

A young painted dog pup is shown in profile, running across a dry, sandy savanna landscape. The pup has a mix of brown, black, and white fur. The background is a blurred natural setting. The image is framed by geometric shapes in shades of orange and yellow on the right side.

PAINTED DOG CONSERVATION
ANNUAL REPORT
2022



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Executive Summary

2022 felt like a year where we could finally breath easily again, the threat of COVID-19, for us at any rate, all but faded and we could really focus our full efforts on the life saving work at hand.

By **Peter Blinston**
Executive Director
Painted Dog Conservation



That's not to say that COVID-19 didn't leave us alone entirely, schools opened a month later than usual because of it and we still had one school from the 2021 grade six classes that needed to attend our Bush Camp. However, those challenges didn't stop Wilton and his team and by the end of 2022 they had completed a record number of camps without a hitch, delivering a life changing experience to more than 800 children.

The impact of the Bush Camp, which completed its 19th year in operation, cannot be overstated. We have a growing number of Bush Camp graduates living in the surrounding villages who are strong advocates for the dogs. This was illustrated again early in the year when the Mpindothealla pack ventured into the villages and preyed on goats. There was none of the "usual" anti-predator uproar, but rather a concerted effort to inform and work with us to drive the pack back across the highway into the forest lands. It was even more interesting to note that when someone did raise their voice in complaint they were addressed quite quickly by the supportive community at large and told to take better care of their livestock (as they had been shown by our neighbours the (Soft Foot Alliance) rather than blame the dogs for their loss.

The main force in this regard is the Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit (MCAPU). Numbering more than 40, this unit established themselves in 2014 following the death of a painted dog, killed in a snare adjacent to their villages. Since then we have worked with them to develop an effective deterrent to poachers and increase the blanket of protection we provide for not just our beloved painted dogs but all wildlife. We engaged the MCAPU again for more than six months through the dry season, when poaching typically escalates, and they work as an effective team with our professional APU scouts.

Sadly this level of commitment isn't demonstrated by all stakeholders and some locations in our core operating area remain poaching hotspots, with no sign of the insidious threat diminishing.

Matters reached a peak late in the year when the Mpindothealla moved from a very safe denning area into arguably the worst possible place they could pick. Certainly, if I was challenged to point on a map to the worst place for poaching in our core operating area, that would have been it. We had already lost two of the adults in the Mpindothealla during the year, one killed by lions and the other hit by a vehicle, we didn't want to lose any more. Sadly though, by the time we realised where the pack had moved to, another adult and pup had been killed. It was tragic. The MCAPU were outraged and joined forces to clear the snares and protect the dogs as much as possible. The task was enormous though and in a six week period the three remaining adults were snared six times! If I wasn't on hand to assist, then our good friend Brent Staplekamp was there and between us we removed the snares four times. On the other occasions the combined tracking and APU team released the snared dog themselves. Finding the dog attached to a tree, they covered its head with a blanket and released it relatively unscathed.

During the same period Jealous and I removed snares from three members of the Somamalisa pack. A pack that are deep inside Hwange NP, though we believe they venture to the eastern boundary, another treacherous poaching hot spot.

On a brighter note, we were delighted by the chaos caused when a new pack, we named the Umkhonto (spear), emerged from Hwange NP and took up residence in our immediate area. The "resident" packs (Mpindothealla and Bachijwa) each had fewer adults so kept their distance. For now the Umkhonto have moved back inside Hwange NP but we were excited to see them as it indicates a healthy population of painted dogs inside the park, with dispersing adults looking to establish themselves as new packs.

Much work was undertaken by Dought and his maintenance team on our ageing structures and facilities but again they did a tremendous job to keep on top of the work. Our good friend John Lemon came over from Perth for a couple of weeks and it was great to have his input and experience on renovations to our Rehabilitation Facility, which he built almost 20 years ago.

