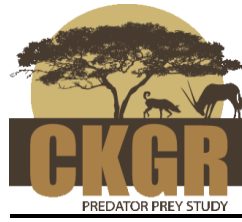


**Central Kalahari Wild Dog Research-CKGR and Makgadikgadi
Research Group**



Report CKGR wild dog research - July 2011

Wild Dog Project Researchers and team: Dr Glyn Maude, Botilo Tshimologo ,
Mmoluki Keiteretse, Mompoloki Morapedi and Paul Mothathobi.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) wild dog research project has finally managed to get a satellite collar onto the study pack living in the CKGR. The collar was deployed mid-May onto an adult female whom had previously been wearing a VHF collar. It is our first time to use an “argos” satellite collar as other larger satellite collars are based on “iridium” satellites which work differently and we have previously only used them on lions and wildebeest. This wild dog argos collar stores 6 locations a day and is set up to maximise the chances of it giving us a 9 am or 10 am location each day so we can drive and find them before they move again. This pack has been moving over an area in the northern CKGR that is about 4 000 km². So far the collar is working well and we recently spent 4 continuous days following the study wild dogs.



Figure one: The long awaited satellite collar goes onto a study animal. We have struggled to spend time with this pack as we lose them easily and then can't relocate them unless we fly. We hope we can know spend more time with them but have we left it too late?



Figure two: Botilo project M.sc University of Botswana researcher is happy the job is well done. The wild dog was up and gone thirty minutes later.

The study “CKGR pack” which had eleven members two years ago at the start of this study was down to three in number in May this year when we changed the collar. The alpha female was missing then, as only a few weeks previously there were still four members (with the alpha present) which had been the case for almost a year. Since the collaring in May the newly satellite collared female is now with a strange shy female wild dog (figure three) and there is no sign of the two other males she was still with only three weeks before and lived with for two years. The pack is now down to only two wild dogs which is a real concern, in particular as wild dog sightings within the CKGR are rare, typically only of very small numbers (two or three) and often near the park boundaries. Only a few years back we knew of two wild dogs pack working within the northern CKGR region, each with nine pack members and there were regular sightings of other wild dog packs in the south. We have no idea the fate of ten of the original eleven study wild dogs. Or of the fate of other packs that were seen in the area. Of concern is the continued and unabated high level of persecution of wild dogs outside the park and the sightings of only larger wild dog packs outside in farming areas but not inside the park. Inevitably all of these larger packs are being heavily persecuted as they live on farming lands.

Such a decline in our study CKGR pack and a relative scarcity of other wild dog sightings within the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is a potentially real conservation concern for the populations in Kalahari region. We know so little of these Kalahari populations and it would be beyond a tragedy if they disappeared before we had a chance to make a sustained effort to conserve them. We have to assume the persecution of wild dogs on the boundaries may be causing a source (CKGR) and sink (farming areas) syndrome to be going on.



Figure three: The strange female resting up that is now with the only wild dog left from the initial eleven part of a CKGR pack. She was shy of us (we were only 25 km from the park boundary so she may have move outside in conflict with farmers!) and we were lucky to get this close to take the photo. The white spot on the upper left middle part of her back is a “marker” and we are looking at other photos to see if we have got her id already but we this is our first view of her.



Figure four: On the track of wild dogs in the CKGR. With the amount of time we spend off road not a surprise we fall down big holes and have to dig and jack the car out. We were on our own, 25 km from the nearest remote bush road and have to be self sufficient in all ways.



Figure five: “Rapps” a project researcher emerging from his “flop up” tent on a cold morning to start the day on the trail of the two wild dogs. Typically but not always by sunrise they would have moved 10 km or more in the night but the satellite collar meant we could find them again. Due to disturbance we do not want to follow them at night.

This CKGR study pack has not denuded now for two consecutive years and will most likely completely disappear in the near future along with the other packs that typically were seen in the region. Of course other factors other than human persecution can have highly negative influences on wild dog populations. These include pressures on wild dogs from lions, disease and loss of habitat among others. Lion population within the CKGR appear to be at peak at the moment (CKGR lion research), diseases are known to periodically be present in the region and of course no doubt human persecution along the boundaries is high but the exact level is not quantified. **Thus to be factual – “as a research group we can’t yet be sure that the populations are definitely dropping within the CKGR as there could be wild dogs packs resident that we are not aware of. In 52 500 km² of remote bush it is not easy to locate wild dogs that live at low densities with huge territories. Or if they are dropping significantly whether the reasons are natural or human induced.”** However the negative signs are there and they should be noted and acted upon. What is now required is a significant effort to gain more information about wild dog numbers in the region and to more accurately and scientifically quantify the levels of off-take on the boundaries and to then act accordingly.

What it takes

To gain information on numbers we need to have access to more funds than we have at present in order to send researchers with reliable cars and good equipment into the field to remote areas all over the CKGR with trackers to find wild dogs and their den sites (they typically den from June/July to September). We need to have the ability to then access vets and get them to the wild dogs we find quickly to get satellite collars onto them so we can monitor them to determine their fate and further study their behaviours. Thus we need more resources for collars and vet costs and then the resources to monitor the wild dogs after getting the collars on.

In order to scientifically quantify the levels of off-take on the boundaries we need to send researchers to gain the trust of farmers both commercial and subsistence. We need to design a series of questions that if answered honestly will help us gauge the level of farmer wild dog conflict on the boundaries and the level of persecution of wild dogs. Also of course how this level may change and what this change may mean. For example lower level of persecution could be the result of significantly declining wild dog populations. Thus we also need to try get good information on wild dogs numbers moving in farming areas and on the park boundary. We need to be able to respond quickly when farmers call us to say they have wild dog problems on their farms so we can do something.

As a research group we believe the above is urgently needed. We have started already and have so far worked with four packs of wild dog and learnt about our study animals, what they eat where they go, how large their territories are and so on but we need to go further. We have chatted to farmers and gained their trust but not enough of them or frequently enough. Our study area is massive and remote and the challenges to success with our mission are big and in order to do we need to raise funds soon. **Ideally if we are to be effective we need to raise between \$ 20 000 to \$ 40 000 in the next six months and then between \$ 3000 to \$ 6 000 every month after that. Even more if we can!**



Figure six: Two wild dogs recently sighted in the eastern CKGR not far from boundary. We need to locate them again and get a satellite collar onto one if we are to monitor them ...will they be stay in the reserve or move out and be persecuted or den and successful raise pups?



A Kalahari wild dog looking gazing into the distance and possible into the future..... Is there a future for this species in the Kalahari environment? So far the signs are not promising but we need to learn more.

Thanks to:

Research of this nature in a remote and massive region with an elusive, large ranging and low density study animal takes dedication, expertise and considerable resources. For what we have achieved so far sincere thanks go to Biotope, Lars Gorschluter from Gotec and SAVE Foundation, Denver Zoological Foundation, Anton van Schalkwyk, the Wilderness Wildlife Trust and the Comanis Foundation. Private donors Stuart and Teresa Graham and deserve a special thanks for their long-term support.

The project is also affiliated to the wild dog work done in the Linyanti region of the Okavango Delta and (supported by Okavango Wilderness Safaris) with project researchers Botilo Tshimologo, Kai Collins and Glyn Maude.

If any further information is required please contact project lead researcher:

Dr Glyn Maude on: email brownhyaena@info.bw or 267 721 91011.