

NAPLES ZOO

From David Tetzlaff, Director

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Rare Carnivores Move into New Digs at Naples Zoo

Naples, FL — In the wild, you'll find more endangered tigers than you will of this predator. In the last fifty years, they have disappeared from nearly two-thirds of the countries where they formerly lived. In the 1980s, disease wiped out their entire population in both Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve and Tanzania's famous Serengeti National Park. Even in zoos, you would have to visit an average of seven nationally accredited zoos before seeing one of these rare creatures. This highly endangered carnivore is the African wild dog and Naples Zoo is premiering an all-new exhibit for four of these colorful canids.

With an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 wild dogs left surviving in Africa and less than 200 in America, breeding African wild dogs and supporting their conservation in the wild is critical. The African wild dog, also known as the Cape hunting dog or painted wolf, is managed through a Species Survival Plan® (SSP). Members of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) manage the breeding of a species in order to maintain a healthy and self-sustaining population that is both genetically diverse and demographically stable. SSPs also participate in a variety of other cooperative conservation activities such as research, public education, reintroduction, and field projects. Zoo professionals involved in the African wild dog SSP issued a breeding recommendation for the wild dogs at Naples Zoo as they are ranked high on the list of those animals whose genetics are not represented in the North American population.

Based on this need for the future of this endangered species, Naples Zoo built this new exhibit for its four wild dogs with breeding in mind. The large exhibit can be opened wide for full use of the space or sectioned off to create a separate whelping yard for females and puppies. These endangered carnivores are being welcomed into the northern portion of the gardens by their African neighbors including lions and forest antelope. The space was formerly occupied by several older structures including cages built in the 1950s that were torn down years ago as well as an old diet preparation facility for the Zoo's carnivores that was transferred to the front of the Zoo.

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The new African wild dog exhibit is also designed to delight Naples Zoo visitors. Three large glass viewing walls will allow guests clear views of these beautifully colored mammals. Full color graphics as well as interactive *True and False* flip panels will help guests get to know more about wild dogs as well as issues that not only affect them, but also our own native Florida wildlife.

The two female African wild dogs that reside at Naples Zoo were born at the Toledo Zoo in 2001 and came to Naples Zoo via Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago. The two males were born in 1998 at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Why So Endangered?

Although all large African carnivores suffer from persecution as well as loss of habitat and prey, the African wild dog has the highest risk of extinction. Part of the problem is how people perceive them. Myths based on single incidents or pure conjecture instigated concerted campaigns to eradicate them. Government authorized killings were promoted into the middle of the twentieth century and poaching and poisoning continues today. And in a recent study in Zimbabwe more than half the recorded wild dog deaths were from road kills.

In addition, their social nature makes them especially susceptible to disease. And to add to the risk, the growing bushmeat trade is also reducing wild dog numbers. *Bushmeat* is the term used for the killing of wild animals including gorillas, chimpanzees, and many other rare species for the sale of their meat in commercial markets. Snares that are set for antelope are catching wild dogs more than any other large carnivore.

Fighting Like Cats and Dogs and a Metabolism That Won't Quit

An additional factor in the demise of wild dogs in certain areas can be traced to conflict with other predators. Lions will regularly go out of their way to kill wild dogs. In addition, in a behavior known as kleptoparasitism, lions and hyenas will steal kills from dogs.

Although predators often steal prey from other predators, it is especially threatening to the wild dogs. A wild dog burns up nearly three times the energy as a highly active domestic dog of the same weight. Put another way, this fifty to sixty pound animal must eat as much food as two 165-pound men. The loss of even one quarter of their kills would increase the pack hunting time from less than four hours a day to twelve hours.

All this may prove critical in saving Africa's wild dogs. It explains why seemingly good wild dog habitat like the Serengeti was losing wild dogs even before the epidemics of the 1980s. In these open areas, lions and hyenas can more easily spot wild dogs on a kill and move in to steal it. The pressures placed on the dogs by their metabolic needs would then be greatly heightened. The hope for wild dogs would be better found in wooded areas providing more cover and protection from being seen.

In addition, predators like lions can go a week without a kill. The high metabolism of the dogs requires more regular meals. So areas in which the prey is more spread out would also prove unsuitable.

Helping Dogs

To help protect these animals in the wild, scientists need to know how many dogs there are, where they're living, and the region specific issues affecting them. In addition to their dwindling numbers, one of the biggest challenges to surveying them is just finding all of them. One great feature in their design does help researchers: the coat pattern of each dog is different. Naples Zoo is providing staff time and funds for organizations and researchers working in African wild dog habitat.

Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens is nationally accredited by the prestigious Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Naples Zoo is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples across from the Coastland Center mall. In addition to innovative presentations like Serpents: Fangs & Fiction and Planet Predator, the Zoo offers a historic botanical garden and many rare animals. Guests board the Primate Expedition Cruise to glide by islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes live in natural habitats. Admission (\$15.95 adult/ \$9.95 children) includes all shows and the boat ride. Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. The Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:30 to 5:30 with the last ticket sold at 4:30. Discover more at www.napleszoo.com or call (239) 262-5409.

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