

Farmers' Attitudes to Wild Dogs in the Limpopo Valley Preliminary Report

**18 August 2001
Harriet Davies**

1 Introduction

The introduction of wild dogs into Venetia-Limpopo Nature Reserve (VLNR) has potential impacts for farmers in the area. If the wild dogs leave the reserve, the probability of farmer-wild dog conflict is high. The project cannot succeed without at least some co-operation from neighbouring farmers.

An important component of the Venetia-Limpopo Wild Dog Project (VLWDP) is the evaluation of the attitudes of game farmers and other neighbouring communities towards wild dogs in the surrounding areas at different stages of the project. Preliminary work to this effect began in April 2001.

2 Methods

A database of farmers in the Limpopo Valley was collated from farmer association records and the telephone directory. Farmers were contacted by telephone and appointments were set up. These appointments were one-on-one interviews that enabled researchers to inform farmers of the project and gave farmers a chance to air their views on wild dogs and the project as a whole.

Thys de Wet (Kapama Cheetah Centre) arrived at VLNR on 3 April 2001 and seven key farmers were visited before he left on 6 April 2001. These farmers were identified on the basis of their position in the community and or their proximity to the reserve. Fairly lengthy discussions were held, during which the farmers were asked for both their personal views on the introduction, and the general feeling of the farmers they represent. Several of the farmers we visited provided contact details for other neighbouring farmers.

Peter Lindsey (University of Pretoria) arrived at Venetia on 18 April. He and Harriet Davies spent two weeks visiting farmers in the area. Two questionnaires were administered during each interview: (i) a general questionnaire which forms part of Peter Lindsey's broader economic study, and (ii) a specific set of questions relating to attitudes towards the VLWDP. Each farmer was provided with a fact sheet on the VLWDP together with contact details for the project. Before being questioned on their

attitudes to the project, farmers were given some background on the endangered status of wild dogs and why the project is important.

It is important to note that the following report provides only a preliminary description of the results of the interviews to date. Harriet has interviewed several farmers since April and farm interviews are considered to be a long-term and ongoing part of the project.

3 Results

The results of Peter Lindsey's economic survey are still pending.

A total of 39 farmers representing 82 farm units were asked specific questions relating to the VLWDP. Table 1 provides an indication of the location of these farms in relation to VLNR.

Table 1: The number and proportion of farm units sampled during one-on-one interviews in April 2001

Distance from VLNR	Number of farm units interviewed	Total number of farm units	Percentage of farms sampled ¹
< 10km (neighbour)	39	68	57%
10-20km	13	48	27%
20-30km	9	-	-
30-40km	8	-	-
40-50km	6	-	-
> 50km	-	-	-
Total	82	116	45%

¹The percentage of farms sampled only includes those farms within 20km of the reserve.

Table 2 and Table 3 provide a summary of farmers' responses to questions and statements regarding wild dogs in general and the VLWDP in particular.

Table 2: Responses to quantitative questions regarding the Venetia-Limpopo Wild Dog Project

Question	Range of responses	Percent ¹
How much do you care about the survival of wild dogs as a species?	Not at all	3%
	Not much	3%
	Neutral	5%
	Much	29%
	Very much	61%
Before this interview, were you aware of the proposed introduction of wild dogs onto Venetia?	Yes	72%
	No	28%
How do you feel about the introduction of wild dogs onto Venetia-Limpopo Nature Reserve?	Strongly oppose	8%
	Moderately oppose	3%
	Neutral	13%
	Moderately favour	31%
	Strongly favour ²	46%
Would you be prepared to assist with wild dog research by allowing researchers to monitor wild dogs on your property?	Yes	67%

Question	Range of responses	Percent ¹
	No	23%
	Don't know	3%
	Unknown irrelevant	8%
Would you be prepared to market wild dog eco-tours to your clients?	Yes	82%
	No	3%
	Unknown irrelevant	15%

¹Due to rounding-off, percentages do not always add up to 100%. In 22% of these cases "strongly favour" was conditional on the dogs remaining in the reserve

Table 3: Responses to quantitative statements regarding the Venetia-Limpopo Wild Dog Project

