

# Newsletter

Summer 2006



## PCT FUNDS PURCHASE OF LANDROVER FOR THE PAINTED DOG PROJECT'S ANTI POACHING UNIT IN ZIMBABWE

In mid July we were approached by Greg Rasmussen of the Painted Dog Project in Zimbabwe to see if we would be willing to help purchase a vehicle for the projects anti poaching unit. The trustees were all in favour of funding the vehicle and quickly raised the additional funds needed to purchase the vehicle in its entirety. We worked quickly to get the funds ready while Greg located a suitable vehicle. Just 3 weeks from the initial approach a suitable vehicle had been located, the funds transferred and the vehicle purchased.

On 6th August three of the PCT trustees, Bob Kimber, Simon Marsh and Anthony May, travelled to Oxfordshire to meet Greg Rasmussen and formally hand over the new vehicle - by now adorned with the logos of both Predator Conservation Trust and the Painted Dog Project.

The Anti poaching teams patrol on a daily basis searching for snares left by poachers which they then remove. It is estimated that 10% of snares will if not removed eventually kill an animal, so when you consider the fact that the anti poaching teams have removed over 10,000 snares in the last 4 years this shows the incredible impact they are making. While poachers don't set snares for wild dogs the snares don't discriminate between the animals that they kill and so dogs have been killed by the wire snares.

The total cost of the vehicle (including a spare engine which will be invaluable in keeping the vehicle running in the harsh conditions in which it will be operating) was £4100 (approx \$7800).



From left to right: Greg Rasmussen, Bob Kimber, Anthony May and Simon Marsh

## LISE HANSSEN FIELD TRIP REPORT

It has been some time since I have ventured into the great outdoors and early July brought an opportunity to put a long held plan into action. For many years I have dreamed of setting up a spotted hyaena research and conservation project and I had planned to visit various areas that fall within hyaena ranges, namely, the Kunene region, the southern Namib desert, eastern Etosha National Park and the Caprivi region.

After much hesitation, it was time to bite the bullet and decide on specific dates to get the field trips on the go. Mid July seemed perfect to venture into the Kunene area as the rains were long over and I didn't want to miss the sight of grass covering the entire area that has resulted from the recent excellent wet season in Namibia.

It just so happened that I bumped into John Leach in town who hosts the annual Emory University student field trip to Namibia. When it turned out that we were both headed to Kunene at more or less the same time, we made arrangements to meet up and drive the area together. At the same time I could talk to the Emory group about Namibian carnivores and their conservation and share any hyaena findings that I should stumble across.

On 2nd July, we departed in the morning from Windhoek and reached the Grootberg pass just as it was getting dark. At the veterinary check point we headed north in the pitch blackness that only comes with being away from city lights. After locating the Ongongo campsite turn off just south of Sesfontein we drove the rutted, dusty 6 km track to find the most beautiful solar lit campsite set right next to a flowing stream that flows from Ongongo waterfall. After meeting up with the group we soon turned in for the night.



*The camp*

The following day we headed for the Hoanib river after stopping in Sesfontein to fill the vehicles with fuel. I was looking forward to seeing elephants which cruise up and down the Hoanib and hopefully lion and spotted hyaena spoor, but after hours of driving with fantastic sightings of giraffe and springbok, the only signs we saw were a dried out elephant carcass and the tracks of one brown hyaena.

That night was spent camping on the bank of the Hoanib to make sure we didn't cross paths with elephants wandering downriver at night. I chatted to the group about carnivores, their distribution and various conservation efforts around the country. They were referred to the PCT website where so many field reports and information could be downloaded for reference material.



*The Emory University group*

The following days were spent navigating the Mudorib tributary, visiting the Hunkab and Kai-ais springs where no signs of carnivores were seen until we got to the Orinendes spring. This was the only indication of spotted hyaena that we saw throughout the entire trip, where an old patch of dried blood and a few sets of tracks indicated that they had visited this spring a good few days before us.

