

Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan

The Ethiopian Wolf

Compiled and edited by
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IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist Group



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Preface

The Ethiopian wolf is an endemic and highly endangered canid which lives in the highlands of Ethiopia. The majority of the remaining wolves are to be found in Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP), which supports the necessary afroalpine ecosystem.

The major threats to Ethiopian wolves in BMNP are habitat destruction, competition for food, and hybridization with and disease transmission from domestic dogs. These problems are fundamentally associated with human settlement in BMNP and its buffer zone.

Research activities have been conducted by expatriates and native Ethiopians on the ecology, behaviour and disease of Ethiopian wolves. Studies have revealed a dramatic decline in the Ethiopian wolf population due to the aforementioned factors.

A fundamental solution requires us to devise a strategy which discourages the settlement of local people in BMNP, thus reducing the pressure that

inevitably results from their domestic animals grazing the fragile ecosystem. In addition this will mitigate the unwanted dog population. The disease problem can be alleviated by vaccination of domestic dogs and wolves preferably using oral vaccines in bait. Routine contraception of local dogs may also reduce hybridization between dogs and wolves.

Short and long term action plans for the preservation of the Ethiopian wolf in its native habitat need to be developed in sympathy with the requirements and views of the local community. The involvement of international bodies in further research implementation of proper management practices in order to achieve this final goal is highly appreciated.

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Foreword

For centuries canids have impinged upon the human mind in fables, literature and daily life. We have taken the dog into our home, made the grey wolf a totem of wilderness, and reluctantly admired the red fox's ability to outwit us. Although we view many species as competitors, we also admire their hunting skills, elegance, and devoted family life. Highly adaptable, most species have endured in spite of relentless persecution, habitat destruction, and decimation of their prey. Yet only the Falkland Island wolf has in recent times become extinct. Of the 34 remaining canid species, the Ethiopian wolf could be the next to lose its place on earth. It is now the most endangered of the canids, perhaps only 400 surviving in a few highland tracts in Ethiopia. What can be done to save this strikingly handsome creature?

Conservation and management programmes must be built on sound knowledge, a fact all too often ignored by conservation organizations which may fund cursory surveys but hesitate to invest in the long-term field work that is needed to elucidate the biology of a species. The Ethiopian wolf has been fortunate that Claudio Sillero-Zubiri and Dada Gottelli were able to devote years to chronicling its life. With perseverance and dedication they gathered data on home ranges, territoriality, dispersal patterns, food habits and other aspects of biology, as well as on the dangers threatening the species, from hunting and habitat modification to hybridization with domestic dogs. At the same time the

investigators became familiar with the local peoples, learning of their problems and aspirations, and they were able to seek their support for a conservation effort. This Action Plan, written by Claudio and David Macdonald, is thus based on critical information and comprehensive knowledge about the Ethiopian wolf and its environment. Because of this, their plan is insightful, realistic, authoritative, and innovative, a solid prescription for providing the Ethiopian wolf with a future.

However, the Action Plan represents more than just a blueprint for the survival of the Ethiopian wolf. Though this animal is a natural icon of the Ethiopian highlands, it is only one of many endemic and other species there. The goal is to protect and manage a whole unique Afroalpine ecosystem, for the benefit of plants and animals, including the local peoples whose future also depends upon the health of the land.

The local peoples, the Ethiopian government, and the international conservation community must now cooperate to implement this Action Plan. The struggle to save the Ethiopian wolf is a task of decades, requiring constant vigilance. This plan represents an affirmation of hope that the species will not vanish quietly into oblivion.

Dr George B. Schaller
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Appendix: A Resolution Supporting a Captive Breeding Programme for the Ethiopian Wolf

The Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*) is the rarest canid in the Old World; the species is found only in a few isolated mountains of Ethiopia. Fewer than 500 adult animals survive, most of them in the Bale Mountains. This represents a decline of 30% of the known population in the last two years. The reasons for the decline in population levels are numerous: loss of habitat; habitat fragmentation; disease; and persecution by pastoralists. Additional threats to the ever smaller populations include inbreeding and loss of genetic diversity and those arising from sympatric populations of domestic dogs, *i.e.* competition, disease and risk of hybridization.

Ethiopia, and the rest of the world, are at a great risk of losing the species if action is not taken immediately. Each of the remaining populations of Ethiopian wolf is faced with a near certain risk of extinction. Actions are required both in Ethiopia and elsewhere. In particular, we believe that immediate action is needed to obtain a representative sample of the population for intensive captive breeding.

To this end, The Canid Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (Canid-CAMP) Workshop, held under the auspices of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums Canid Taxon Advisory Group (AAZPA Canid TAG) and the IUCN Canid and Conservation Breeding Specialist Groups, strongly recommends the following actions to be taken immediately:

- 1) Establish an integrated in-country and out-of-country captive breeding program. The priority is to establish the program as effectively and quickly as possible. Each site has equal priority and efforts should be made to facilitate construction and implementation in Ethiopia and at an out-of-country facility. Because such facilities already exist at many out-of-country zoos and captive breeding centres, propagation outside the range state could proceed while an establishment is being built in Ethiopia.
- 2) We understand that the captive breeding of endangered species is a difficult task. The IUCN Species Survival Commission and the AAZPA Canid TAG offer the Ethiopian Government whatever technical assistance they require to pursue

their goals. There is no previous experience in breeding Ethiopian wolves in captivity hence extensive research on husbandry techniques may be required. As a result, the out-of-country location(s), where expertise and extensive laboratory facilities already exist, may be able to offer the Ethiopian Government immediate assistance in establishing a protocol for captive breeding to be used at both the in-country and out-of-country captive sites. In the long term, in-country captive breeding offers direct access to, and simpler provision of, the unique prey and habitat the species requires for long term survival.

- 3) The establishment of a captive breeding program, while of critical necessity, cannot be seen as a replacement for further in situ habitat and species conservation and management.

We acknowledge the efforts to date of the Ethiopian Government and urge them to continue to support such activities. We also urge the world conservation community to support the lead role of the Ethiopian Government.

Signed:

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¹ Canid CAMP workshop held in Texas, USA in May 1992 (Grisham et al. 1994).