



## Kalahari African Wild Dogs



Update-November 17<sup>th</sup>

By Glyn Maude on behalf of the CKGR research team in collaboration with the Linyanti and Vumbura wild dog project

### **“Fading?”**

The last project news update in October asked the question? “Are Central Kalahari wild dogs threatened with extinction?” Events since then have transpired to give us a strong clue as to the answer. That October update (attached) described the disappearance of the main study pack living entirely within the CKGR and the eroding of wild dog populations within the park generally. It also outlined the importance of a second wild dog pack we were working with in the northwest CKGR, the “Tsau Hills” pack. This pack ranges primarily within the NW CKGR and onto a large game farm located outside the NW boundary of the CKGR. The pack also moves on some occasions, onto commercial cattle farm land to the west of CKGR, on which farmers are known to regularly kill predators in defence of their livestock. The last update ended with;

***“It will be very crucial to see how the Tsau hills wild dog pack goes in the future as their fate may represent the destiny of other Kalahari wild dogs pack in the region. It will give us some clue as to the future presence of these wild dog populations in the Kalahari regions and the factors that come in to play in determining the fate of these Kalahari wild dogs. “***

We can confirm that this pack is also fading fast. Before we started working with this pack and got collars on two pack members this pack was seen with eight adult members in it. By the time we got collars onto two wild dogs it was only six in number so our reference point was six pack members but very likely the pack

contained eight or more members. Around February/ March of 2011 two pack members disappeared, one of them with a GPS collar. We flew on several occasions aerial tracking for this collared wild dog with no success. We recently met a farmer whom confessed to shooting this wild dog and destroying the collar. The satellite collar on the mother and Alpha female of the seven pups also stopped sending locations on October the 18<sup>th</sup>. We have again recently met a farmer who also confessed to shooting the satellite collared female on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October along with a second pack member and destroying the satellite collar. Right now we have no idea if the possible two remaining adult pack members are alive (one with a VHF collar) and if any of the seven pups that were alive in August are still around.



**Figure One:** The Tsau Hills Pack in happier days November last year. The shot GPS collared wild dog is back right. Of the five wild dogs in picture we now know only one of them might be alive (the VHF collared wild dog bottom left) along with another wild dog from the pack not in picture (both are males). The other middle three have also been confirmed recently shot.

As a research project we have also been trying to get collars out onto a pack of 13 that has been sighted ranging to the north of this pack and we believe north of the CKGR. As recently as in March of this year this pack had 13 adult/near adult members. However this pack is now only five pack members with one of these five having what appears to be its lower leg shot and questions as to if it will survive. We met with farmers whom have confessed to shooting the missing pack members and nine pups in the last few weeks.



**Figure Two:** The seven pups in August. We don't yet know for sure how many or if any at all are still alive. We do know that a farmer confessed to us that he shot nine pups in we think a pack ranging to north of this one in one go.

### **What does it all mean?**

In simple language it means that this pack is decimated via members being shot and without intervention this pack is unlikely to survive. It may already be too late. This pack also only rarely ranged onto commercial cattle land. It also means a pack to the north is also being decimated by being shot by farmers and without intervention is unlikely to survive. In more depth it means wild dogs on the boundaries of the CKGR are being hammered which is not really a surprise.....this is not new news, however the extent and circumstances around it may surprise many. Outside of the moral argument of killing predators and the further significant issue of wild dogs being Botswana's and southern Africa's only endangered carnivore (in spite of significant effort there are less than 400 wild dogs left in South Africa and only approximately 3 500 to 4 000 across Africa, of which possibly only as few as 2 500 are mature individuals) we have to ask what the above all means for the survival of CKGR and wider Kalahari wild dogs?

For this document we want to only focus on the question of "are Central Kalahari wild dogs threatened with extinction?" Based on research of wild dogs in the area we now know the answer is yes "CKGR wild dogs both in and on the boundaries of the CKGR are threatened with extinction".....it does not mean without intervention it will happen but it does mean it very well might. Shooting of carnivores on the boundaries of protected areas across the world is not a new thing, it is common place and although not pleasant or right it is in some ways inevitable. However in most cases robust populations of the carnivore species being persecuted live within the



**Figure Three:** A CKGR wild dog recently found dead far into the park this time probably not due directly to human influences..... The reason why this wild dog died remains unclear. There have been record high temperatures in the CKGR and late rains which may have contributed. Disease may also be a factor or lack of mates to hunt with (wild dogs in the northern CKGR now appear to live in ones and two's), or even being killed by larger predators such as lion or leopard. Whatever the reason more wild dogs dying inside the park is not what the species needs right now.