It's these long term relationships and committed support that help us make a difference and strengthen our resolve in the darkest hours when the challenge ahead seems unsurmountable. Each and everyone of you have shown your commitment and support and we will never get tired of thanking you for that. It's a tremendous pleasure and privilege to have been able to get to know so many of you over the years and all of us at PDC look forward to many, many more years together, working as a team to create an environment where the painted dogs can thrive.

Iganyana Children's Bush Camp:

The education 'marathon'

In 2022 our flagship Iganyana Children's Bush Camp conducted a record 31 camps, the highest so far since the program began way back in 2004. This meant back to back camps, bringing increased pressure throughout the year for the hardworking team at the camp.

Schools opened a month later than usual in 2022 in Zimbabwe, which added even more challenges.

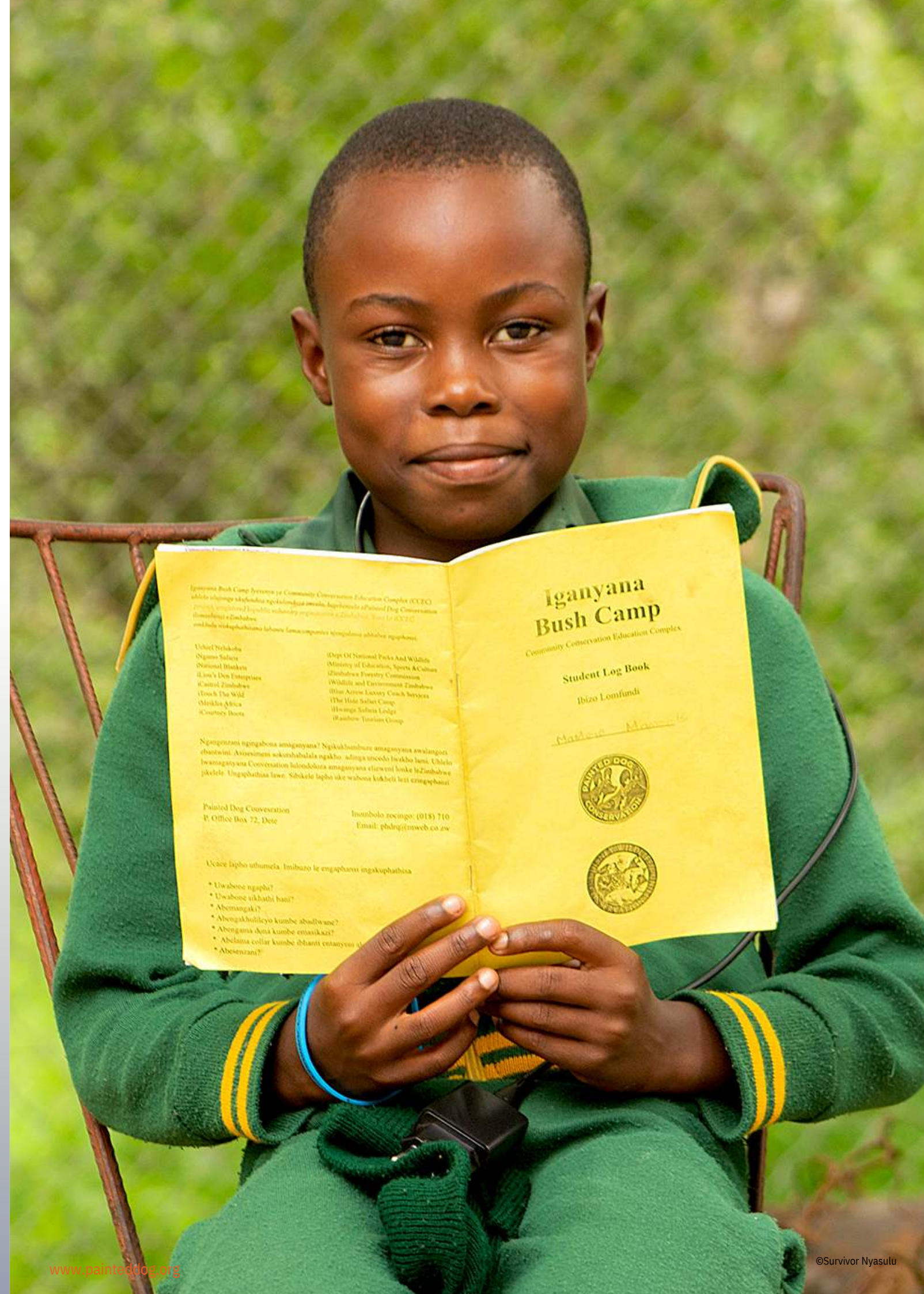
The record number of camps was caused by St Francis Primary School's camps running over into 2022 from 2021 due to COVID-19 disturbances. Two additional camps were added to cater for them so that the kids didn't miss their much anticipated camp. In addition to this we recognised that the enrolment in some of the schools was higher than usual in 2022. In some instances where we traditionally had one camp, we had to break the class to have two or three camps. A perfect example being the Ndangababi Primary School. The school had 97 students in grade six in 2022, which meant we had to conduct three camps, something that we haven't had to do in the previous years.

