

The IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist Group's
African Wild Dog Status Survey and Action Plan (1997)

Executive Summary

Populations of the African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) have declined dramatically over the past 30 years. Wild dogs have disappeared from 25 of the 39 countries in which they were formerly recorded, and only six populations are believed to number more than 100 animals. Between 3,000 and 5,500 wild dogs, in perhaps 600-1,000 packs, remain in total. Most of these are in southern and eastern Africa; only small remnant populations remain in West and central Africa.

Wild Dogs as Indicators

Wild dogs are uniquely susceptible to habitat fragmentation. A resident breeding population may therefore provide a "gold standard" indicating excellent local management of wildlife. Wild dogs' recent decline reflects the expansion of human populations in Africa and the associated fragmentation of habitat available to wildlife:

Wild dogs range widely, so that even those inhabiting protected areas often contact human activity on reserve borders. Over half the wild dogs found dead in protected areas have been shot, snared, poisoned, killed by road traffic or infected with diseases by domestic dogs outside the reserve.

Human activity therefore represents a serious threat, even to wild dogs inhabiting large reserves.

Areas smaller than 10,000km² contain no safe "core" where wild dogs are buffered from these edge effects. As a result they will be the first species to disappear as wildlife lands are fragmented.

Since wild dogs are so susceptible to habitat fragmentation, the highest priority for their conservation is to maintain and promote the contiguity of wildlife areas. Establishing cross-border parks, corridors and buffer zones, and encouraging land use favourable to wildlife on reserve borders, will therefore benefit wild dogs even more than other endangered species. Wild dogs are highly appropriate "flagships" for the expansion of wildlife areas.

Most of Africa's remaining wild dog populations inhabit areas substantially smaller than 10,000km². These are extremely vulnerable due to their small size and exposure to human activity. Protecting such populations requires mitigation of "edge effects" on the borders of wildlife areas by:

- Working with local farmers to limit persecution. This may involve establishing zones where wild dogs are to be conserved, and areas where farmers are not required to tolerate large predators. Inside predator conservation zones wild dog protection might involve improved livestock husbandry, compensation for livestock losses, local education, and better legal protection.
 - Routing of new high-speed roads away from reserves and their border areas.
 - Control of snaring inside wildlife areas and along their borders. This may involve local development to provide alternative sources of protein.
 - Minimizing wild dogs' contact with diseases carried by domestic dogs. Control of diseases such as rabies will also benefit people and livestock, and may be carried out in collaboration with public health organizations. Domestic dogs should not be permitted inside protected areas. Outside reserves, the numbers and mobility of domestic dogs should be controlled, with unaccompanied dogs being shot on sight. Domestic dogs may also be vaccinated against canid diseases.
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Monitoring Population Trends: Continued Information-gathering

Continued monitoring of wild dog populations is crucial to dynamic management:

- Countries such as Algeria, Sudan and the Central African Republic might contain wild dog populations with very high conservation value. Surveys are needed to establish their status.
 - Wild dog sightings should be collected continuously by local conservation authorities. Sightings are rare and wild dog population decline may go unnoticed if data are not collected systematically.
 - Threats such as disease vary dramatically from place to place and over time. Continued monitoring of populations under long-term study will identify new threats as they emerge.
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Lower Priorities: Re-establishing Extirpated Populations

It is technically possible to re-establish extirpated wild dog populations by reintroduction, but this provides no substitute for the conservation of existing populations. Reintroduction is most needed in West and central Africa, but there

are few suitable release sites, and no animals of appropriate genotypes available for release.

In highly fragmented landscapes, wild dogs could be released into a network of small, fenced reserves, each supporting one or a few packs, to establish an intensively-managed metapopulation. This would be prohibitively expensive in most of Africa, but locally valuable if funds were available.

Return to Wild Dog Action Plan [Table of Contents](#), [AWD Species Account](#), [CSG Publications](#) or [CSG Home Page](#).

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