



Member of the IUCN – World Conservation Union

## **Media Release**

5 February 2009

*Starts*

### **CENSUS EXPEDITION: ON THE HUNT FOR WILD DOGS AND CHEETAH IN MOZAMBIQUE**

In the last few days of January 2009, researchers from the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Carnivore Conservation Group (EWT-CCG), assisted by intrepid explorer Kingsley Holgate and with vehicle support from Land Rover South Africa, travelled the entire length of the *Parque Nacional do Limpopo* to interview communities and park personnel about their experiences with Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) and Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*). Knowledge about the distribution of these threatened species is important for effective conservation planning, and the expedition augments the distribution data collected through the 5<sup>th</sup> Wild Dog and 3<sup>rd</sup> Kruger National Park Cheetah Photographic Census, which is currently being implemented by the EWT-CCG.

Wild Dogs and Cheetah are among the rarest of Africa's large carnivores. Both species are severely impacted by habitat loss and are widely persecuted, and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is home to some of the only remaining viable populations in the region. These wide-ranging species, both of which are listed as threatened in the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species and on the Convention on the Conservation for Migratory Species (CMS), require large areas to sustain viable populations.

An understanding of population dynamics is essential for the development of sound conservation strategies. Their low densities and wide-ranging behaviour however, make Wild Dogs and Cheetah extremely difficult to count, thus exacerbating the challenges that conservationists already face in trying to protect them.

Fortunately, researchers are able to recognise individuals of both species from their unique coat patterns, thus enabling an estimation of minimum population size. For the past 20 years, 5-yearly photographic surveys have been conducted to assess population numbers in Kruger National Park (KNP), with the latest survey currently underway (1 August 2008 to 30 April 2009). This technique has been extremely successful in the KNP with its high tourist volumes and comprehensive road network. The photographic method is however unlikely to adequately document numbers in the Limpopo section of the Transfrontier Park, given that tourist numbers are still low and there are very few roads.

A Census Expedition was therefore organised in late January to obtain preliminary information about the distribution of Wild Dogs and Cheetah in the *Parque Nacional do Limpopo*. Researchers from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, assisted by Kingsley Holgate and interpreter Maria Khosa, travelled from village to village to determine whether these animals had been sighted. "We were pleased to find that

Page 1 of 2

#### **EWT Vision:**

"A healthy planet and equitable world that values and sustains the diversity of all life"

most respondents were able to correctly identify these carnivores and that there had been several confirmed sightings in the past year, particularly in the southern region of the park”, said Harriet Davies-Mostert, Manager of EWT’s Carnivore Conservation Group. “The park has the potential to become a carnivore stronghold in the years to come”.

Kingsley Holgate’s participation in the expedition was particularly fitting given that he will be embarking on his *Boundless Southern Africa Expedition* in May 2009. Embracing the theme of “Nature Culture Community”, the expedition will use a single high profile journey to link nine SADC countries, seven Transfrontier Conservation Areas, 30 national parks and nature reserves and the communities adjacent to these conservation areas.

The Wild Dog and Cheetah Photographic Census is funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation’s African Cheetah Initiative, with vehicle support from Land Rover South Africa. Tinga Lodge has provided competition prizes, and Esor has covered the printing of posters and brochures.

Anyone lucky enough to see Wild Dogs or Cheetah in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and surrounds is requested to please report sightings to the EWT. Participants in the photographic competition stand a chance to win great prizes, and will also be contributing to the long-term conservation of these beautiful creatures. Entry forms are available at all gates and rest camps in KNP, and sightings can also be reported to the Census Hotline Number (076 725 5242) or [census@ewt.org.za](mailto:census@ewt.org.za). Please visit [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za) for more information.

*Ends*

Contact: Harriet Davies-Mostert  
Endangered Wildlife Trust  
Manager: Carnivore Conservation Group  
Mobile +27(0) 82 507 9223  
Tel: +27 (0)11 486 1102  
E-mail: [harrieted@ewt.org.za](mailto:harrieted@ewt.org.za)

Issued by: Hayley Komen  
Conservation Programme Developer  
Endangered Wildlife Trust  
[www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za)  
Tel: +27 (0)11 486 1102



**EWT Vision:**

“A healthy planet and equitable world that values and sustains the diversity of all life”