The scenery was spectacular with the gravel plains and entire mountains covered in yellow, waving grass. Including two massive herds of springbok, we also saw gemsbok, ostrich, mountain zebra and giraffe. I decided that I would have to return to the Kunene Region for further investigation after I had visited the other potential study sites, including the Caprivi, which I hope will be within the next month or two.

*Lise Hanssen*

## GRANT FOR AERIAL TRACKING OF BROWN HYENAS

In March the Trustees of the Predator Conservation Trust agreed to provide a grant to the Brown Hyena Research Project based in Luderitz, Namibia.



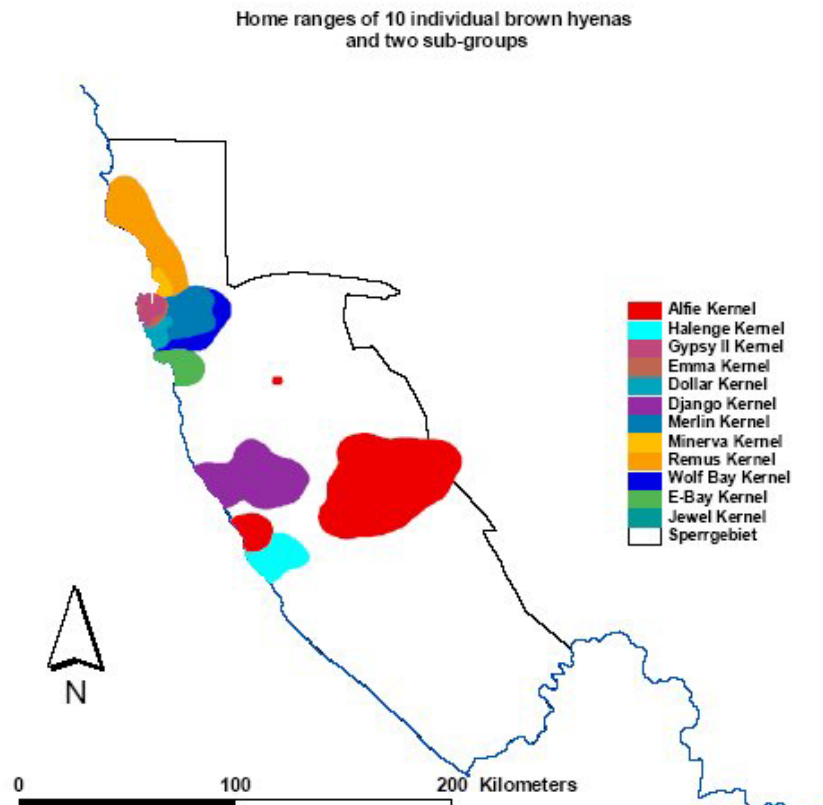
Ingrid Wiesel and her team study the Brown Hyenas in the Sperrgebiet - a vast unspoilt wilderness in the South West of Namibia near Luderitz. The area has virtually no roads (the only roads that exist run from the entrance gates to the diamond mines), and is extremely difficult terrain in which to locate and track a radio collared Hyena. For this reason the project relies heavily on aerial tracking to locate the Brown Hyenas.

Animals fitted with a standard VHF collar can be located from the air and their location noted for later use in building up a picture of the animals movements.

Some of the Brown Hyenas have been fitted with a more sophisticated GPS collar. These record the animals location at set intervals day and night which provide far more valuable information as normal radio tracking is generally not possible at night so normal radio collars tend to provide daytime movement information which may not give the full picture. The aircraft is used to locate the GPS collared animals and to then guide the ground team in towards the Brown Hyena being tracked. Once within a fairly short range the ground team is able to remotely retrieve the data stored in the collar.

When the GPS collars near the end of their operational life they need to be recovered. The collars are designed to release from the animals neck when they receive a certain radio signal. Again the aerial tracking is essential here as the Hyena can be tracked and the collar drop off signal sent while the Hyena is visible from the air. The ground team can then be guided in to retrieve the collar. Without the use of the aircraft this would be extremely difficult (like searching for a needle in a haystack) as the hilly terrain means that a Hyena that was visible a few seconds previously when the drop off signal was sent can vanish without trace, which results in a very long search to find where the collar fell off (made more difficult as the Hyenas have been know to pick up the fallen collar and run off with it before eventually dropping it some considerable distance from where it initially fell).

