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Field Report

Recent records of African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) from Ethiopia

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Introduction

African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) have declined dramatically over the last century. They were once distributed through much of south-Saharan Africa, but have now been extirpated from most of west and central Africa and populations in the east and the south have been confined to areas where human population density remains low (Woodroffe et al. 1997).

A smaller concentration of wild dogs exists in Ethiopia, which may spread into southern Sudan, northern Kenya, southern Somalia and even northern Uganda. Yalden et al. (1980, 1996) presented known records for the species. This note summarizes recent information on the distribution of African wild dogs in Ethiopia (with one record from Sudan), including recent sightings which improve existing distribution knowledge and extend the distribution of the species in Ethiopia.

Methodology

Data come from two main sources: Chris Hillman's compilation of information on *Lycaon* in Ethiopia's National Parks and Reserves up to 1992 (Hillman 1993); information collated by the authors from people working in the field that might have seen wild dogs. Claudio Sillero-Zubiri worked with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organisation (EWCO) from 1988-2000 and James Malcolm from 1994-95. Additional information emerged from respondents to a mail survey organized by the IUCN Canid Specialist Group (Fanshawe et al. 1997). Older records are summarized in Yalden et al. (1980).

Results

The map (Fig. 1) indicates locations where wild dogs have been reported. Older records from known current localities are not included. Wild dogs are reported in six geographic regions discussed below.

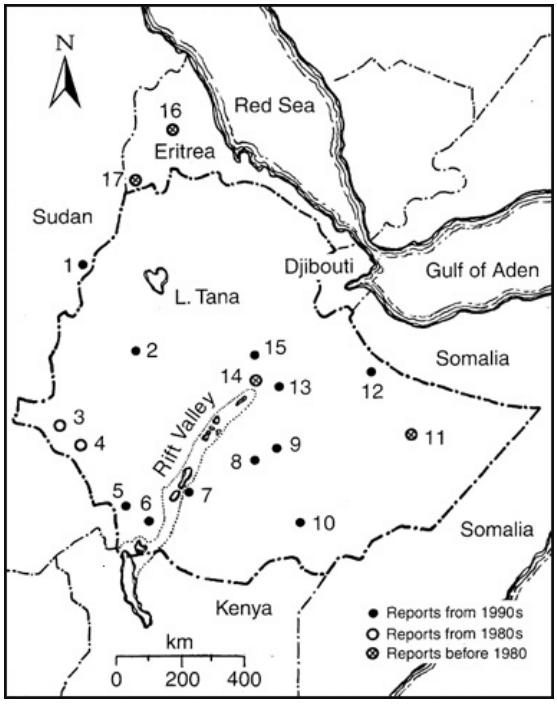

Figure 1. Locations where wild dogs have been reported in Ethiopia

Locations:

1. Dinder National Park, Sudan 13° 19' N, 34° 05' E
2. Fincha'a-Dindessa Valley 9° 38' N, 37° 13' E
3. Gambela National Park 8° 10', N 34° 12' E
4. Ilubabor Province
5. Mago National Park 5° 30' N, 36° 00' E
6. Omo National Park 6° 00' N, 35° 30' E
7. Nechisar National Park 6° 00' N, 39° 49' E
8. Katcha, Harenna & Sanetti Plateau, Bale Mountains National Park 6° 42' N, 39° 45' E
9. Sof Omar 7° 05' N, 40°49'E
10. Filtu 5°00' N, 40° 43' E
11. Ogaden
12. Jijiga 9° 08'N, 42° 52'E
13. Awash National Park 8° 50' N, 40° 00'E
14. Balicha (Balchi on some maps) 8° 41' N, 39°25' E
15. Mehal Meda 10° 11' N, 39° 28' E
16. Eritrea
17. Eritrea

The west

A delegation from the Ministry of Natural Resources of Ethiopia saw a pack of wild dogs in Dinder National Park, Sudan (1), in May 1995. The park lies on the western border of Ethiopia.

The Fincha'a and the Dindessa rivers are tributaries of the Blue Nile. Their valleys provide strips of savannah vegetation cutting into the west side of the Ethiopian highlands. In October 1994, the manager of the sugar plantation operating in the Fincha'a valley (2) had heard reports of wild dogs. Nehberg (1974 in Yalden et al. 1996) reported a sighting from the Great Abbai Gorge, near the Uolaka River mouth.