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/ Don't know
Wild dogs should be conserved because they have a right to exist	95%	0%	5%
Wild dogs and game farmers will one day be able to coexist	54%	28%	18%
It is a wonderful experience to see wild dogs in the wild	92%	5%	3%
After the wild dogs are introduced I will probably make a trip to go and see them	95%	5%	0%
I am concerned that the introduction of wild dogs to VLNR may affect my income	30%	68%	3%
I would be more supportive of the project if I was guaranteed the dogs would not get out of the reserve	70%	30%	0%
I feel the Venetia project will provide valuable information about the real impacts of wild dogs on private land in the Northern Province	94%	6%	0%

A summary of other, more open-ended questions is provided in Appendix 1.

4 Discussion

A large proportion (72%) of the farmers interviewed were aware of the project before being interviewed. This is not surprising considering the length of time the project has taken to get off the ground. Farmers learnt of the project in a variety of ways. The interviews have also helped to increase public awareness of the project.

On the whole, attitudes towards wild dogs were more positive than had previously been anticipated. Only four farmers indicated that the continued existence of wild dogs as a species was not important to them. This suggests that farmers (even those opposed to the VLWDP itself) are sympathetic to the plight of the African wild dog and bodes well for future education programmes in the area.

Thirty of the 39 farmers interviewed were either moderately or strongly in favour of the introduction of wild dogs to VLNR. Even if we discount the 22% of those farmers whose support depended on the ability of the perimeter fence to contain the dogs, those in favour still outnumbered those opposed.

More than 80% of farmers interviewed were interested in being involved in wild dog based eco-tourism, and more than 90% felt that wild dogs are a rewarding game viewing experience. This indicates that people in the area are likely to take advantage of any opportunity to earn an income from wild dogs. The VLWDP is an excellent platform from which to launch such an enterprise.

Although 6 of the 39 farmers bluntly stated that they would shoot the wild dogs on sight, more than 70% of respondents were willing to contact researchers and give us an opportunity to capture and remove them. Respondents frequently brought up the issue of compensation for losses to wild dogs. There was some doubt as to whether a breakout policy would actually result in payouts to farmers. Several respondents implied that they were doubtful that De Beers would "pay up" in the event of a breakout.

Some interesting suggestions were made for the long-term conservation of wild dogs in the Northern Province. Perhaps the most useful of these centre around increased cooperation between farmers and local conservation authorities in the region. This includes the establishment of a wild dog association and the development of a workable compensation scheme in the case of stock losses to wild dogs.

5 Summary

1. The vast majority of farmers felt that wild dog conservation is important.
2. A higher proportion of farmers were supportive of the project than had previously been anticipated.
3. Most respondents recognise that the VLWDP will provide valuable information about the real impacts of wild dogs on private land in the Northern Province.
4. Wild dogs have the potential to be an additional marketing point for eco-tourism ventures in the region, and farmers appear to be keen to get involved.
5. These preliminary interviews provide the basis for a long-term database on farmers in the area that will serve as a useful tool if the dogs do manage to leave the reserve. Researchers will be able to identify each farm as high-, medium- or low-conflict areas and be able to react accordingly (see Appendix 2).

6 Appendices

Appendix 1: Preliminary responses to qualitative questions asked of Northern Province farmers

The following summarises the range of responses to open-ended questions.

Q: Who do you think should be held responsible for wild dog conservation?

- government
- government with the help of public farmers
- Nature Conservation
- South African National Parks
- non-governmental organisations (e.g. EWT)
- bigger game reserves
- De Beers
- Venetia-Limpopo Wild Dog Project
- the people who bring them here
- the game industry
- Landowners (government compensation)
- Every farmer
- Every single South African
- I don't want them saved

Q: How did you learn about the VLNR introduction?

- Project researchers
- Local SANP personnel
- Contacts at De Beers
- Manager of Venetia
- Farmers' meeting
- Via the grape-vine
- Read something
- Television (50/50)
- Neighbours
- Pub in Alldays

Q: Why are you moderately or strongly opposed to the introduction?

