

Wildlife vets act to help save Africa's painted dogs

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Wildlife Vets International (WVI) and Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) have teamed up with their joint Patron, TV vet Steve Leonard, in an international rescue effort to help save Africa's most endangered large carnivore, the painted dog, from extinction.

A fund-raising campaign, launched yesterday beside Yorkshire Wildlife Park's painted dog enclosure, will enable vets to visit Zimbabwe next year to man community clinics for domestic dogs around Hwange national park, vaccinating them against rabies and distemper to stop disease transmission into the painted dog (wild dog) population already decimated by human persecution.

The £12k project will also buy veterinary supplies and equipment for PDC's new in-house clinic, provide first aid training for field staff and advice on clinic set up. Species numbers have plummeted across Africa to between 3,000-5,000, with Zimbabwe one of its last strongholds.

"Only domestic dogs will be vaccinated as the effects on wild dogs are unknown, but vets will expect to treat some painted dogs", explained WVI project leader Brigadier Tom Ogilvie Graham, Queens Honorary Veterinary Surgeon and head of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. A similar trip last year left him with an abiding memory of saving the life of a painted dog pack leader, critical to pack survival.

"We tracked the dog from his radio collar, anaesthetised him and found a serious maggot-ridden infection above his elbow. We treated that and allowed the dog to join his waiting pack, with reports confirming that he was recovering well. These are amazing creatures under increasing threat and deserve all the help we can provide."

Yorkshire Wildlife Park is already home to three female painted dogs as part of the European breeding programme.

Steve Leonard, who presents *Vets in the Wild*, *Steve Leonard's Extreme Animals*, *Animal Camera* and *Journey of Life*, said: "I am delighted that two of the charities of which I am patron have joined Yorkshire Wildlife Park to raise money for a cause close to my heart."

"I first introduced Wildlife Vets International to Painted Dog Conservation in Zimbabwe so that one could help the other to conserve this iconic creature."

Wildlife Vets International is now in a unique position to provide independent specialist veterinary support to any project, anywhere in the world, including education and training of people who live and work in the animals' natural range. Other projects help with conflict tigers in Bangladesh, an Amur leopard release programme, and primate rehabilitation in Nigeria.

Project manager of Painted Dog Conservation in Zimbabwe, Peter Blinston, added: "PDC is very "hands on" in its approach. We've developed collars, we've got anti-poaching units in the field and now we have the essential support of Wildlife Vets International, sponsored by Yorkshire Wildlife Park. The project cannot work in isolation from the surrounding communities who are very grateful for veterinary care for their domestic dogs, brought about by their support for PDC and the conservation of the painted dogs."

Director of YWP, Cheryl Williams, explains the painted dog allure: "They are famed as relentless and successful hunters, but they are one of the only animals that will care for the injured, the old and young, bringing back food and tending their wounds. Persecuted by man, they now face a silent danger from disease passed on by domestic dogs."

Wildlife Vets International was formed by a group of experienced zoo and wildlife vets in 2004 to give conservation workers the veterinary support and skills they need and to reverse the decline of some of the world's most endangered animals. To donate to WVI painted dog project; <http://www.justgiving.com/wvi/donate>

Painted dogs, also known as African wild dogs, are actually not dogs at all but represent an evolutionary line of their own that is unique to the African continent. Their Latin name of *lycaon pictus* translates into *Painted or Ornate Wolf*

Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) aims to protect and increase the painted dog's range and numbers. To ensure the painted dogs' long-term survival, PDC is creating a model for conservation that includes the scientific community, the local community and the international community all working together. To find out more, please visit <http://www.painteddog.org/>

Yorkshire Wildlife Park near Doncaster has a vision of becoming a dynamic conservation centre, working with communities at home and around the world to help save habitats and wildlife. Last year it saved 13 lions from a rundown Romanian zoo, and earlier this year, its Land of the Tigers was opened as one of Europe's largest tiger reserves and home to a pair of critically endangered Amur tigers. This month, South America Viva was unveiled to raise awareness of the plight of South America's ailing rainforests by housing its native animals and birds in a walkthrough reserve. <http://www.yorkshirewildlifepark.net/>



Steve Leonard, Cheryl Williams, Director of Yorkshire Wildlife Park, Olivia Walter (Wildlife Vets International) and Nicky Vyvyan-Robinson (PDCUK)