

Painted Dog Conservation Annual Report 2023

Saving Painted Dogs Through Action and Education





Executive Summary

By Peter Blinston, Executive Director



2023 was a year when we saw the impact of the work we have undertaken during the past 25+ years. For the first time, we have seen three if not five packs of painted dogs utilizing the buffer zone in our core operating area. Three packs denned in the area and we deployed the full extent of our resources to try and protect them, which was successful on the whole but not without tragedy.

The irony of this relative success in terms of seeing more painted dog packs in our area meant that we had to deal with more snaring and roadkill incidents. It's still very hard to accept these human-induced mortalities that threaten the very existence of a pack. The Mpindothele and Kingsbury packs have been reduced in number by man to a point where their continued existence is in doubt.

Nonetheless, the situation points to a stable, if not increasing painted dog population in Hwange NP itself, and with our continued collaboration with our colleagues in Botswana (Botswana Predator Conservation Trust), it's fascinating to see the movement of individuals across international borders.

The painted dog population in the Mid Zambezi Valley also seems to be relatively strong and stable, except for Mana Pools, where painted dogs continue to struggle. Preliminary findings from our collaboration with Stanford University show that the painted dogs in Mana Pools have significantly higher stress levels than those in Hwange NP. The likely cause of this is part of our ongoing research. We invested heavily in the repair and maintenance of our HQ infrastructure in 2023. Installing new solar systems into the staff housing, re-thatching all the buildings, and purchasing several new/new-to-us vehicles for the anti-poaching units and the research/monitoring team, headed by Jealous Mpofu.

I can't fail to mention the wonderful recognition awarded to Jealous this year. His 25+ years of dedication and commitment to the painted dogs being recognised as he was awarded the prestigious Tusk Wildlife Ranger Award. This Award is to recognise the dedication and commitment of an individual working in the field protecting Africa's wildlife. Jealous stands as a figurehead, representing the work of everyone at PDC.

A school classroom block is being built through the winning proceeds, which is also being supported by funds raised from Stichting Painted Dog Conservation, The Netherlands, to celebrate Jealous' 25th Anniversary working for PDC.

The tide of poaching seemed more relentless than ever in 2023. We extended our anti-poaching units, adding eight scouts and creating our first all-female unit, which is headed by Belinda Ncube. Belinda's story, from her stay at our Children's Bush Camp as an eleven-year-old child, to her employment at PDC, being recognized herself as a conservation hero by Disney, is as inspiring as Jealous'. She has undergone training with the formidable Akashingas and is now a leader at PDC.

We extended our partnership with the Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit to protect the painted dogs, and particularly the Kingsbury pack, also working closely with the Forestry Commission in the area the pack had denned. During this period, one of the males sustained a broken leg but was protected and fed by his pack and had almost made a full recovery before tragedy struck and he was killed by lions along with the three pups that had been born. Lions killing painted dogs is something we accept, as brutal as nature seems at such times, it's the human-induced mortalities, as mentioned above, that knock the wind out of our sails.

Our Children's Bush Camp completed another tremendous year. Wilton and his team continuing the life-changing work, with more than 900 children from 33 schools attending the camp in 2023. We now have such a tremendous pool of former Bush Camp alumni in our area, many of them involved in the MCAPU, employed at PDC or in neighbouring safari companies, which is something we are tremendously proud of. As is the measurable improvement in the children's overall performance at school, after attending the camp. The knowledge and inspiration they gain show itself, time and time again as they participate in National competitions.

None of the work we do would be possible without your dedicated support and commitment. We remain forever humbled and grateful for this support, which always motivates us to keep going, even on the darkest of days. David, Ronnie, Wilton, Jealous, and I, were able to travel to see many of you and it was a pleasure to welcome those of you who ventured out to see us. We certainly hope to see many more of you in 2024.

Research

By Dr Hillary Madzikanda, Research Director



Monitoring and biodiversity research are important in identifying, describing, and evaluating dynamics, limiting factors and threats to painted dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) and, the ecosystems, the dogs live in. The painted dogs and the ecosystems offer scientific investigations ranging from population dynamics, genetics, disease, predator-prey interactions, predator-predator competition, behaviour and general landscape ecology.

Painted dogs have been the flagship species of Painted Dog Conservation for the twenty-five years the organization has been operating in the country. The Hwange National Park (HNP) painted dog population is key and a stronghold to the national pack. The HNP dog population has been stable for some time and is increasing confirmed by numerous dispersers.

