

# Notes from the Field

FALL 2019

## EVERY INDIVIDUAL COUNTS:

---

- ▶ Marco Shows the Danger of Isolation
- ▶ Brownny Gets a Second Chance
- ▶ No.52's Transatlantic Journey



**WCN**

Wildlife Conservation Network



# Marco Shows the Danger of Isolation



It was a scene right out of a whodunit. Boulders lining the dry riverbed were ominously marked with blood. Conservationists at Spectacled Bear Conservation (SBC) looked at each other with eyebrows raised. They knew the only animals strong enough to scale those boulders were large male bears. If a bear was injured, SBC needed to know. Their typical method for solving such mysteries in Peru's dry forest is to set up camera traps and look to the footage for answers.

In the following days, with the cameras set, answers did arrive. Footage showed a husky male bear named Marco soaking shoulder-deep in a waterhole, a common way for bears to cool off. However, Marco wasn't just taking a respite from the heat, he sat in the water for hours scratching himself. He had islands of angry red blotches where fur should be and wounds that could easily explain blood spots on the boulders. SBC had seen this condition spread before. It left animals with bald patches and infections from over-scratching and in some cases, it was fatal. Not only was Marco's life in danger, he could be a harbinger of an epidemic.

At about 16, Marco is one of the dry forest's oldest bears and a dominant male. This makes him especially important, even in a tiny population where every individual is precious. At fewer than 200, dry forest bears are a unique and extremely important population. The conditions and visibility of the dry forest are ideal for studying bears, and that research is used to better understand and conserve spectacled bears (the least known bear species in the world) as a whole. Unfortunately, these bears are also particularly vulnerable to disease. Due to habitat fragmentation they are isolated from other bear populations; subsequent interbreeding has left them with low genetic diversity, which makes a species less resilient to disease.

This is partly why SBC's conservation strategy strongly focuses on identifying and protecting key pieces of land that will connect bear populations. Once identified, SBC helps communities and landowners convert that land into private protected areas, thus safeguarding it from destructive industries and development. SBC protects prime bear habitat to increase the opportunity for connectivity between bear populations, which improves the species' ability to survive.



Spectacled Bear Conservation

**MARCO SOAKS IN WATER TO SOOTH HIS SKIN CONDITION (VISIBLE HERE ON THE SIDE OF HIS FACE).**

SBC continued to closely monitor Marco while they worked on getting him veterinary care, but remarkably, before they solidified a medical intervention, Marco started getting better. His wounds healed, his fur grew back, and the disease left as mysteriously as it appeared.

Thankfully, there was no epidemic this time, but the experience underscored the fragility of this small, isolated population. It was a reminder to everyone at SBC that for these endangered bears to survive they must be able to rebound from disease. And for that to happen, their habitat must be both protected and connected. ■



## EVERY PAINTED DOG COUNTS

# Brownny Gets a Second Chance

*Stephanie Carnow, WCN's Director of Marketing and Communications, spent a week with Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) in July, 2019. While exploring PDC's projects, Stephanie had multiple encounters with the same painted dog pack. She observed how those dogs coped with an injured pack member and how PDC responded to the situation.*

I was fiddling with my camera and momentarily distracted when the kids started shouting. I was on a safari drive with a group of eleven-year-olds from Painted Dog Conservation's (PDC) Bush Camp, winding through Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park. The kids shouted whenever we passed something exciting, so I quickly looked up. All day we applauded animals like they were red-carpet celebrities and though we saw many A-list stars—elephants, giraffes, zebra—above all else, we longed to see painted dogs. At last, peeking up from a field of thigh-high grasses, were the unmistakable Mickey Mouse ears of a painted dog. The kids cheered while I, like a pushy paparazzo, pointed my camera and hit record.

There were actually two dogs standing side-by-side with a third walking towards them. When I played the video later, I noticed one dog had some kind

of injury near its hind legs. The following day, I returned to Hwange to track painted dogs with PDC's chief tracker, Jealous Mpofu. Watching my video, Jealous identified the dog (Brownny) from his coat pattern and his pack (the Destiny Pack), but not the injury. For that, we had to find Brownny.

PDC had outfitted Brownny with a VHF tracking collar, but VHF cannot pinpoint exact locations. To find dog packs, Jealous relies on his expertise and intimate knowledge of the dogs. He strategically surveys the park, checking for dog tracks along the roads, until locating a VHF signal. We listened intently for the VHF receiver to beep, and when it did, we followed the signal like breadcrumbs. We had found the Destiny Pack. Except now, we didn't see Brownny.

With only three dogs—Lucy, Lily, and Brownny—the Destiny Pack is much smaller than they once were.



Painted Dog Conservation

Over the years, the pack lost dogs to lion fights and wire bushmeat snares. Entire litters of pups didn't survive. Painted dogs survive as a group, hunting together and raising pups collectively, the loss of one can unravel an entire pack. As a trio, the Destiny Pack is fragile, it could collapse if Brownny succumbed to an injury.

We watched as Lucy and Lily gnawed at the remains of an antelope until leaving it in a heap beneath a tree and trotting into the forest. But they returned quickly, leading a slow-moving Brownny to the antelope. It's a defining characteristic that painted dogs care for their sick and injured, Lucy and Lily were feeding Brownny when he wasn't able to feed himself.

