

notes from the field

FALL 2018



Moving
Painted
Dogs

Under
Construction

Forests for
Cotton-tops



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network



Moving Painted Dogs to Safety

The painted dog pup—only two weeks old—rests in Peter Blinston’s gloved hands. Its mottled black and white fur is covered with sand and its small body is warm. Peter, executive director of Painted Dog Conservation (PDC), carefully lifts the tiny creature from its den inside a two-meter deep pit and hands it to a team member above ground. This is the eighth and last one. Once they’ve reunited the pup with its mother and siblings, all

Without relocation, the villagers would be forced to get rid of the dogs on their own.

resting in a carrier nearby, the men load up the truck and set off on the three-hour drive back to PDC’s headquarters in Dete, Zimbabwe. The future of this pack is now secure.

Six weeks earlier, community members from the village of

Phindo—located 62 miles southeast of Dete—discovered that two painted dogs, a male and a female, had denned close by and were picking off their livestock. The villagers were desperate to stop this; livestock are integral to their survival. They simply could not afford any more losses. They had heard about Painted Dog Conservation, so they contacted PDC hoping they could relocate the dogs. Without relocation, the villagers would be forced to get rid of the dogs on their own.

Most landowners across the continent view painted dogs as dangerous pests; as a result, they are often poisoned or shot. As one of the world’s most endangered animals—once numbering in the hundreds of thousands, but with fewer than 7,000 today—the death of even one painted dog can be devastating. As pack animals that cooperate on everything, from hunting to taking care

of their injured to raising their young, the loss of one pack member can essentially destroy the entire pack.

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While PDC had not worked with the Phindo community before, the fact that they had asked for help rather than killing the dogs was a tremendous testament to the far-reaching effects of PDC’s education and outreach programs. It was proof that people’s negative attitudes about these beautiful animals could change.

The Phindo pack is currently safe and sound at the rehabilitation center at PDC’s headquarters—a comfortable fenced-in area where they are being kept until they can be released back

into the wild. They will be released when the pups turn six months old, when they will be strong enough to keep up with their parents. This rescue is a precious reminder of how important building relationships with



Chris Hennessy

communities is to conservation. In some situations, like this one, it is all that stands between life and death for painted dogs. ■



Under Construction

The Standard Gauge Railway being constructed in southeastern Kenya is indicative of the kind of development that is coming to northern Kenya.



Development in Kenya is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be devastating.

As she pulls the truck off the highway and heads west into Samburu, Sarah Chiles marvels at the area's remarkable transformation. A few years ago, the road ended only a few miles south of here; dirt supplanted pavement all the way to the Kenya-Ethiopia border. Now the road is smooth and straight, cleaving into a sprawling landscape of low shrubs and rust-colored earth. The ease of a flat open road, and the lack of cars in this relatively remote area, has made speeding pervasive, with dire consequences. There are daily collisions with wildlife, especially at night when it's harder to see animals crossing the road. Hyenas and aardwolves are hit most frequently, but so are larger animals like lions and the endangered Grevy's zebra. Even elephants are vulnerable. This is just one of the many issues affect-

ing wildlife and local people arising from Africa's extensive infrastructure development.

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development where they operate in northern Kenya. There are massive plans throughout the continent to connect Africa in all directions; roadways, railways, oil pipelines, airports, and sea ports are all in the works. This infrastructure development comes at a cost, it will carve into wildlife-rich landscapes, degrading and fragmenting habitat and causing a decline in wildlife populations that can signifi-

Sarah was hired by two WCN partners—Ewaso Lions (EL) and Grevy's Zebra Trust (GZT)—specifically to deal with infrastructure

cantly alter ecosystems and affect communities dependent on pastoralism and tourism dollars. In Samburu, development is well underway with the road networks 80% completed and a powerline under construction—each presenting their own challenges to wildlife. Additional infrastructure projects, like a dam, a railway project, and an oil pipeline, threaten to restrict Grevy's zebras' and lions' access to food and water. Perhaps the biggest concern for conservationists is not knowing exactly how wildlife species will interact with infrastructure and the extent to which they will be affected.

Ewaso Lions and Grevy's Zebra Trust are wisely getting in front of the issue; they know that an oppositional approach that pits conservation against development isn't helpful. They want to ensure that built infrastructure and natural ecosystems are harmonized for

the benefit of people and wildlife. Sarah Chiles is working with representatives from GZT and EL to engage local agencies early in the development process, so they make smart decisions before building. As part of these efforts, they plan to take representatives from local communities and infrastructure authorities to visit and learn from completed infrastructure projects. Some of these projects act as cautionary tales, demonstrating the dangers of building without environmental consideration, and others are models of success showing how to build in ecologically sensitive ways. Development in Kenya is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be devastating; with Ewaso Lions, Grevy's Zebra Trust, and other conservationists working with developers, Africa can have both infrastructure and healthy ecosystems. ■



Rebuilding Forests for Cotton-tops

The ancient Ceiba tree towers over Rosamira at roughly 230 feet. With a massive spiny trunk and branches heavy with clusters of flower-shaped leaves, the Ceiba has an imposing presence. This giant of a tree is the preferred sleeping place for the tiny, one-pound cotton-top tamarins—endangered primates that Rosamira Guillen, executive director at Proyecto Tití, and her team have been protecting for over 14 years. Rosamira searches the tree's dense foliage for cotton-tops; the possibility of seeing them in this particular patch of forest makes her heart race.

A few weeks ago, the farmer who owns this parcel of land spotted a cotton-top napping on this very Ceiba tree; the farmer had never seen a cotton-top in this region before. Until recently, such a sighting in this part of San Juan, in northern Colombia, would never have occurred. Decades of conflict between the government and local rebel groups, slash and burn agriculture, and logging had left the forest heavily fragmented, relegating cotton-tops to certain areas. Wildlife in these forest islands have remained isolated, struggling for food and shelter. This is why Proyecto Tití focuses on building forest corridors—small paths of trees between community lands and farms that link up these forest islands, giving wildlife greater mobility and broadening their habitat. The presence of a cotton-top in this area meant that this monkey had found its way to Proyecto Tití's newly established corridor.

In 2016, Proyecto Tití partnered with local organizations to restore fragmented forests and plant protected corridors. Farmers set aside portions of their land for this purpose and in return, Proyecto Tití and their partners trained the farmers in environmentally-friendly farming practices, such as rotating crops, growing seasonal fruit trees, and sustainable cattle ranching. Proyecto Tití also set up a community nursery where they planted 25,000 seedlings in their first year—all native tree species, like the Ceiba, that cotton-tops favor for food and shelter—half of which were used to build the forest corridors.

It has been just two years since this initiative began and Rosamira is already seeing enormous benefits.

The seedlings are growing taller and stronger every day, there are signs that wildlife have been exploring the new corridors, and communities are now able to access water, even in the dry season. Most importantly, Rosamira and her team are making a tangible impact to save these beloved monkeys. The team is hoping these new cotton-top sightings are just the beginning and cotton-tops will continue to spread to new forest areas. ■



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WCN
Wildlife Conservation Network

209 Mississippi Street
San Francisco, CA 94107, USA
Ph. (415) 202-6380

wildnet.org