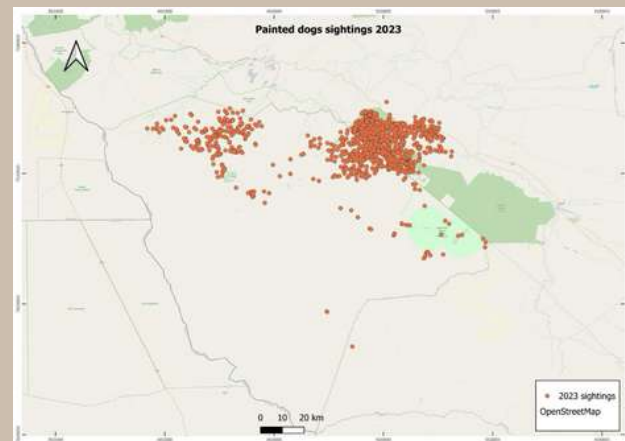
However, the Mana Pools population has been fluctuating and is in the phase of a decline/dip which is worrying. The major causes of the decline on the flood plain are mostly human-induced: visits to den sites, resting and kill sites swamped by hordes of tourists and film crews, and pressure from lions and hyenas. The remaining areas away from the flood plain indicate a stable dog population within the lower Zambezi Valley.

The data coming from the Hwange National Park, on known packs, indicates a population in 2023 of 251 adult dogs, in 34 packs with a pack size of 7.4. This is the highest population recorded in 25 years. Nine breeding units were recorded during the current period with a total of 55 pups.

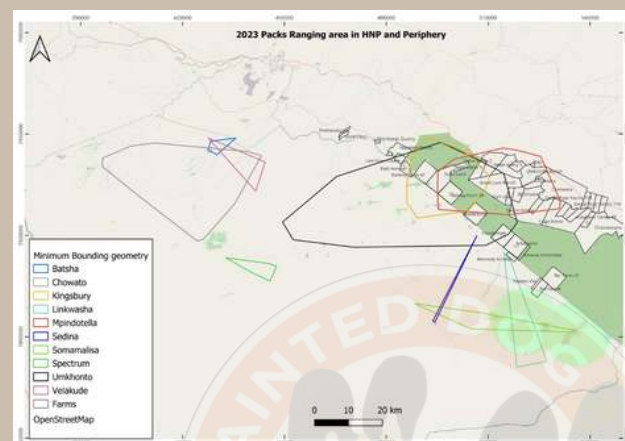
It is only thanks to our efforts and sheer luck that the Mpindothela pack is still alive as they forage in the Gwayi areas, which are a snare hotspot, despite community volunteers de-snaring the area for months.

The painted dog population in the Mid Zambezi including Mana Pools based on known packs is 209 adult dogs from 25 packs, making a pack size of 8.4. Two litters from one pack were documented in HNP and 11 pups out of 12 survived at the reporting time. The overall strategy of PDC is to address the threats to painted dogs and the environment as identified through research and monitoring, to minimize current negative impacts and reverse past impacts on dogs in HNP and Mana Pools.

During the current reporting period, PDC has recorded a high number of dogs carrying wire snares, especially the packs on the buffer/boundary of HNP, map 2. It is only thanks to our efforts and sheer luck that the Mpindothela pack is still alive as they forage in the Gwayi areas, which are a snare hotspot, despite community volunteers de-snaring the area for months. The PDC team remove snares when detected, however, it is sometimes difficult to get close enough to individual dogs to dart. The activity of detecting and removing wire snares is an important part of monitoring within PDC and has saved 14 painted dogs in 2023.



Map 1: Observed sightings of Packs in HNP 2023



Map 2: Home Range Overlap of Packs in HNP and Periphery in 2023

Painted Dog Mortality 2023 HNP

Table 1: Mortalities recorded within HNP 2023

NAME OF DOG	DATE OF DEATH	NAME OF PACK	CAUSE OF DEATH	LOCATION
Unknown	2023	Unknown	Killed by a wire snare	Sinamatella
Blade	28/6/2023	Kingsbury	Road Kill	Hwange National Park Mpofu-Mabale
Unnamed	27/6/2023	Kingsbury	Road Kill	Hwange National Park Mpofu-Mabale
Unnamed	27/6/2023	Kingsbury	Road Kill	Hwange National Park Mpofu-Mabale
Flash	4/9/2023	Kingsbury	Snare wire	Hwange National Park Ganda Foresty area
Clara	25/9/2023	Mpindothela	Snare wire	Gwayi area
Unnamed Pup	4/10/2023	Mpindotella	Presumed predation	Hwange National Park Gwayi
Unnamed Pup	11/10/2023	Umkhonto	Presumed predation	Hwange National Park Gwayi
Washy	30/11/2023	Mpindothela	Snare wire	Hwange National Park Gwayi

During the current reporting period, PDC recorded nine known mortalities in HNP, three individual dogs from the Kingsbury pack which were killed by reckless driving and one other Kingsbury individual killed in a wire snare. The alpha female of the Mpindothela pack, Clara, was also found killed in a wire snare, one pup from the same pack was also killed by lions and one unknown dog from Sinamatella was found dead in a wire snare.

The Mpofu-Mabale section of the highway has been a black spot for painted dogs in 2023, most dogs were killed by speeding reckless drivers on this section. Table 1 clearly highlights the danger posed to painted dogs in HNP by road kills and wire snares.

PDC has since erected road signs and speed reduction rubbles along the Mpofu-Mabale section in collaboration with the Ministry of Roads on potential accident hot spots to force drivers to be on alert and at the same time to reduce speed— the same needs to be erected on the Bulawayo to Victoria Falls road.



