confrontation, as a result of their lessons at the Bush Camp and their first ever game drive into Hwange National Park, when they saw buffalo for the first time, which enabled them to distinguishing buffalo from cattle.

Poaching activity has been generally low in the first quarter of the year but with the rains now seeming to have come to an end rather early it spells trouble ahead. . Already agencies such as USAID are distributing food in the rural communities and there are concerns that a relatively poor rainy season will translate into hardships for people later this year. This usually translates into increased poaching activity, so if funding permits we will try and strengthen our anti-poaching units this year.

All in all it’s been a positive start to 2011. We sincerely hope that you will continue to support us as you have done so wonderfully over the years during will inevitably be another tough year