



Venetia Limpopo Wild Dog Project:

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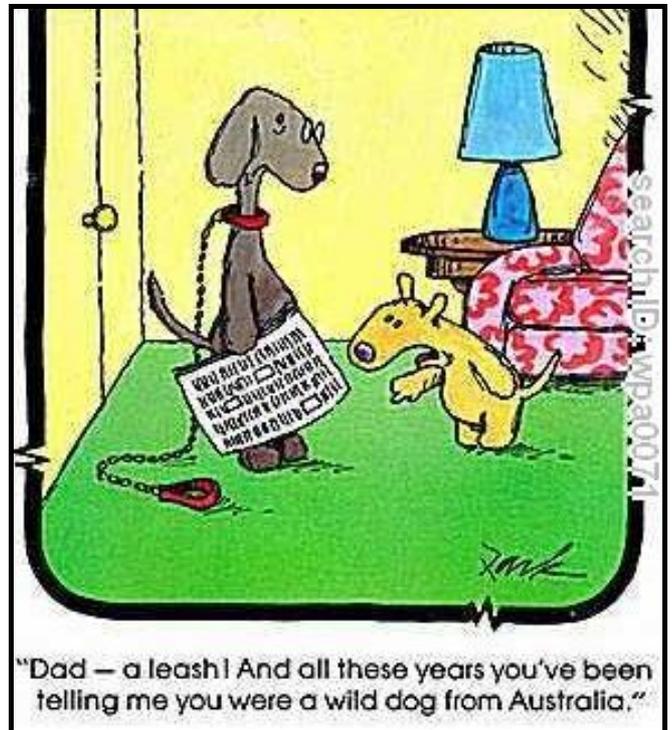
June was a significant month for the project because we released Rory – the young adult male – and the bonded pack of four Wild Dogs on the 3rd and 4th of June 2009, respectively. I opened the gates of Rory's enclosure in the morning of 3 June, but he seemed oblivious to the fact that he was now free. That afternoon, I decided to enter the boma to 'herd' him out as I was concerned that scavengers like Spotted Hyenas would enter the boma in the evening (a carcass scent lingers in the bomas) and they could harm him. While doing so, the most bizarre thing happened – a female Cheetah had entered the boma after I had entered, and proceeded to stalk Rory! Upon realising he was potential Cheetah food, Rory sped past me howling to the opposite corner of the boma with the Cheetah in hot pursuit. I had to quickly make a plan to separate them and get Rory out of the boma, so with deft zigzag driving in the Land Rover Defender I managed to displace Rory to the entrance end of the boma, with the Cheetah in the opposite end, and Rory was thus able to escape unharmed. I quickly closed the boma gates so that we could fit a tracking collar onto the Cheetah – something we have wanted to do for months but to no avail.

The following morning we opened the boma gates at first light and Rory proceeded to enter the boma and confidently strolled up to the new males and greeted them. Our concerns about conflict were quickly negated, and we were pleased when the males seemed to accept Rory, though Able, the alpha male, did make it quite clear to him who was boss in the group! This is of course normal in the hierarchy of Wild Dog society.



Collaring Rory

Rory spent the evening outside the bomas in close proximity to the bonded dogs that were still in the adjacent boma, and there was an amount of interaction between him and the confined dogs.



With the five Wild Dogs released together into the reserve, I set about doing continuous follows of them for the following 10 days. We wanted to see a new pack's post-release movement on a reserve, and look to what extent it was random. Since the females knew the reserve, the first week of travels was an orientation exercise where the girls showed the guys around – so to speak. I followed them all night during the full moon periods, and the furthest distance they travelled was 15 km. The new males were initially quite shy of observer presence, but toward the end of the 10 day period, they relaxed a bit more – having probably responded to the females comfort with vehicles. We are happy that the group has integrated so smoothly, and please to have a functioning pack again on Venetia.

This project is an initiative of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Carnivore Conservation Group. It is generously supported by Land Rover South Africa and De Beers Consolidated Mines.