Thanks to our close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, and the schools, we managed to get all kids to come to camp safely and enjoy the education activities without any COVID-19 incident. This primarily meant restricting the number of children to just two per room and thus a maximum of 30 children attended the camp for the four day program.



Iganyana Children's Bush Camp 2022 Highlights:

- Increased uptake of sciences and mathematics by students after attending 'Kids For Science' camp
- 31 camps conducted by Iganyana Children's Bush Camp
- Conservation Club: Competitions returned this year with Quiz(2nd term) and Performing Arts(3rd term). Ndangababi won the finals and Mazwa came second to qualify to the Provincials in Bulawayo.
- 20 new computers for the Computer Lab



Thank you for 'Tech For Kids'

As the year came to a close in 2022, we ran a campaign to raise funds to replace the old iMac computers in our Iganyana Children's Bush Camp computer lab. The aging iMacs operating on Mac OS 9.2 were no longer reliable, they had played their part and were now failing the children as they kept breaking down, taking away much of the sheer enjoyment for the children and giving us continued technical headaches.

For most of the children, the computer lab is the first time they have even seen a computer, let alone used one. The Computer Lab is an integral part of the Iganyana Bush Camp activities. The children take two critical lessons in the lab, the first is the Meet the Dogs One, where they learn about painted dogs, where they are found, what they eat and the threats, and the second, is the Tree Search lesson, where the children learn how to identify trees using leaf patterns and branching patterns. As usual, your support made it all possible and the campaign was successful. We are pleased to let you know that we purchased 20 brand new computers from a local supplier in Zimbabwe.

Before

The excitement has been restored we are back at the top of introducing technology and a unique learning environment that the majority of the children have never experienced before, literally life-changing. We are grateful to you our supporters for coming through and supporting the campaign!



After



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Thubelihle, one of the beneficiaries of the PDC Scholarship Program



Scholarships: Paving a way for future conservationists

Apart from directly engaging children at our Iganyana Children's Bush Camp to inspire positive attitudes towards wildlife in the now and next generation, we have also established a program that helps deserving local children pursue studies at university level. The aim is to create local role models in conservation and inspire the next generation. More than 90 children have been assisted through this program, largely by matching deserving children (bright but underprivileged) with donors who are willing to sponsor their education.

To streamline this program and help raise as many local role models as possible, we have launched a Scholarship Fund. This is a vehicle that will raise and gather funds towards supporting local bright and underprivileged kids for further education.

To pilot the program, we identified one, 18 year Thubelihle Mhlanga from Dingani village, during our 'Kids for Science' Form Two special camp. He was the choice for all four teachers who attended the special camp which select the best students from local secondary schools and stimulate their interest in science subjects and conservation careers. Thubelihle has been attending one of the local government schools which he had to travel 10km to everyday. As a beneficiary of the Scholarship Fund, he now attends one of the best boarding schools in the province, Marist Brothers Secondary School. Here he will have ample time to study and have a better chance to succeed in his studies and nurture his dream to become a doctor.