We were happy to provide funding of £1000 towards the cost of the aerial tracking for 2006 and other sponsors provided the rest of the required funds enabling Ingrid to continue with her work.



## **PAINTED DOG PROJECT UPDATE: April 2006:**

While Greg and I undertook our annual USA / European Tour, visiting many friends and “rattling the can” to bring in the much needed funds, life at PDC continued without missing a beat. The projects work is gaining more and more international recognition, testament to the dedication and commitment of our staff.

Foggie Wilson, our Office Manager, handles the day to day logistics in her inimitable, matriarchal way, while Wilton Nsimango works tirelessly to ensure that the Children’s Bush Camp continues to deliver its life changing experience for so many of the local children. During the months of February and March over 170 children from 5 schools visited the camp on our extended 4-day programme. Wilton supplements these camps by visiting the schools before and after each camp, thus he conducted 20 school visits during the same period, which is very exhausting work for him, carried out with a permanent smile on his face. Closed for the school holidays now, much maintenance work is being undertaken by Dought Nkomo and his team.

Martin Muserere, our Computer Training Coordinator, continues to deliver a first class programme for many of the local peoples. He has conducted over 7500 hours of lessons since the programme began last year, almost 2000 of those hours this year alone and seen 240 students graduate from the course.

Sikhosana keeps a tight rein on the APU, deploying them for maximum effect. Poaching levels thus remain low in the core areas patrolled, but there is still concern about the poaching in the eastern Gwayi plus the eastern boundary of Hwange National Park and the area to the far west of us, where there is again encroachment into Hwange National Park. The truth of the matter is that there are still not enough professional anti poaching units in the region, we continue to provide training and support for the landowners in the Gwayi who are showing interest in deploying anti poaching units. While every snare that is collected in is a plus, the problem nonetheless, remains massive.

The dogs of course are the main focus of everything and as usual Jealous stepped up to the task of keeping an eye on them. The Umtchibi pack, continue to flourish within the sanctuary of Hwange National Park, the pups growing before ones eyes as the very capable adults provide plenty of food for them. The pack is still fifteen strong and are regularly seen in an around the Main Camp area. However we are perhaps more delighted by the progress being made of the “Mashambo” pack, which comprises of only two adults and three pups, these pups are huge!! Testament to how well the parents are feeding them and though they are still a fragile pack in terms of the age and experience of the dogs, we are optimistic that another litter this year will take the pack up to a more effective unit. With Jealous picking up additional sightings of two packs in the Eastern Gwayi, one comprising of 7 dogs and the other comprising of 4 dogs plus a pack of 11 dogs to the west of us at Masuma Dam, the overall situation is looking very good, even Agula and Ukula are still being seen every day. I need only check the fuel log to see how many kilometres Jealous has driven to gather this information; I know only too well how uncomfortable all those kilometres are in his battered old landrover.

To cap of a very positive period of dog sightings, the National Parks staff at Tashinga, in Matusadhona, have been reporting on the good progress of our “Tashinga” pack, which we released into the wild last year. Not only are the four dogs doing well, they also seem to have stimulated “dog activity” in the region, as sightings are coming in of other dogs, not previously seen there. Needless to say we are very keen to make the arduous journey back to Matusadhona, once we have confirmation that it is again possible to cross the numerous rivers that dissect the region.

*Peter Bliston*

## **PAINTED DOG PROJECT UPDATE: May 2006:**

May turned into one of those months we will never forget, thanks largely to a single exercise concerning the translocation<sup>16</sup> painted dogs from South Africa to our Rehabilitation facility in Hwange. A quite exhausting 4-day operation was the culmination of many months’ negotiation and frustration.

