



Painted Dog Conservation News Year 2000

November/December 2000 - Peter Blinston

Man Continues His Seemingly Relentless Assault on the Painted Hunting Dogs:

We were puzzled by the Hlangabeza's activities last year, their behaviour never fitting into the "normal" denning season pattern. However regular sightings confirmed that they were all fit and well, only a lack of puppies causing us some concern.

News reached us one day of a dog carrying a neck snare plus another limping badly. We responded immediately, "Sally mk2" always ready for such emergencies.

A quick search of the area resulted in us locating Simon; we homed in on the signal from his collar, fearful of what we might find. Simon lay a pitiful sight. It was relatively easy to move into position and dart him due to his weakened state. Four of the pack watched as we examined Simon,



seemingly aware that we meant no harm. We were horrified by what we found; the snare was deeply embedded in his neck, tearing through muscle and tissue creating a massive wound. Thankfully his protective collar had done enough to save his life, preventing the wire from cutting into the back of his



neck. Greg worked quickly to remove the cruel wire, administering antibiotic ointment and injections. Experience had shown us that the dogs have incredible powers of recovery and though we were astonished that he was still alive, we felt that he would recover, aided by the antibiotics. There was nothing else we could do for him.

The next task was to dart Pelota who was

limping badly. His rear left leg was a mess and a quick decision was made to take him to Bonnie Reid Roland's veterinarian surgery in Bulawayo. She sewed torn tendons together and removed badly infected tissue. X-rays showed that he had suffered many other injuries, all caused by snares. Eight hours later, following a six hundred-km journey under anaesthesia he was back with the pack. We had done all we could; they would care for each other now as only dogs do.



There was no sign of Smoke, Hamuka and the rest of the pack. We searched the area extensively and eventually located them many km away. Smoke was with Ringtail plus three of the



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yearlings (born June 1999). Hamuka and Saddle were missing, as were three other yearlings. We fear that the pack has split, probably as a result of the devastation caused by the snaring that seems to have resulted in Hamukas death.

In the last issue of Wildlife Matters we reported on the collaring of a pack occupying ranch land near Bulawayo. Once the pups were big enough we went back to the area with the Department of National Parks in an effort to capture and translocate the entire pack to a safe area. Ten days of the most incredibly draining drama followed.



Thanks to the collars and the co-operation of the farm workers we quickly located the dogs. Greg and Jealous set the newly designed capture nets into a boma while I went to collect the National Parks team. Unfortunately the parks Unimog had a puncture on the way to the site! As the lightweight net boma was already set we decided to attempt the capture anyway, conscious that we were short of manpower. Though we managed to drive the pack, they avoided the boma completely and drifted off into the bush seemingly oblivious to

the whole affair. The Parks team eventually turned up after fixing the tyre but sadly too late to help.

Two days later we tried again, this time with the full National Parks team. Relying on the heat of the mid day sun to discourage the pack from moving, we set the boma some 200m from the dogs. Using our own lightweight nets again ensured that the boma went up quickly and with minimal noise disturbance. We then ran the fladry along each side of the resting pack to form a funnel, at the same time allowing us to move into position behind them.

Once satisfied that the driving teams were in place a pencil flare was launched as the signal to start the drive. The dogs were so unconcerned that all eleven simply walked into the boma. A perfect drive! As the net curtain was closed behind them, they sensed the "danger" and ran at the net wall. Unfortunately, as can happen with new techniques, the nets were not set properly and the dogs escaped!!

Those few lines in no way portray the drama and level of tension. We were absolutely drained having worked for hours in the mid day heat of Africa, the whole process would have to be repeated again.

The pack moved off into an area that was difficult for us to operate in. Several days of tracking on foot, by vehicle and ultimately by helicopter resulted in us getting the opportunity to try one last time.

The National Parks team decided to use their nets / boma this time. A combination of the appalling weather (torrential rain), the noise associated with erecting such a boma and the dogs perhaps being sensitised, resulted in the pack moving away and the operation being aborted.

The Ganda Lodge and our determination and commitment to catch and remove this pack is still intact. Both parties feel that it is essential to demonstrate as much to the farm owners / managers and thus show that "we" can deal with their "problem". With this in mind another capture operation has been scheduled for the end of the rainy season. The farmers showed great understanding and have promised that the dogs will remain unharmed.

Mans seemingly relentless assault on the dogs continued. On arriving back at the dog house late that evening we picked up a report indicating that Specks was dead, Beehive had been snared again and the seven pups were barely alive, scavenging for food from a waste dump behind a safari lodge. Though exhausted we could not sleep. At 4am the next morning Greg and I rushed to the lodge at Ganda, determined to be there at first light. We found the pups very quickly as they were still near the rubbish tip;



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Beehive soon appeared from the thick bush, looking pathetically thin. We had been told that the snare had cut deeply into his throat creating a wound similar to that suffered by Simon, again the protective collar had done its job and kept him alive. Giving a fellow researcher the chance to dart him and remove the wire while we were away. Specks was nowhere to be seen, a sure indication that she was dead, as she would never abandon her pups that were now destined to die. Beehive would never be able to keep them alive,



particularly in his weakened state. Consequently we had no qualms of "interfering" in a situation created by man and so hatched a plan to catch the pups.

Using the same nets that had let us down only a few days before we erected a simple boma and placed some meat in it to attract the pups. We barely had time to get back in our landrover before the pups came rushing over to get the meat; such was their level of hunger. Jealous leapt out of the landrover and closed of the mouth of the boma,

trapping six of the pups. We moved in quickly, catching each one by hand and placing them gently in the covered trailer before taking them to a nearby holding pen. Beehive and the seventh pup simply looked on. As we drove away they rushed to the meat and fed ravenously. We soon arrived at the holding pen that was only 1km away and placed some meat inside to attract the pups out of the trailer. They leapt out eager to feed and we knew that they would soon settle down with nice full stomachs. Later that day Beehive and the seventh pup appeared by the enclosure so we were able to catch the last pup easily and re-unite him with his brothers and sisters.

We did not want to put Beehive in the enclosure however we did want to inspect his wound. As he had been anaesthetised recently we could not dart him again and so decided to see if we could catch him in a cage trap and so inspect the wound while he was still "awake". We set the trap with some meat and waited as he approached. Hunger again drove him to enter the cage without any hesitation and indeed when the door dropped close he simply continued to eat. We moved slowly and quietly towards the cage so as not to cause him any unnecessary distress but need not have worried. He simply lay down and watched us. We inspected his wound through the mesh as he lay there, applying more antibiotic ointment and at one point, lifting his head to apply the ointment underneath his chin!! He did not show any sign of fear or distress, seemingly aware that we meant no harm and were helping him. Even when the door to the trap was opened he simply ran out with the minimal of fuss, stopping 30 metres away to look back at us. We were happy that he would stay in the area and so allow us to keep a watch on his progress and feed him if necessary so that he would make a full recovery.



We have no intention of keeping the pups in captivity. Painted Hunting Dogs will adopt dogs from other packs and so we will introduce the pups to another pack once they have regained their strength. As always we try to look for a positive outcome from any situation and believe that we will be able to unite the pups and Beehive with the dogs from the Bulawayo farmland and move the entire group to a new safer area. An operation that will also introduce a new bloodline into the selected area thus improving the species genetic diversity!