
African Wild Dog 98 Fact Sheet (7/1/98)

African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*)

Description: The African wild dog, sometimes known as the Cape hunting dog, is quite different from the more familiar domestic dog or gray wolf. It has highly specialized sharp shearing teeth, large round ears and only four toes on its front legs, rather than five. Each wild dog has its own unique markings of yellow, black, brown and white. It weighs from 40 to 80 pounds and stands 30 inches high at the shoulder.

Range: Formerly the African wild dog was found over almost all of sub-Saharan Africa. It still ranges from south of the Sahara to South Africa, but only widely scattered populations.

Habitat: Wild dogs require immense amounts of territory and packs range across areas of 200 to 700 square miles. Dogs occupy many different kinds of habitat but prefer open woodlands and plains.

Diet: African wild dogs are almost exclusively carnivorous and hunt various types of antelope and small mammals. It is not uncommon for the dogs to lose their catch to hyenas and lions.

Social Organization: Social hunters, African wild dogs have an unusual pack system. The pack, usually seven to ten adults, consists of males who are related to each other and females who are related to each other; the males and females, however are not related. Only the dominant male and female usually breed, with the female bearing litters that average ten pups. All adults help raise the pups, feeding them regurgitated food. Both sexes leave the pack when one to two years old.

Threats to survival: due to their large home ranges, African wild dogs are especially vulnerable to habitat destruction and direct persecution. Human encroachment also brings domestic dogs in contact with wild dogs, transmitting diseases such as distemper and rabies. Despite protective laws, the dogs are still shot by herders seeking to protect their livestock.

Zoo Programs -SSP: The African Wild Dog SSP was formed in 1991. There are about 40 wild dogs in AZA institutions and 20 elsewhere in North America. The SSP's target population is 75-100 specimens for exhibit or maintenance in AZA institutions.

Conservation: Despite its precarious situation, the wild dog has not received the attention given to elephants, rhinos and other endangered African animals. A conservation program for the wild dog could help many other species because of the large areas needed to support viable populations of wild dogs.

Reintroduction: Reintroduction or relocation of wild dogs from one area of Africa to another is not presently feasible due to a general lack of protection but may be possible in the future if adequate protection returns.

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