In August 2005 we received a letter from the South African North West Parks Board, asking if we were interested in receiving a pack of dogs from Pilansberg National Park, which were “surplus” to requirements. In fact the letter stated that they had heard that we would be interested. Rather sur-

prised with the “surplus to requirements” aspect, we none the less spoke to the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA), who immediately supported the proposal and issued the relevant paperwork within a week. Then we waited, and waited, for the go ahead from South Africa, looking at our crowded diaries, almost on a weekly basis, to see when we could make the trip, if and when we got the go ahead. Months went by, during which time we heard that certain elements in South Africa were suggesting euthanasia for the “surplus” pack!! This strengthened our resolve of course and we remained determined, the translocation taking on more of a rescue mission now in our hearts and minds. George In der Maur and his Dutch based SOS Wild dog Foundation pledged to cover the entire cost of the translocation, having been the first to hear of the packs plight.

The Pilansberg management clearly wanted the dogs to come to Zimbabwe and the communication channels remained open, euthanasia was not an option to them either.

Finally, this month, we received the final confirmation that the translocation had been approved and with the paperwork issued we set off on Tuesday morning, a 15-hour drive from Hwange to Pilansberg ahead of us. John Lemon and his colleague Jon Keates, were with me, George was already in South Africa, waiting for us. On the way we collected a truck, which had been specially modified, with a cage on the back, suitable for carrying the dogs. The drive was too much, delays at the border and busy traffic on the narrow, unlit roads at night determined that it was not safe to continue and we found a hotel room for the night. Upon reaching South Africa on the Wednesday afternoon, John recommended further modifications to the truck, to ensure that the dogs would be as safe and comfortable as possible.

Another frustrating day of waiting followed as the ZPWMA representatives who were travelling with us had to wade their way through even more red tape. It would have been easy for them to give up but they were as determined as we were and eventually met up with us on the Thursday evening.

Early Friday morning saw us driving to the facility that was holding the dogs. The South African vet and his team prepared their equipment as we prepared ours, aiming to fit protective collars to each dog at this stage so that we would not have to put the dogs through the stress of a further immobilization prior to their release. The process began, the vet darting each dog in turn and his team bringing them to us, a collar fitted, identification photos taken of each one before they were placed in the back of the truck. After approx two hours we had the 16 dogs in the truck and the vet gave them the reversal injection to wake them up.

Now we could set off on the arduous drive back to Hwange, knowing that we could not find a hotel to rest this time around, even if we wanted too. For the dogs benefit, we had to keep driving as they relax and sleep together if the vehicle keeps moving, however once it stops, they often wake up and can become stressed at being in a relatively confined space.

We reached the border at 10pm and after three hours of queues, more red tape and more queues; we were back in Zimbabwe, with only another 8 hours to go!! A quick refuelling stop in Bulawayo, a cup of coffee and we continued as the sun rose behind us.

We arrived in Hwange at 9.30am, completely exhausted. However the remarkable reception committee immediately revitalized us. The Zimbabwe Minister of Environment, ZPWMA officials from Head Office in Harare and Hwange Main Camp and the national media were all there to greet us. This compared to the fact that we did not meet a single official from the South African National Parks Board during the whole exercise, which was rather surprising and a bit disappointing.

Many people, too many people, are quick to criticize Zimbabwe, however this exercise alone shows the level of commitment towards conservation, which exists within the country and many of its officials. The dogs have settled in well and we will hold them now for two or three months before releasing them into the wilds of Hwange National Park.

*Peter Blinston*

## **PCT NOW THREE YEARS OLD**

As a Trustee I find it hard to believe it is now a few weeks over three years since we founded the Predator Conservation Trust - time seems to have flown by since then.

Despite starting from nothing we have already managed to fund a number of conservation projects in Southern Africa, with grants made totalling over £20,000 to date and aim to fund even more work over the next few years.

### **Kunene Lion Project, Namibia**

In November 2003 we funded the refurbishment and repair of 10 radio collars as well as new tranquiliser darts and a supply of anaesthetic.