Signage installed by PDC warning motorists



Signage installed by PDC warning motorists



The Mid Zambezi Valley



The Nyamepi pack of 11 individuals is the only pack that is seen often on the Mana flood plain, the Ilala pack is also occasionally seen, see Map below. The Rukomechi pack had the Alpha female, named Taku, was run over by a vehicle on the Chirundu-Harare highway while she was heavily pregnant, table 2.

The decline of the painted dog population on the Mana flood plain, for the past few years is a cause of concern. PDC has been highlighting, for several years, the sensitive nature of dogs due to anthropogenic negative impacts as dogs are an indicator species. The anthropogenic negative impacts on painted dogs are caused by den site visits, crowding at the kill and resting site visits by hordes of visitors, film crews and safari operators, contributing to the current decline of painted dogs on the flood plain.

Other than the mentioned anthropogenic impacts the dogs on the flood plains additionally face serious competition from lions and hyenas. The Nyamepi pack, the only pack currently on the flood plain had seven pups when they became nomadic after denning, at the time of this reporting period only two pups remain. The five were observed being killed by lions on five different occasions, highlighting the lion pressure on painted dogs.

At the same time, two individual dogs were killed by cars on the Chirundu-Karoi highway, including one alpha female and five adult dogs were killed by lions during the course of the year.

For the current reporting period, the **Mid Zambezi has 209 dogs from 25 packs and Dandawa, Manhero and Nyamahwani have sizeable packs of 13, 10 and 14 individuals in each pack.**

However, for 2023 only three packs have been observed to have pups, which is of great concern. The Mukanga, Kapirinhengu and Nyaodza are relatively big packs and should have denned.

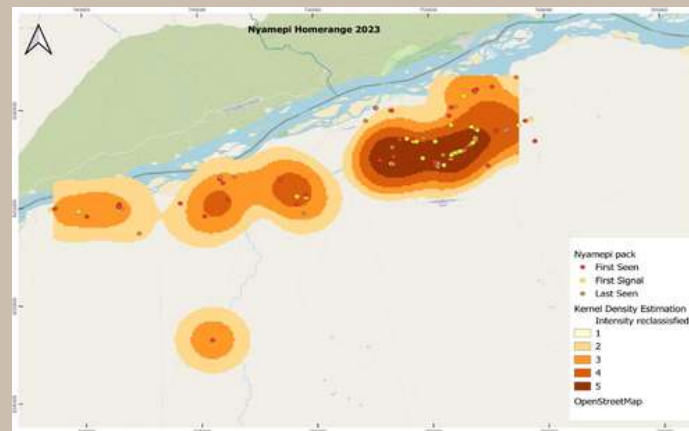
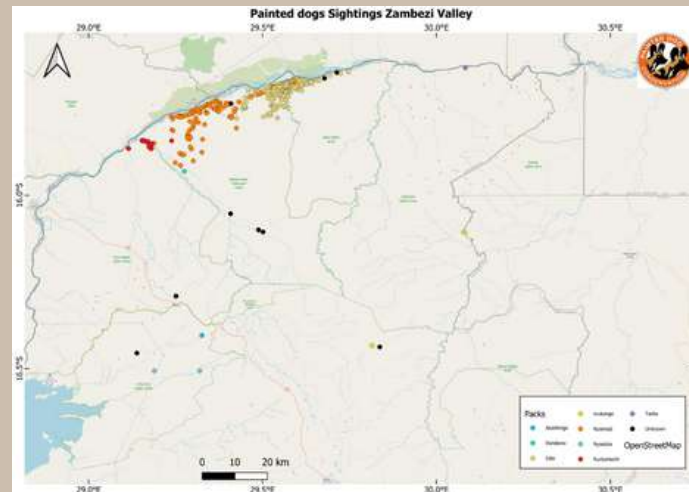


Table 2: Dog Mortalities in Mid Zambezi valley 2023

PACK NAME	DOG NAME	CAUSE OF DEATH	PRESUMED DATE OF DEATH
Nyamepi	Vincent	Road kill	28/02/2023
Rukomechi	Taurai	Road kill	17/6/2023
Nyamepi	Tracey	Presumed to be a lion kill	2/10/2023
Nyamepi	Treasure	Presumed to be a lion kill	2/10/2023
Nyamepi	Junior	Presumed to be a lion kill	27/10/2023
Nyamepi	Kieran	Presumed to be a lion kill	13/10/2023
Nyamepi	Lennart	Presumed to be a lion kill	13/10/2023

The largest pack in the Mid Zambezi valley is the Akashinga pack, comprised of 12 adult dogs and 13 pups. The Akashinga is found in the Charara concession and were mostly monitored through camera trapping. However, the pack moved because of veld fire which came from the communities in the buffer zone. Permission was sought for collaring this pack, however, it was not granted which hindered our activities.