protected area and often this is the cause of the human wildlife conflict on the boundaries. Robust populations inside a protected areas result in significant conflict on the boundaries. However we know now through research that the wild dog population within the CKGR is far from robust. In fact with some educated guess work it is highly unlikely that there are more than thirty to forty wild dogs in living in the CKGR with home ranges that are completely contained within the 52 500km<sup>2</sup> of the CKGR. In fact there may be far fewer and thus our boundary population suddenly becomes "the population". As the boundary wild dog packs disappear it is unclear as to how or if at all they will get replaced. It is also unclear why when farmers have been shooting wild dogs in the Kalahari for an extended period why suddenly it appears that the population is significantly threatened. There are many possible reasons, gradual erosion of populations to a point threshold of no return for some packs, increased levels of persecution of wild dogs, wild dogs packs inside the CKGR disappearing due to disease, higher densities of large predators such as lion or even lack of immigration of wild dogs into the park from outside due to high levels of boundary persecution, but continued emigration from in to outside? Essentially a

sink- source situation that become untenable all round. Possibly even the closing of dispersal routes wild dogs have used to enter the CKGR from the Delta? A combination of many factors can lead to extinction and wild dogs are particularly vulnerable to these as had been demonstrated time and time again as the species becomes extinct from more and more of its present range.

### **What we plan to do?**

We have already engaged in open and honest communications with some of the farmers on whose land the two packs in the NW CKGR range. The fact that some of them they have given us valuable information about the killings of wild dogs is a sign that some farmers are ready to look for other solutions. In fact the satellite collared wild dog and mate were shot even though the pack had just killed a steinbok on the cattle farm and was in a part of the farm where there were no cattle at all at that time. The farmer whom shot the nine pups did not know that wild dogs only breed once in a year. We are in the process of taking this further, designing a framework that we can use to work with farmers going forwards with the short term goal of preventing the remaining pack members in the two wild dog packs left from being shot. We need to fly to determine if the VHF collared wild dog from Tsau hills pack is still alive and if so replace it with a sat collar. We need to get a satellite collar onto one the remaining packs of five wild dogs. These collars will help us monitor the packs and even work with farmers when we can see they range onto the cattle farms. There are several solutions we would like to try but the first one we have started already, communication and swapping of information!

Reports of wild dogs within the CKGR are few are far between but there are reports of wild dogs near boundaries either just inside or just outside the park. Areas include Kang, Xade, a few other villages and cattle and game farms on the boundaries of the CKGR and the Khutse Game reserve. We have no idea if is a few packs ranging over several large areas or if indeed there are more than a few packs with smaller territories. We aim to visit these areas, chat to farmers and deploy remote camera traps to get as many wild dogs as possible on camera. We plan to adapt computer software to allow for easy identification of wild dogs. If possible also to get satellite collars onto them. This will help us determine more accurately the distribution and importantly the number of packs in the CKGR environment. We are also working north of the CKGR in the Boteti region in an attempt to understand the “wider Kalahari picture of wild dogs”. Provisional communications with farmers has also shown extremely high levels of wild dog persecution in the Boteti region. Can this possibly be a route through which traditionally wild dogs did or do still move between the Delta and the Kalahari? Does the high level of persecution there influence the CKGR wild dogs? We have identified a pack of seven adults and six pups and yesterday managed to get a sat collar onto a female in the pack and a VHF collar onto a second female. Monitoring of this new study pack will be crucial as they range, as we know it so far, in game farm area, commercial cattle areas and wildlife management areas to the north of Motopi in the Boteti region.



**Figure Four:** John the vet trying his best to dart an adult wild dog, typically you need to be within 20m to have a good chance. The area had been burnt by bush fires and in the background the first rains of the season are falling.



**Figure Five:** John was successful twice. Bahiti, the project tracker, had been tracking the pack for three days before we got a chance to get the collar on. This is the sat collar going out onto a wild dog we have named SAVE. Hopefully we can work with this pack for years to come and among many things importantly determine the fate of the six pups. The CKGR is only 100km south....a hop in wild dog language, will any pups disperse there?

If anyone would like further information from us about the CKGR wild dogs and our future conservation efforts please contact Glyn Maude, on [brownhyaean@info.bw](mailto:brownhyaean@info.bw) . We are desperately short of resources and need more to succeed with our project aims. This wild dog project is part of a holistic research effort across the CKGR aimed at generating knowledge of the regions key wildlife and key issues that can be used to conserve the area. Several team members from the (see photo below) wider research team are helping with the Kalahari wild dog conservation effort.



**CKGR and Makgadikgadi Wildlife Research Team-November 2011**

**Starting back row all left to right moving forwards: (1) Paul Mothathobi (research assistant and tracker), (2) Keitumetse Ngaka (M.sc student, lions) (3) Letsayang Sasaya (research assistant), (4) Bahiti Ntole (tracker and research assistant) (5) Glyn Maude (wild dog post doc researcher) (6) Shadrack Lemponye (research assistant), (7) Mompoloki Morapedi (BT student and field assistant), (8) Moses Selebatso (PhD student, wildebeest) (9) Kevin Macfarlane (PhD student, lions) (10) Botilo Tshimologo (M.sc student, wild dogs). Missing (11) Mmoloki Keiteretse (Project assistant) (12) Viyanna Leo (PhD student, brown hyenas).**