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Conservation Through Sport

The Rhino Cup Champions League Zimbabwe - Iganyana Division

In 2022 we announced our partnership with Wild and Free Foundation (WFF) to support conservation through sport, sponsoring the Iganyana Football League. WFF is a non-profit organisation based in the United States and South Africa with a mission to empower youth and communities living around the national parks and wildlife reserves in Africa through sport and economic opportunities to reduce their dependence on poaching.

WFF successfully implemented the Rhino Cup Champions League in Mozambique in 2017 with positive results such as reduced rhino poaching. RCCL Zimbabwe – Iganyana Division addresses issues of boredom, idleness, and poverty which are some of the contributing factors to becoming a poacher, by supporting and sponsoring the sport that communities love - football - directly helping save both wildlife and people.

For over 15 years, PDC has been sponsoring the local football league - Iganyana Football League – reaching out to the youth about conservation, keeping them engaged and away from illegal activities such as poaching and drug abuse. The league has been vital in gathering intel on poaching and reporting poaching activities, reporting painted dog sightings and supporting community-based initiatives such as clean-up campaigns and borehole repairs.

PDC and WFF common goal is to empower and uplift young people, and to help them get on a positive life path instead of the destructive path of poaching or any other types of illegal activities while engaging with people, uplifting communities and protecting wildlife.

To reflect this partnership, the league assumed a new name as follows: 'Rhino Cup Champions League Zimbabwe – Iganyana Division'.

Through this new partnership, we distributed soccer kits and equipment to 20 community-based teams in the league. Each team received at least 2 soccer kits including boots, socks, balls, cooler boxes, nets, cones, bibs.

The RCCL Zimbabwe - Iganyana Division league supports 20 male and 4 female community-based teams from communities living adjacent to Hwange National Park, directly impacting wildlife and people welfare in the area.

We continue to call for more support in the conservation through sport aspect. It is an important aspect with great potential to significantly contribute in securing an environment where painted dogs and the rest of wildlife can thrive.



Collaboration with the communities comes in very handy in anti-poaching, helping to make sure we have more boots on the ground



Tackling the poaching pandemic: PDC Anti-poaching Unit and the community

Poaching remains one of the deadliest threats towards the survival of painted dogs in and around Hwange National Park.



The year showed little to no sign of this trend slowing down. Our anti-poaching units removed more wire snares than the previous year.

A total number of 1636 patrols resulted in the arrest of seven poachers and the recovery of 3503 snares, almost double the number from 2021.

Our Core operating area covers over 30 farms in the Gwayi valley and not all of them have farm scouts, let alone a dedicated anti-poaching unit. All farms are potential hotspots as they are located within the buffer zone of the protected areas of the National Parks and Forestry Commission. While the wildlife populations have declined significantly in the past 20 years, these areas still have wildlife populations that would stun the senses of the average tourist visiting Africa for the first time. Without your support and our concerted efforts the situation would be far worse, it is our belief that with the proper management strategies in place, this area can become home to an abundance of wildlife.

Our objective of eliminating the illegal hunting threat and having a no-snare zone within these areas are challenged by the fact that those farms need constant daily patrols. We have relatively limited resources in manpower and the necessary funding making it an uphill task.

QUICK FACT: The Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit (MCAPU) established themselves in 2014 following the death of a painted dog, killed in a snare adjacent to their villages.

Ever since, they have led a relentless campaign against poaching within the community removing snares in their village and surrounding areas. Their efforts have been admired and replicated by neighbouring communities which include Nabushome, Dopota and most recently the Sianyanga community who have followed suit and are patrolling their village removing snares. Since COVID-19 outbreak in 2019, we saw an escalation of poaching activities and to step up our anti-poaching efforts we started engaging the MCAPU to help us manage the situation outside their community. Ever since, we have made massive impact together.



