

Executive Summary

Ethiopia is blessed with extensive and unique environmental conditions. These have resulted in the evolution of a plethora of endemic animal and plant species, especially those confined to the afroalpine ecosystem. The future of several of these wildlife species is in question, due to the continuing and insidious pressures on the habitat and on the species themselves. The Ethiopian wolf is one of the many species endemic to the highlands of Ethiopia. With probably less than 400 adult individuals surviving, it is the most endangered canid in the world. The species is less common and has a more reduced range now than in the past. It survives in only a few mountain ranges and is in danger of extinction. The largest population is found in the Bale Mountains National Park. Elsewhere, Ethiopian wolves may be on the verge of extinction. With the probable exception of Menz and Arsi, remnant wolf populations are so small that they may not be viable.

The afroalpine range is threatened by loss of habitat to high altitude subsistence agriculture and livestock overgrazing. The small size and isolation of the remaining wolf populations have brought in new threats, such as inbreeding and loss of genetic diversity, and those arising from sympatric populations of domestic dogs such as disease and hybridization. Development in areas of Ethiopian wolf habitat may also have a negative impact upon its survival, with road traffic accidents and shooting bringing in new mortality factors. Each of the remaining populations could become extinct due to further destruction of habitat, inbreeding, hybridization or an epizootic decimating an entire population.

In view of the persistent human impact on the overall distribution of the Ethiopian wolf and its vulnerability to extinction, immediate action on three fronts is required to conserve the afroalpine ecosystem and its top predator. Protective measures in the case of the Ethiopian wolf require the consolidation of the management of protected areas, active efforts to monitor and protect its remaining populations, backed up by the establishment of a population management programme. This Action Plan provides a detailed strategy for the conservation and management of the remaining Ethiopian wolf populations. Better management in Bale and the Simien Mountains, and the

establishment of other conservation areas in Menz and possibly elsewhere, will help protect the afroalpine ecosystem and many of its rare highland endemic plants and animals. Improved park patrolling, control of domestic dogs and community education, backed up by further epidemiological and demographic studies are required.

In order to ensure the long-term survival of the Ethiopian wolf, we advocate a mixed strategy of active population management. While we show that captive breeding *per se* will not suffice to protect the Ethiopian wolf, it will serve as another stepping stone to avoid extinction. A small captive breeding nucleus will contribute to the conservation of genetic variability and purity. This operation may take place in a future captive breeding facility or facilities in Ethiopia, for which proposals are being prepared and funding has been pledged. Each wolf population, including the captive one, must be considered as part of a global metapopulation, with some genetic flow occurring among them. Thus a limited number of captive-bred or wild-bred wolves may be exchanged between populations, reintroduced to areas where the wolves have been extirpated, or used to restock depleted populations.

The launch of such programme is dependant upon developments in funding, possible locations and Government approval. This population management strategy will be complementary to efforts to protect wild populations and their afroalpine habitats. Conservation priorities must be decided pragmatically with regard to the allocation of resources and manpower. Provided the Ethiopian authorities step up appropriate park management with increasing support from the international community, the Bale Mountains will remain the best refuge for the survival of these unique and fascinating canids. Menz may soon become a conservation area, providing protection for an additional wolf population. Ethiopia's current progress in securing long-lasting peace and stability may help secure more international funding for afroalpine conservation. We hope that by highlighting the plight of the Ethiopian wolf, and turning it into an Ethiopian flagship species, we will trigger renewed efforts to conserve the afroalpine ecosystem, and thus conserve many other of its less known endemic fauna and flora.