In January 2005 we funded a permanent base camp for the project. This purpose built stone structure included a shade net hangar for the aircraft as well as work areas and store rooms and replaced the old temporary base camp previously used.

Total Grants made: £8,282

### **Carnivore Atlas Project, Namibia**

In 2003 and 2004 we funded Lise Hanssen to work on the Namibian Large Carnivore Atlas project following a limited funds donation for this purpose.

Total Grants made: £2,700

### **Brown Hyena Research Project, Namibia**

In February 2004 we funded the purchase of three radio collars to help the tracking of Brown Hyena's in the Luderitz area of Namibia.

In October 2004 we funded a digital SLR camera to replace the projects old film camera. The cameras are used to record details of all Brown Hyenas observed or darted. A digital camera will save the project a considerable amount of money on developing costs and allow pictures to be used much faster than previously.

In December 2005 we made a donation to help fund the purchase of special video camera equipment designed to work in very low light conditions (i.e. at night when the brown hyenas are most active).

In April 2006 we donated £1000 to cover the bulk of the aerial tracking costs for the year - the Brown Hyena Project was close to having to abandon aerial tracking (by far the most effective way to track the Brown Hyenas in the wilderness around Luderitz) due to lack of funds till we stepped in along with another donor.

Total Grants made: £3,579

### **Painted Dog Project, Zimbabwe**

In November 2005 we funded the purchase of a new dart gun plus darts. This was needed partly because the project had expanded and required a second dart gun but more importantly because the projects only dart gun was urgently in need of repairs that would leave it out of action for several weeks.

In July 2006 we funded the purchase of a new land rover vehicle for the Painted Dog Projects Anti-Poaching team (see elsewhere in this newsletter). The anti-poaching teams work is absolutely vital to help protect the African Wild Dog and the rest of Zimbabwe's wildlife, and the new land rover will make it a lot easier for them to perform their work.

Total Grants made: £6,065

**Total of all grants made to date (since 30th June 2003): £20,626**

## NEW TRUSTEE ELECTED

Alan Woodward, one of the original Trustees of PCT recently resigned as a Trustee due to other commitments. We would like to thank Alan for all the work he put into helping PCT in its first three years.

Edwin Collins, a retired farmer and art dealer is our new Trustee. He and his wife Bidy have travelled extensively in Africa for many years and are committed to conservation. They have known Lise Hanssen for many years since her time with Africat. We look forwards to working with Edwin and know he will make a valuable contribution to our trustees discussions.



*Edwin Collins*

## RAISE MONEY FOR PCT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE

Supporters of the Predator Conservation Trust are now able to help PCT financially in two ways through our website - and neither will cost you a thing.

The first is for UK based supporters. If you use Amazon.co.uk then by visiting our website and following a link to Amazon from our site (there is a banner at the top of the links page) then Amazon pay a percentage of the purchase price of anything you buy in that shopping session to PCT, and you just pay the same prices as you would if you went directly to Amazons site. This means that by following the link to Amazon from our site you can help raise more money for PCT without it costing you anything.

The second way people can help PCT is by using our new search page. We have teamed up with ClickNow to offer a search page. Every time someone uses this page they are helping PCT financially. ClickNow advise that the average user would if they use ClickNow for all their web searches, generate £4 (around US \$6) per month for PCT. If all our supporters were to use this search page then that would generate a significant amount of money and would enable us to fund even more deserving conservation work. The ClickNow page includes a link to add it to your favourites to make it easier for you to use it to help support PCT.

To use our search page, you can either visit our website - [www.predatorconservation.com](http://www.predatorconservation.com) and click on the ClickNow button on any of the pages,



*The ClickNow button you will see on our website*

Alternatively you can go to the page directly using the address below.

<http://www.clicknow.org.uk/PredatorConservationTrust>

At the top of the search page is a link to add it to your bookmarks/favourites to make it easy to go directly to the page in future.

Please use the Predator Conservation Trust search page whenever you can, and while you look at the results of your searches you can be satisfied that you are helping Predator Conservation Trust conserve the worlds wildlife.

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