Road signs erected along Chirundu-Karoi Highway 2023

PDC has erected road signs between Nyamakate-Makuti and Marongora boom gate- Chirundu in collaboration with the Ministry of roads as a way of highlighting dogs crossing the high-way and alerting the truck and car drivers to reduce speed on these sections. As mentioned in the report are two dogs were recorded to have been killed by cars on the Chirundu-Karoi highway including a heavily pregnant alpha female.



Other Activities



Elisa Sandoval Seres has completed her second year of data collection while attached to PDC for her Ph.D. programme titled: impact of interspecific competition on African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) in an ecosystem with artificial perennial water provision. Elisa Seres is currently finalizing her Ph.D. thesis for submission and has the following publications under review:

- Water availability affects the risk of kleptoparasitism of African wild dogs by large predators.
- Food resource competition between African wild dogs and larger carnivores in an ecosystem with artificial water provision Stanford University: Large Scale Genetic Monitoring of African Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*): Summary of Findings.



Our ongoing collaboration with Stanford University continues to make exciting progress as follows:

- Whole genome sequencing:

In total, 41 African wild dog samples from Hwange and Mana Pools have undergone whole genome sequencing. This data has been combined with whole genome sequencing data for 40 samples from Gorongosa National Park and 70 samples from Kruger National Park (published data from Meiring et al. 2022). This dataset has been submitted to a service-providing company (Gencove) for SNP calling. Once the final SNP calls from this data are received, work will begin on the analyses of population structure and relatedness. We expect to have preliminary results from this dataset ready by mid-2024.



- SNP panel:

Also in collaboration with the Pringle Lab at Princeton University) focused on Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique, we will be developing a SNP panel for painted dogs to enable the identification of first order relatives from faecal samples. The SNP panel we construct will also work for identifying first-order relatives among samples collected from Hwange NP and Mana Pools. We expect the painted dog SNP panel to be ready for use by the end of 2024.



- Hormone analyses:

Samples were successfully submitted to the endocrine lab at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, for stress hormone analyses. Faecal Glucocorticoid Metabolite (fGCM) concentrations using a Cortisol enzyme immunoassay (EIA) have been completed on all 71 faecal samples. Initial data analyses have indicated that painted dogs in Mana Pools NP have significantly higher stress levels than painted dogs in Hwange NP



- We also provided five learning opportunities through internships to local university students, fostering collaboration with universities and students pursuing studies in wildlife ecology and conservation.

PDC's extensive monitoring efforts, collaboration with researchers, and commitment to conservation underscore the dedication to safeguarding painted dog populations amidst ongoing challenges.





Jealous Mpfu receiving his award from HRH Prince William

Photo Credit: Tusk

Jealous Mpfu's Tusk Wildlife Ranger Award

Jealous Mpfu, Senior Tracker at PDC, was awarded the Tusk Wildlife Ranger Award presented by HRH Prince William in London. This prestigious accolade not only honours Jealous' dedication but also sheds light on the often-overlooked work of conservationists.

With over 25 years at PDC, Jealous has become integral to our mission, and his award is a collective victory for our organization and the entire conservation community.

Jealous' recognition stands as a powerful testament to the significant impact that individuals like him can make in the critical task of conserving our planet's precious wildlife – painted dogs and other endangered species in particular. According to Jealous, this acknowledgement is not just a personal triumph for him but a collective victory for Painted Dog Conservation, our supporters, the local communities and the stakeholders we work with, underscoring the importance of our shared commitment to the environment.

Jealous' dedication serves as a beacon of inspiration for all of us at PDC. In a field where recognition is often sparse, his achievement brings a sense of pride and validation to the entire conservation community. We extend our deepest gratitude to Jealous for his outstanding service and commendable leadership, which has not only elevated our organization but also shed light on the essential work carried out by conservationists worldwide.

Jealous chose for his award to go to his community by building a much-needed classroom block at his local primary school, which is also being supported by funds raised from Stichting Painted Dog Conservation, The Netherlands, to celebrate his 25th Anniversary working for PDC.



New classroom block being built at Lupote Primary School



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Anti-poaching Unit

By Enock Zulu, Anti-poaching Unit Manager



While we celebrated the presence of five packs in the buffer for the first time in 25 years, it brought about more responsibility on us to keep the packs as safe as possible. The tide of poaching seemed more relentless than ever in 2023.

To cope with the pressure, we extended our own anti-poaching units, adding an additional eight scouts and creating our first all-female unit, which is headed by Belinda Ncube.

Belinda's story, from her stay at our Children's Bush Camp as an eleven-year-old child, to her employment at PDC, being recognised herself as a conservation hero by Disney, is as inspiring as 'Jealous'. She has undergone training with the formidable Akashingas and is now a leader at PDC.

We continued our partnership with the Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit to protect the painted dogs, and in particular the Kingsbury pack, also working closely with Forestry Commission in the area the pack had denned.

During this period, one of the males sustained a broken leg but was protected and fed by his pack and had almost made a full recovery before tragedy struck. He was killed by lions along with the three pups that had been born.

Lions killing painted dogs is something we accept, as brutal as nature seems at such times, it's the human induced mortalities, that knock the wind out of our sails.

The Mpindothela pack embarked on a journey of resilience through the first half of 2023.