Wild dogs are on the species list for Gambela National Park (3), 4,800km² of forested grasslands. Hillman (1993) reports that the species was seen in the past in and around the park, but there have been no confirmed sightings since 1987. The park is heavily used by pastoralists, who occasionally report livestock losses to predators. A wild dog pack was seen by Gezahegn Negussie in the late 1980s in a forested area in Ilubabor Province (now in Region 12)(4), which lies south of Gambela. This region has extensive dry forests.

The south

The three southern National Parks in Ethiopia (Mago (5), Omo (6) and Nechisar (7)) lie in the savannah belt, which covers much of southern Ethiopia and grades into the semi-desert areas of northern Kenya. Pastoralists use these parks frequently for their livestock and are reported to shoot wild dogs, which they see as a threat to their livestock.

Wild dogs are recorded in both Omo and Mago National Parks, an area encompassing 6,031km² of short grassland, bushland and wooded grassland, but are seen only sporadically (Hillman 1993). Yirmed Demeke, a biologist with EWCO, reported a pack of wild dogs in March 1992 in Mago (Yirmed Demeke 1994). Mike Jacobs, working with EWCO, watched a pack of wild dogs in Omo in early 1995. In the early 1990s the wardens of these parks reported seeing one or two packs of wild dogs in Omo and up to five packs in Mago (Fanshawe et al. 1997).

Nechisar National Park lies immediately to the east of the Rift Valley lakes of Chamo and Abaya. One adult dog was reported chasing a small herd of gazelles in the eastern plains in September 1991 (Duckworth et al. 1992). Packs of wild dogs have been reported by the park warden as recently as 1992 (Hillman 1993). Further to the south, a group of three wild dogs was reported in the Yabello Sanctuary in 1996 (Fanshawe et al. 1997). Demeter and Topal (1982 in Yalden et al. 1996) provide a record for Adola north of Yabello.

The southeast

The Bale Mountains in south-eastern Ethiopia consist of a high ridge running more or less east-west. There is an extensive area of Afroalpine habitat above 3,700m. To the south, there is a large tract of humid Afro-montane forest

below 3,400m, which is replaced by sclerophyllous dry forests below 1,500m. This vegetation in turn covers much of south-eastern Ethiopia. Oromo pastoralists occupy the whole area but cultivation is largely restricted to clearings in the forest and areas along the main watercourses. Unfortunately, deforestation in and around the Bale Mountains National Park (2,000km²) is increasing.

Wild dogs were seen in the southern Harenna Forest of the Bale Mountains on several occasions in the 1980s (Hillman 1993), at elevations ranging from 2,000-2,800m. In August 1986, an adult female dog was hit by a vehicle near Katcha clearing (8) in *Aningeria* forest habitat at 1,900m. This was preceded by two reports of dog sightings alongside the Harenna Forest road by local drivers. In April 1987, two adult dogs were seen at Katcha in a grassy clearing at 2,400m in *Schefflera* forest. In May 1987, repeated observations of two dogs in the Katcha clearing were reported by Park Scout Abdela Hussein, presumably the same individuals seen in April.

In January 1990, Park Biologist Menassie Gashaw collected a dead juvenile female from the Harenna road, five kilometres south of Katcha, presumably killed by a vehicle. The presence of an animal less than six months old suggests dogs breed in the area. On 15 January 1996, a pack of 20 dogs was observed near the Shisha River, in southern Harenna (observed by Swedish aid worker via John Osborne in Yalden et al. 1996). This is the largest pack reported in Bale.

In August 1994, local people reported that a pack was hunting near Sisha River, Harenna (8), towards the southern end of the *Aningeria* forest, close to the boundary with the thorn scrub at about 1,500m. In June 1995, Fekadu Garehew, the warden of Bale Mountains National Park, found a dead wild dog in Afroalpine habitat on the Sanetti Plateau (8) at 4,050m. This is one of the highest records ever reported for the species (but see Thesiger 1970 for a record from the Kilimanjaro summit), presumably an animal dispersing northwards from the Harenna Forest. A dead dog was reported in southern Harenna in January 1997 (William Jones, pers. comm.). In June 1999, Guy Dutson reported and photographed a pack of 12 dogs standing on the Harenna road, seven kilometres south of Katcha (pers. comm.).

The caves of Sof Omar (9) lie 65km east of the Bale Mountains. The elevation is about 1,400m and the area has sclerophyllous woodland in the flat areas and taller *Acacia* woodland along the watercourses. Samson Bayu, Bale Mountains National Park Biologist, saw a pack of wild dogs close to Sof Omar in early 1994.