Now close up, we could see Brownny's injury was a cringe-worthy wound on his right testicle. If untreated, it could be fatal. Luckily, PDC is adept at handling these situations. They routinely extricate dogs from deadly wire snares (the dogs' biggest threat in Hwange) and treat everything from broken legs to gaping wounds.

PDC was able to dart Brownny (to sedate him) and a veterinarian performed surgery on him. This would have been relatively simple in a veterinary clinic, but out in the bush, using headlamps for light and with lions close at hand, it was dramatic.



Painted Dog Conservation

**TOP: A QUICK SURGERY TO REPAIR HIS WOUND GAVE BROWNNY A CHANCE TO RECOVER. ABOVE: TOO INJURED TO HUNT, BROWNNY IS FED BY HIS PACK MATES.**

Fortunately, painted dogs are resilient, frequently surviving the most horrific injuries, Brownny should have no problem recovering.

For painted dogs, survival of the group can hinge on an individual. Because of this, the dogs protect one another with fierce loyalty. It's also why PDC's intervention saved not only Brownny's life, but the entire Destiny Pack. ■





## EVERY TIGER SHARK COUNTS

# No.52's Transatlantic Journey

Somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean a powerful figure cuts her way through the choppy water. A tiger shark—six feet long with shadowy streaks along her back—breaks the water's surface with her dorsal fin. As she does, an orange satellite tag fixed to her fin transmits a signal, emailing her location to Dr. Rachel Graham, founder of MarAlliance. This shark, known as No.52, has just accomplished something that marine conservationists didn't know was possible. She has swum across the Atlantic, from Cabo Verde to Brazil, and now, she was on her way back.

MarAlliance has been tracking No.52 for almost a year. They have never seen a shark go this far for this long. In fact, tiger sharks recorded in MarAlliance's research sites were found to linger close to shore and were particularly "site faithful", they find a place they like and they stick around. Tiger sharks don't wander far outside the country's territorial waters, making No.52 an enigma.

It's their "site fidelity" that makes tiger sharks vulnerable to illegal fishing and shark finning, which are decimating their population. This is especially true in places like Cabo Verde where they receive no legal protection yet. Three of Cabo Verde's easternmost islands are tiger shark hotspots, catching sharks in those waters requires just a hook and a little waiting. Proverbial fish in a barrel.



Dr. Rachel Graham / MarAlliance

Paradoxically, their site fidelity might be the key to protecting tiger sharks. Being the second largest predatory shark in the world (after great whites) and relatively easy to find, tiger sharks are accessible to tourists trying to



Dr. Rachel Graham / MarAlliance

tick "swimming with intimidating sharks" off their bucket list. In the Bahamas, for instance, shark tourism generates over \$130 million every year. MarAlliance is working with the Cabo Verde government to seek protection for coastal sharks, emphasizing the non-consumptive economic benefits that responsible shark tourism could bring to the island nation.

No.52 is also doing her part to protect her species. Her transatlantic journey is supplying MarAlliance with crucial data where little data exists. To cross the entire Atlantic, No.52 avoided numerous

dangers, including capture from untold numbers of fishing vessels. MarAlliance now has information on No.52's movements and the threats she encounters to inform their conservation planning.

MarAlliance can also include No.52's story in their campaigns to change negative attitudes towards sharks. They work in several tropical countries, including Cabo Verde, educating children and adults about the importance of sharks in the ecosystem and teaching local fishers sustainable, shark-friendly fishing practices. No.52's adventure can be a source of pride for people at each end of her journey, in both Cabo Verde and Brazil.

Protecting tiger sharks and understanding their conservation needs is a priority for MarAlliance. As such, they'll be monitoring No.52 closely, learning all they can from her epic journey, while also advancing their work to protect her less intrepid cousins throughout the Atlantic. ■

FOR ALMOST A YEAR, NO.52 TRAVELED ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, FROM CABO VERDE TO BRAZIL. MARALLIANCE HAS NEVER BEFORE SEEN A SHARK GO THIS FAR FOR THIS LONG.



**WCN protects endangered wildlife by supporting conservationists who ensure wildlife and people co-exist and thrive.**

## **Invest In Wildlife Conservation**

We greatly appreciate your dedication to protecting wildlife. Your kind support is vital to our partners' heroic and enduring work in conservation.

### **WAYS TO GIVE**

- ▶ Donate by mail, phone, fax, or online
- ▶ Become a monthly donor
- ▶ Give a gift on behalf of someone else
- ▶ Include WCN in your estate plans
- ▶ Donate stock or other securities

WCN maintains Charity Navigator's highest possible 4-star rating. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator, and rates over 8,000 charities on their Financial Health and Accountability & Transparency.



EIN # 30-0108469 • CFC # 63038

If you prefer to receive the WCN newsletter in electronic form, please let us know by calling 415-202-6380 or emailing [info@wildnet.org](mailto:info@wildnet.org).

NONPROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
OAKLAND, CA  
PERMIT NO. 259

**WCN**  
Wildlife Conservation Network



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

**wildnet.org**