Our anti-poaching scouts in collaboration with the Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit and our research team patrolled the Gwayi area, ensuring the safety of the pack in the poaching hotspot. The team did everything they could for the pack including manning the den and providing 24hr surveillance in the area the pack had denned, just beside a busy highway.

Table 3: Patrols focused on hotspot areas along Sikumi Vlei, Kumuna, Gwayi River, and Dett Valley.

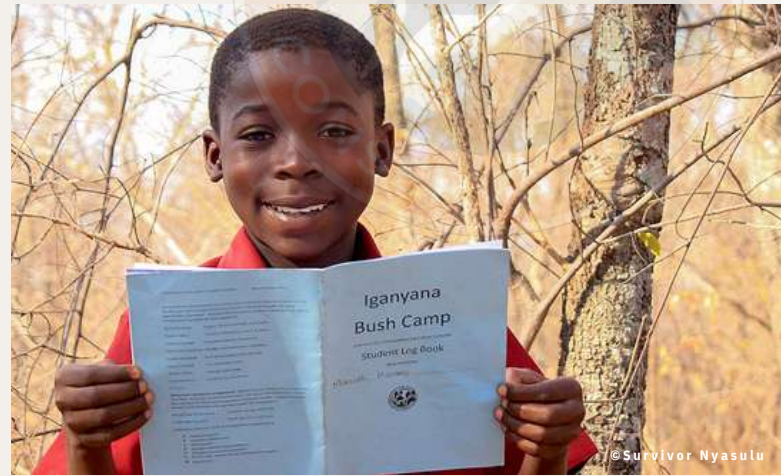
Description	Results
Patrols	2206
Snarers	4079
Arrests	8
Area patrolled in sq km	932
Cumulative Area patrolled in Sq km	6849
Distance covered on foot in km	18521.86
Distance covered by vehicle km	9127.55
Total distance covered in km	27649
Total number of hours patrolled	11521

During the period under review, our APU team arrested eight poachers. The poachers received either fines or community service sentences, something we feel is not deterrent enough for career poachers or would-be poachers. We continue to engage the prosecuting authorities to closely work together in building strong cases and getting stiffer sentences for perpetrators of wildlife crimes.



Education and Community Programs

By Wilton Nsimango, Education and Community Development Programs Manager



Our Children's Bush Camp completed another tremendous year. Wilton and his team continuing the life changing work, with more than 900 children from 33 (29 free of charge local primary school camps and four schools from the cities) schools attending the camp in 2023. We now have such a tremendous pool of former Bush Camp alumni in our area, many of them involved in the Mabale Community Anti-Poaching Unit (MCAPU), employed at PDC or in neighbouring safari companies, which is something we are tremendously proud of. As is the measurable improvement in the children's overall performance at school, after attending the camp.

The knowledge and inspiration they gain is showing itself, time and time again as they participate in National competitions.

Our education and community programs in 2023 continued to achieve significant milestones in fostering conservation awareness, enhancing academic performance, and promoting community engagement.

With a focus on ecology, conservation concepts, and English literacy, the Bush Camp pre/post-camp assessment revealed a 19% improvement in scores, affirming increased understanding of participating students.

The special Form 2 camp contributed to a rise in science and math candidates, challenging negative perceptions around these subjects. Moreover, the camp facilitated a special Bush Camp guide training. The aim is to generate a pool of skilled individuals in the local community to support future programs or better still to be employed by safari operators in and around Hwange National Park.

Table 4: Free of Charge Camps

Free of Charge Bush Camp Programme	
Total Number of Free of Charge Bush Camps so far this year:	29
Total Number of Free of charge Bush Camps since programme began	438
Total Number of students attending Bush Camp so far this year:	818
Total Number of students attending Bush Camp since programme began:	13578

Table 5: Additional Schools

ADDITIONAL SCHOOLS	
Total Number of Camps so far this year:	4
Total Number of Camps since programme began:	69
Total Number of students so far this year:	113
Total Number of students attending Bush Camp since programme began:	2878



Conservation Clubs

Conservation Clubs are an extension of the in-situ conservation effort at the Bush Camp. Students at this juncture make a choice to join the clubs at their respective schools. The aim is to keep the children on track and make sure the conservation concepts initiated at camp continue at school level, a lot of interest has been shown by the children even in lower grades and haven't been to the Bush Camp yet. We managed to conduct 17 school visits under this program and reached 475 children.

The clubs organize lessons, competitions, and clean-up campaigns demonstrating their conservation knowledge among students. Worth noting were the clean-up campaigns and land regeneration exercises, reinforcing the importance of environmental responsibility among students.

The Nabushome Primary School Conservation Club collaborated with the PDC supported Nabushome volunteers on a landscape re-generation project fostering intergenerational sustainability.

Table 6: School Visits

Total number of school visits this year	17
Total number of child/visits this year:	475
Total number of school visits since the program began	1545
Total number of child/visits since the program began	482719

Community Engagement

It is our profound belief that the success of conservation initiatives hinges on the active participation and support of the local community. PDC actively engaged local communities through meetings to foster common ground where the community and conservation efforts can converge harmoniously.



