

AFRICAN PAINTED DOG



Lycaon pictus

STATUS

- Endangered.
- Threats are predators such as lion and hyaenas, persecution by humans outside reserves, diseases spread by domestic dogs (eg. distemper and rabies), habitat loss and road deaths.

ORIGIN


- African painted dogs once lived in most land habitats of Africa. The exceptions were true desert and lowland tropical rainforest areas
- In the early 1900s there were tens of thousands living in sub Saharan Africa
- In Africa now there are only four countries which have strong, viable populations. They are Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia.

HABITAT

- The prime habitat of African painted dogs is woodland, but they can live in grassland and the highlands in tropical rainforest areas.
- Packs have very large territories, ranging from 500 to 1500 km², so they have low population densities and are not often seen in the wild.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- African painted dogs are highly social animals. Packs of over 100 animals were recorded in the 19th century
- Most packs nowadays have 10 to 20 dogs. With less than 6 dogs a pack is unlikely to survive in the wild
- Packs have a hierarchical structure and usually only the alpha male and alpha female breed
- In a pack, fighting amongst males and amongst females for the alpha positions is common, especially when a new pack is established
- The alpha female may have up to 20 puppies. The whole pack will help protect and feed them and rear their puppies in dens underground.
- Puppies suckle for 3-4 weeks after which they feed on meat regurgitated by all the other pack members

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- New packs form when small same sex subgroups, usually siblings, leave their parent group and join up with subgroups of the opposite sex
 - In the wild, packs have been studied where the “babysitter” caring for young at the den has only 3 legs. The hunting adults feed this disabled adult when they return to the den to feed the pups
 - African painted dogs are intensely territorial.

DESCRIPTION

- African painted dogs vary in size from 60 to 75cm tall
- They can live for up to nine years
- They are Canids with no close relatives and are the only dog with four toes on the front feet
- Each African painted dog has unique markings and colourings, but with a black muzzle and white tail
- They are capable of speeds of up to 70kph and can maintain speeds of up to 60kph for as far as 6 km
- They are the only fully carnivorous members of the Canid family.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- African painted dogs need little drinking water, relying on water gained from eating their prey
- They are good swimmers and have excellent senses of sight, smell and hearing – they have very large ears
- They can be scavengers
- They are diurnal, being the most active in the early morning and late evening
- They hunt in packs working as a highly coordinated team. Their main prey is medium antelope and even zebra on the plains
- With no recorded attacks, African painted dogs pose little threat to humans unless cornered.