A pack of wild dogs was seen killing a goat close to Filtu (10) towards the boundary with Kenya, by Adam Abdullah Hussein, Head of Region Five's Department of Wildlife Conservation in May 1995. From talking to people he reported that the species was common over a large tract of country between the Genale and Wabe Shabelle rivers.

There are a number of older records of the species from the Ogaden region in the east of the country (approximately 11 reported by Yalden et al. 1980). However, we collected no information either positive or negative from this area. Adam Abdullah Hussein had reports of wild dogs from the region south of Jijiga (12). This is dry scrub country but not as arid as the areas further south and east in the tip of the Horn.

Rift Valley

Packs of dogs are seen in the Sabober Plains in Awash National Park (13) at irregular intervals. Mike Jacobs and Cathy Schloeder working with EWCO saw dogs once in three years while working in the park between 1987 and 1990 (Hillman 1993).

Balicha (14) lies on the eastern side of the Ethiopian Plateau on the edge of the Rift Valley. It is in open country with extensive cultivation. A few strips of unploughed land remain along the valley bottoms. Most of the people interviewed in April 1995 did not know about wild dogs but an old man remembered a pack that had lived in the area probably 30-40 years ago.

The Central Plateau

The presence of wild dogs from the Mehal Meda area (15) was reported by Matheos and Leykun, EWCO biologists, in 1992. In August 1994, people in the area could describe wild dogs as living in packs and as having mottled coats. Their diet was reported to be exclusively sheep and goats. This report is interesting as the area is in the densely populated and intensively cultivated highlands of Ethiopia. The

dogs were reported to live in the dramatic ravines that dissect the plateau. The habitat is steep and rocky and the only trees remaining are on cliff faces.

Eritrea
There are historic records of the species from northern and eastern Eritrea (Yalden et al. 1980; 16 & 17 in map). We have no records from these areas since the early part of the century. However, the area remains remote.

Discussion

Early records give the impression that wild dogs may never have been widespread in Ethiopia (Yalden et al. 1980). At present, wild dogs appear to survive over large parts of the country, but they seem to be uncommon everywhere. Many Ethiopians know the species, which they refer to as *takula* in Amharic, and wolf in English. The sightings in this report from the southeast come from parts of Ethiopia occupied by the Oromo people who call the species *yeyii* in most areas and *oulay* in the extreme southeast. Although wild dogs are officially protected in Ethiopia under the Wildlife Conservation Regulations of 1974, they are persecuted and killed by pastoralists.

Most of the wild dog reports come from areas around the Ethiopian highlands. This volcanic plateau lying mainly above 2,000m forms the spine of the country. Particularly in the areas north of the Rift Valley it has been extensively deforested and cultivated. Prey for wild dogs, other than domestic stock, is very scarce. It is therefore encouraging that a few dogs appear to be surviving in the eastern edge of the northern highlands in the Mehal Meda region; this area is quite close to the Awash plain below, and sightings in both places might belong to the same population.

The records from the Bale Mountains suggest that the forested Ethiopian highlands might have supported good populations in the past. Regular sightings from the Harenna forest would indicate that the relative abundant wild ungulate population there supports a resident dog population. It is worthwhile to note that this dog population has at least part of its range protected within the Bale Mountains National Park. To our knowledge, these are the only wild dogs known to inhabit a high altitude montane forest (although wild dogs have been occasionally recorded in the forests around the edge of the Ngorongoro Forest Reserve, Tanzania; this habitat is not unlike the Harenna).

It seems likely that some wild dogs survive along the western edge of the country and that this population extends into Sudan. It is unknown if the species survives in the northwest regions of Ethiopia or in Eritrea.

Our survey suggests that a large area in southern and eastern Ethiopia probably supports wild dogs. This population may extend into Kenya to the south and Somalia in the east. There may be as much as 2,000,000km^2 of suitable dog habitat in the Horn of Africa. This could be a very important refuge for the species in east Africa, but information on distribution is slim and data on densities and prey abundance non-existent. More extensive surveys are needed in this region.

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James Malcolm has visited Ethiopia five times since 1975. In the 1970s he studied African wild dogs on the Serengeti, Tanzania.

Claudio Sillero has been involved with the study and conservation of African canids for over a decade, mainly as Coordinator of the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme but also working with African wild dogs in Senegal. His current interest is in resolving conflicts between human and wildlife interests. He is Deputy Chair of the Canid Specialist Group and is currently editing the second edition of the Canid Action Plan.