Though still challenged with COVID restrictions, we managed to conduct three community meetings and attended two agricultural shows that provided a platform to display programs and share insights.

The Iganyana Arts and Crafts Centre

By Agnes Ncube, Iganyana Arts and Crafts Centre Manager



Local artisans making art from wire snares

The primary goal of the centre is to bring immediate financial benefit to our artists. A second—but equally important—goal is to teach and encourage conservation, through the sustainable use of natural resources in the design of our products and the materials used to make them. It is our deep-felt belief that in order to make a difference and win in conservation, it is paramount to change lives and one way we are doing that is through the Iganyana Arts Centre.

The centre provides materials and training for local artisans, many of whom have developed their own unique signature style as well as their own designs. They turn snare wire into sculptures, raising awareness and teaching conservation through art. These are provided as gifts for donations received and then directed to artisans.

Wire snares are one of the major threats in illegal poaching. To highlight this insidious danger, we commissioned local artists to create sculptures from the snare wires collected by our anti-poaching units, turning something negative into something truly wonderful. We are proud of this initiative that not only supports their creators but also contributes to raising awareness and supporting our anti-poaching efforts.



Art from wire snares



Poacher wire snares removed by anti-poaching team

Education and Community Key Accomplishments

- ✓ • Successfully conducted all 29 free-of-charge camps and an additional 4 school camps, including the French School of Harare and Eco-clubs from Lupane.
- ✓ • Initiated the first-ever camp for Eco-clubs from Lupane, expanding awareness in Matabeleland North.
- ✓ • Increased participation in performing arts competitions, with more schools involved than the previous year.
- ✓ • Witnessed an increase in the number of former bush camp students employed in wildlife conservation, including Belinda Ncube taking up a leadership position in the Vusile APU team.



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The overall goal of the education and awareness programs is to inspire positive attitudes and behaviours in children and subsequently transfer these values to parents and guardians has been evidenced through impactful numbers. The pre/post-camp questionnaire results and the success in drama, poem, and song competitions indicate **increased awareness and understanding of conservation strategies among students and the community at large**. The community's intolerance to wildlife crime, evident in reports, arrests, and prosecutions, reflects the rising awareness levels.

Teaching and raising a great conservation-conscious generation requires everyone's participation and we are grateful for our collaboration with various organizations such as the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority, Forest Commission, Wildlife Environment Zimbabwe, Mabale Power Station, Agric Society Hwange, and our international sponsors.

We cannot overlook the challenges that hinder the overall effectiveness of our programs, including the escalating costs of fuel and food, limited staff availability, and teacher motivation. Our program's long-term success necessitates ongoing dedication to engaging students, teachers, and the community, fostering new partnerships, and addressing infrastructure requirements.