We engaged the MCAPU for six months to help tackle poaching. This exercise, however, requires a substantive financial injection in the regions of \$50 000 per 6 months of engagement.



The engagement of Mabale Community Anti-poaching Unit resulted in an increase in our patrol effort in terms of patrols and snares collected from our target of 480 patrols to 1636 patrols and the snares collected were higher than the previous year which was 1922 as compared to 3503.

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Research: Getting to know the painted dog better



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Despite the economic challenges with the rising cost of fuel in the year, our monitoring and tracking effort in 2022 continued unabated.

Through our efforts, we recorded 12 breeding packs compared to four last year, despite not seeing three huge packs namely the Jozi pack last recorded with 21 adult dogs, the Chakabika with 15 dogs and the Mtoa pack last recorded with 13 adults. We last saw them in 2021 and are almost certain that they denned in 2022. The pups' figure stands at 44 including five from Clara from the Mpindothea pack, which is a pack formed from our rehabilitation facility.

The survival of the Mpindothea pack serves to emphasize the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to conservation, the direct intervention through our rehab facility, direct action of snare removals around the den by our APU and the involvement of community anti-poaching units in insuring the success.

For a period of over two months, we had a monitoring team keeping a close eye on the pack 24/7. They were supported by our Anti-poaching Unit in collaboration with the MCAPU to protect the pack as much as they could.

The pack had occupied, arguably, the worst possible area in terms of poaching risks. The three adults were caught in snares six times in a matter of weeks. Either Peter or our close friend Brent Stapelkamp was called to dart the snared individual to remove the snare and treat the wounds. On two occasions, our research team had to set free the snared dog by hand and quickly let it go to rejoin the pack after finding them caught up. However, one of the pups was not so lucky.



We continue to collaborate with Stanford University in a study of large-scale genetic monitoring of painted dogs' population. To date over 70 DNA samples have been sent for analysis. The objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the genetic diversity of the painted dog across their range within Zimbabwe and explore the possibility of using SNPs (genetic markers) for individual ID and relatedness estimates from non-invasively collected fecal samples
2. Use fecal samples to investigate relationships among diet, gut microbiome, parasite diversity, stress hormones, reproductive hormones, observed health, season, sex, pack size, and individual origin of painted dog populations in Zimbabwe.

Elisa Sandoval Seres has also just finished her field data collection work on her PhD titled- Impact of interspecific competition on African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) in an ecosystem with artificial perennial water provision. Interspecific competition affects African wild dogs through exclusion from prey rich areas, kleptoparasitism, mortality, and exposure to human-dominated landscapes. The aim is to determine how painted dogs cope with competition with lions and spotted hyaenas in an ecosystem with artificial water provision. The study is in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe. It included following radio-collared painted dogs, setting camera traps at artificially-pumped waterholes and monitoring dens. This was meant to give insight into how different waterhole densities affect competition of painted dogs with larger carnivores. All this to give water management recommendations which support painted dog conservation.

The Mpindothelela in the Gwayi area



The Rehabilitation Facility: A hospital for painted dogs

Designed to house and care for injured, sick or orphaned painted dogs with minimal handling until they recover enough to rejoin their families in the wild.

In an odd kind of success at our Rehabilitation Facility, we did not take in any injured painted dog in 2022 despite the life-threatening challenges the species usually face in the wild including wire snares.

The Rehabilitation Facility remains fully prepared to effectively meet any eventuality pertaining to the painted dog and we cannot overemphasize its importance in enabling our life-saving interventions to save the already fragile population of painted dogs.