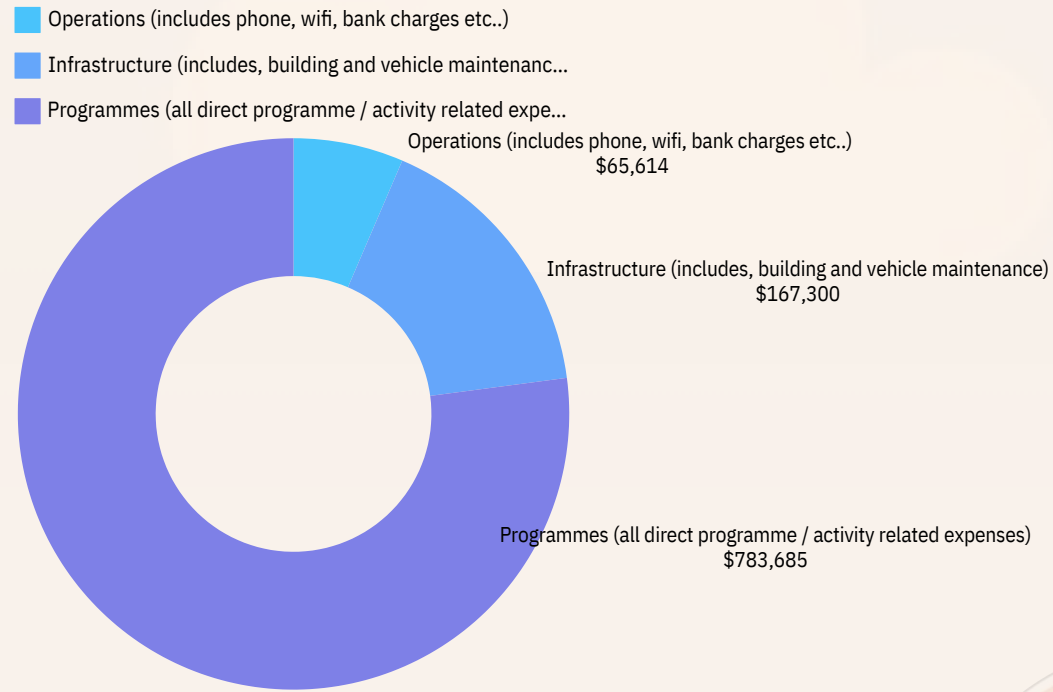


Financial Overview

By Nelson Ndeka, Accounting Manager

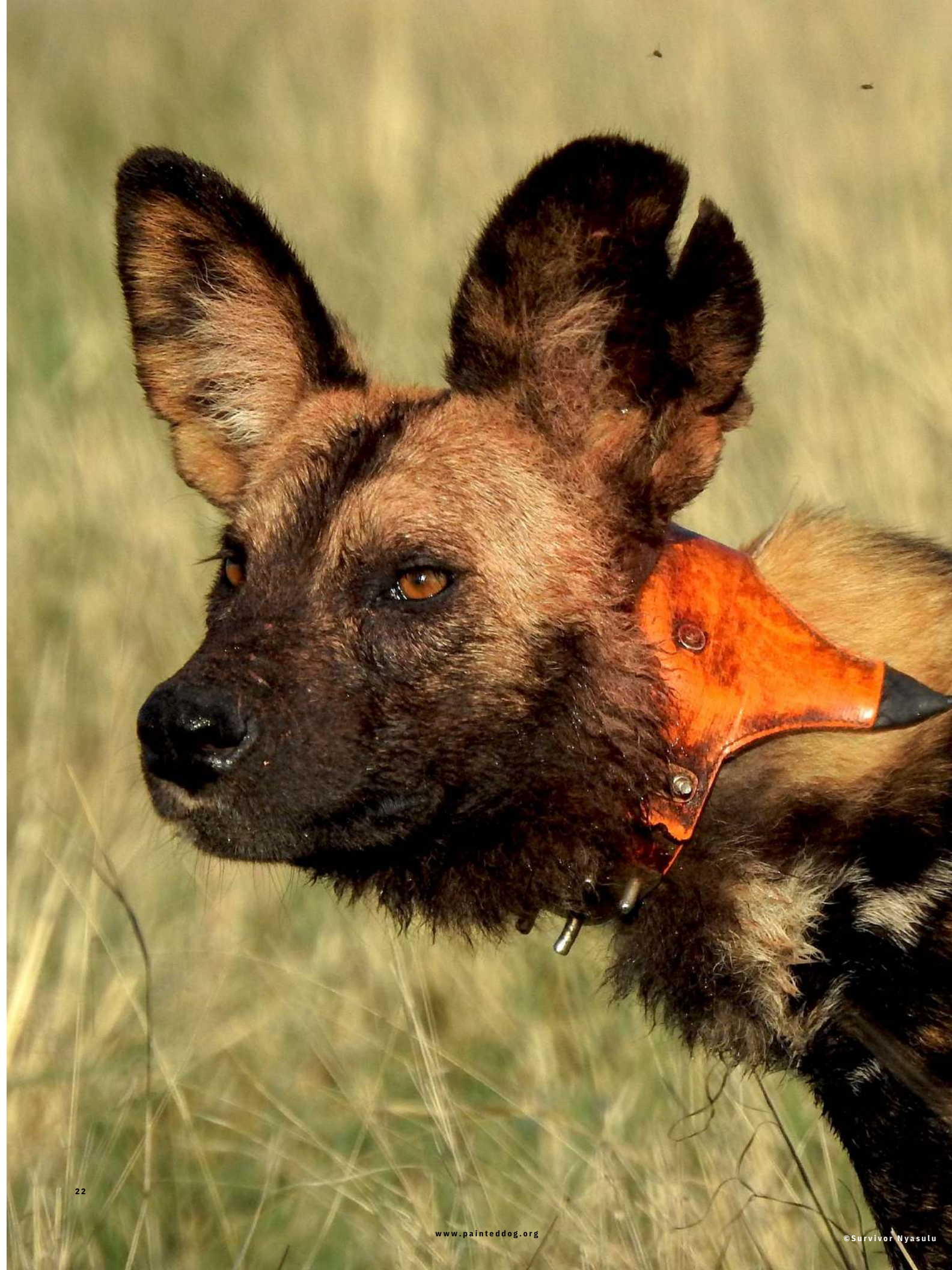
At Painted Dog Conservation, we deeply appreciate our steadfast friends and supporters who stand with us in our vital mission to safeguard painted dogs and their habitats from disappearing. Your generous contributions are invaluable to us, and you play a crucial role in our team. Below is a summary of our finances for 2023, all made possible by your support!

Donations/Income: US\$992,213



Total Expenses: US\$1,016,599

Income Over Expenditure(Expenditure Over Income): - US\$22,386



THANK YOU!

SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE PAINTED WOLF

A detailed analysis by the Painted Wolf Foundation and Wildlife Conservation Network on what can be done to reverse the downward trajectory of the painted wolf.



Securing the Future of the Painted Wolf provides a detailed analysis on the status of conservation of the painted wolf together with a theory of change on what is needed to reverse the downward trajectory of the species.

The report is a result of a year-long consultation with the conservation community led by Diane Skinner and is produced in collaboration between the Painted Wolf Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Network.

Securing the Future of the Painted Wolf provides a comprehensive insight into the myriad threats facing the species across Africa and the conservation measures many incredible organisations are taking to mitigate against them.

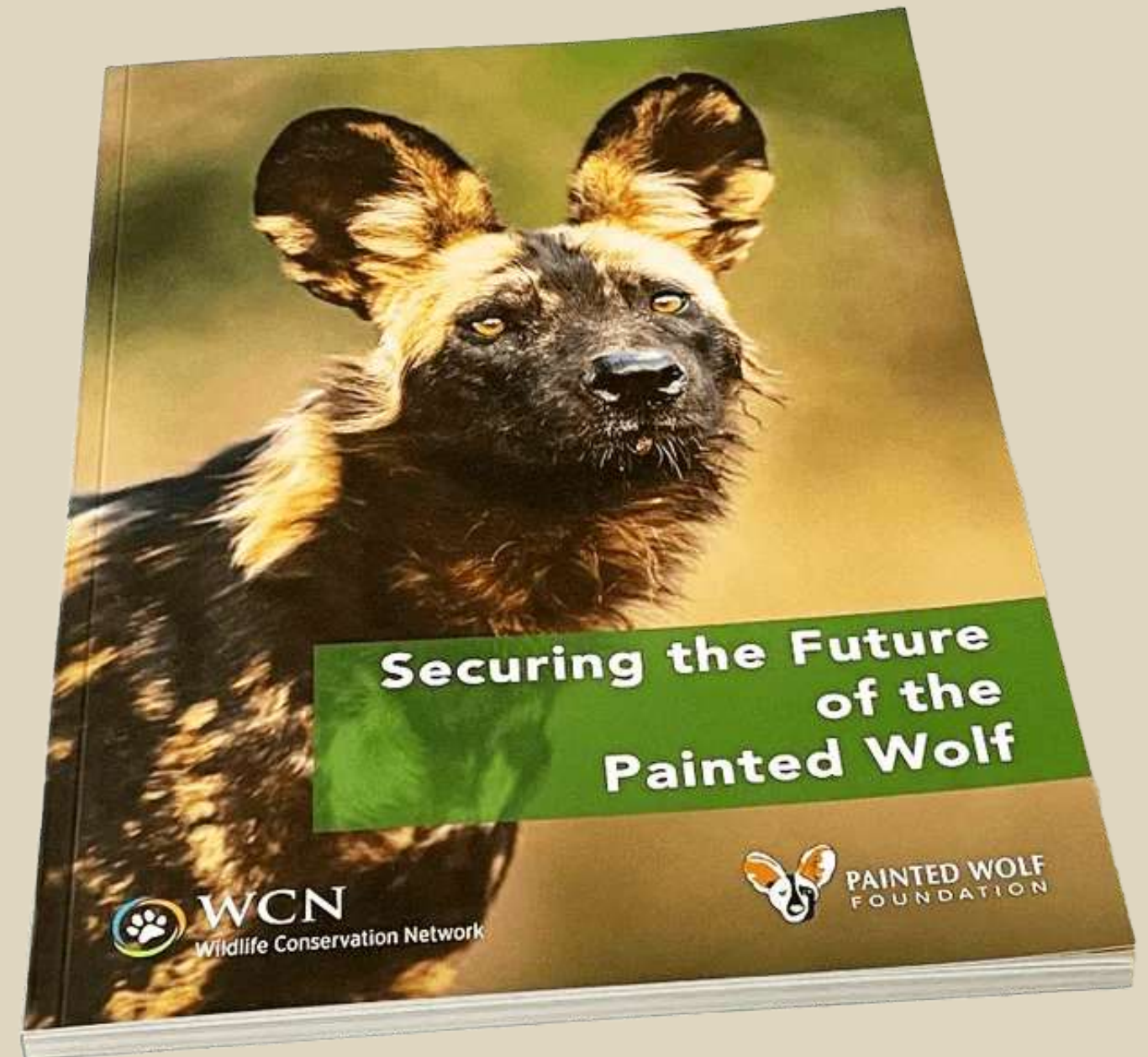
The report shows that despite these valiant efforts, painted wolf populations remain under extreme pressure with very few areas showing increasing numbers.

Effective conservation measures have proven to be transformational in certain areas, but a severe lack of funding prevents their wider implementation which reduces the species long-term chances of survival. However, as the report explains, despite this bleak picture, the outlook is not without hope.

Securing the Future of the Painted Wolf offers a theory of change that has the potential to double painted wolf numbers within the next 30 years.

This beautifully designed 146-page report contains over 50 new images taken by Nicholas Dyer and has been printed by Opmeer who were responsible for printing "Painted Wolves: A Wild Dog's Life".

All proceeds from the report will go to the Painted Wolf Foundation.



Citation: Skinner, D., Dyer, N., Blinston, P., Thomson, P., Lindsey Dr P., Hofmeyr, M. (2021). Securing the Future of the Painted Wolf. Painted Wolf Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Network



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