2022 IN NUMBERS

1636

Patrols

3503

Snares removed

7

Poachers Arrested

31

Children's Bush Camps

852

Kids attended Bush Camp

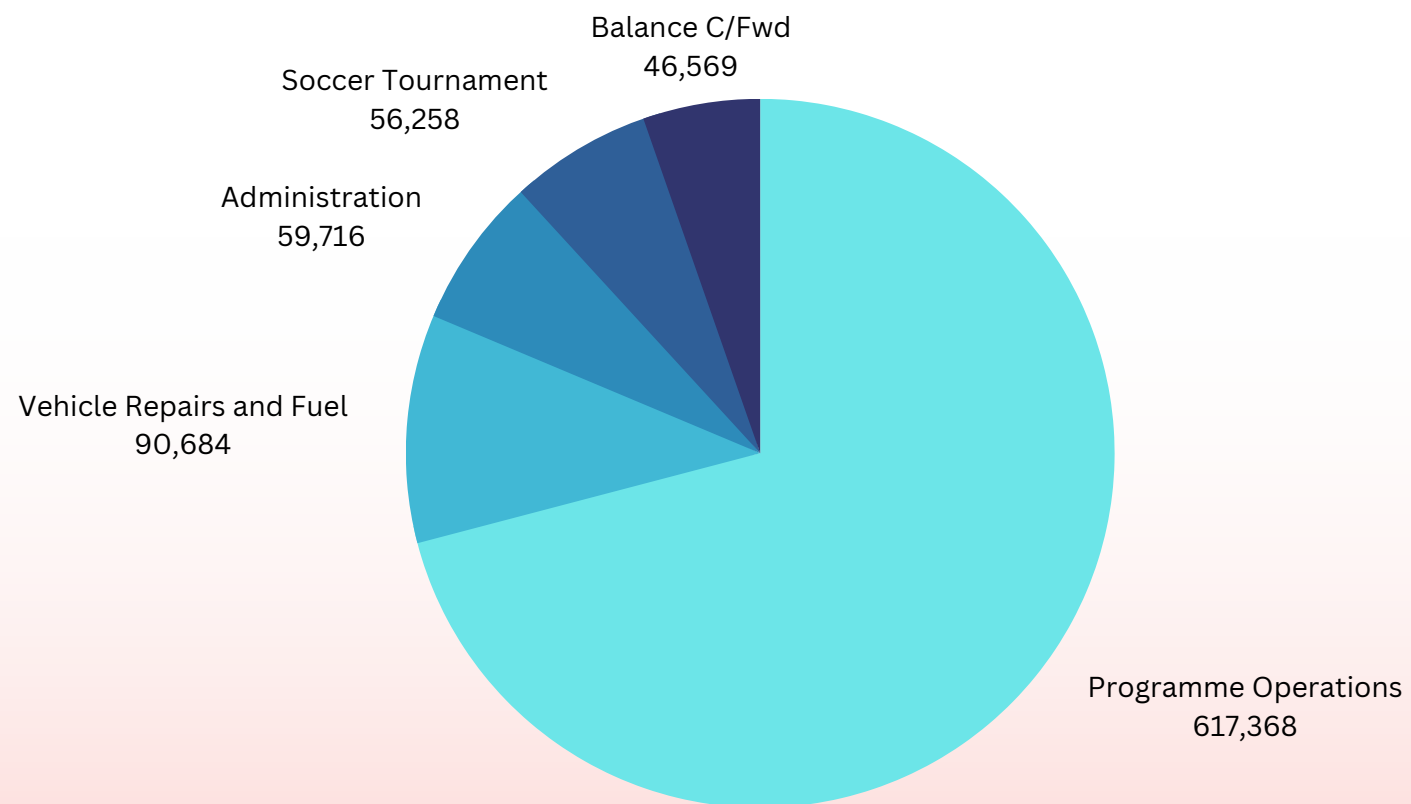
44

Pups recorded

Financial Overview

We at Painted Dog Conservation are eternally grateful to our dedicated friends and supporters in our fight to save painted dogs and their habitat from extinction. We appreciate your efforts more than you know, you are an essential part of our team. Below is our financial overview of 2022, made possible by you!

Total Income: \$870,595





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