- The damage I have seen on my farm
- The attitude of De Beers
- I have a problem with introducing problem animals into this area
- I still farm with cattle, goats and sheep, there are too many fences
- I can't see how you will keep them inside the fence
- I think it is a bit too soon – everyone thinks they'll get out
- I am worried about the length of the monitoring project – what happens after 3 years?

Q: Why are you moderately or strongly in favour of the introduction?

- It is important for the species
- I'm 100% behind it, they are part of nature, they are rare and on the brink of being wiped out
- We need wild dogs - can't rely on KNP
- Wild dogs are an important part of the ecosystem
- One day I can show my children
- Important research will be done
- The land is big enough to accommodate them
- There have to be some sanctuaries where future of wild dog is secure
- I favour the project but under the very strict condition that you keep the dogs inside – if you don't then I am strongly opposed
- As long as it is well fenced, otherwise I will shoot the dogs

Q: What will you do if the Venetia wild dogs enter your property?

Low-conflict responses:

- Leave them alone, notify the project or Nature Conservation
- Take photos, inform us, won't shoot them
- Phone us, wouldn't think about shooting them, also would tell us about other packs
- He won't mind if they pass through, will get them removed if they stay
- Phone Venetia, hope they stay, will definitely not shoot them

- *Do nothing, feed them if he can*
- *Phone Nature Conservation and ask to keep them, will not shoot them*

Medium-conflict responses:

- *Will sue De beers if they start killing everything, but is willing to accept some loss*
- *Contact the project, will try to get compensation if result of negligence*

High-conflict responses:

- *He will phone us if he sees a dogs with a collar, will shoot them if they have taken anything*
- *If they kill expensive game then he'll sort them out*
- *The first time he'll phone, if they stay he'll take action*
- *Let Venetia know immediately before he shoots them*
- *No use reporting to Nature Conservation because they will not react – although that is the obvious thing to do*
- *Try to kill them*
- *No comment*

Q: Why would you be prepared to assist with research by allowing researchers to monitor wild dogs on your property?

- *Interesting*
- *Interesting but they must not eat all his impala*
- *There may be money in it, if expenses are paid they can put wild dogs on his farm*
- *Would like to see them breeding*
- *Would assist only if his farm is part of a bigger environment (i.e. fences are down)*

Q: Why would you be willing to market wild dog eco-tours on VLNR?

- *Has tremendous marketing potential*
- *An extra bonus*
- *He is sure people would like to see them*
- *Good activity for hunters wives who don't have anything to do – they'll love it*
- *Would like to go to Venetia*
- *To test tourist interest – a good way to see if people are keen*
- *Always looking for activities to show clients*

Q: Why do you think that farmers and wild dogs will one day be able to coexist?

- *If tourism develops*
- *They have to if they want to prevent extinction*
- *It will work only if all the fences are taken down and the cattle taken out*
- *It will work in places where farms are large (e.g. Timbavati) not in livestock areas*
- *It will work when the place becomes a park and each impala belongs to 50 farmers*

Q: Why do you think that farmers and wild dogs will never be able to coexist?

- *Wild dogs and farmers can only live together in big reserves*
- *Never all of them – maybe 70% of farmers will tolerate wild dogs*

Q: Why do you think that the VLWDP will affect your income?

- *I will never be able to make up for losses to wild dogs, in bigger areas the dogs will have no negative impact*
- *Worried that Venetia is not fenced properly*
- *If they go onto his farm it will affect him*

Q: Why do you think that the VLWDP will NOT affect your income?

- *His hunters pay camp fees – may affect positively but not negatively*
- *He will tolerate some losses*
- *They won't affect him if we keep them in*
- *He does not make an income from the farm*
- *The insurance policy assuages any fear of losing income*
- *All depends how much Venetia spend on fences, we need qualified people on the fences*

Q: What general suggestions can you make for wild dog conservation in the Northern Province?

- *The only place to save dogs is in bigger conservation areas*
- *Scientific knowledge may change farmers opinions*
- *Diamond mesh with cement will keep the dogs in. Have to watch river exits*
- *Should use under-utilised areas for wild dog introductions*
- *Need to develop tourism and get the farmers to see they can make money. things can balance out*
- *If the dogs get out they'll be shot and it will be a waste*
- *The agricultural union must have a contact number when the dogs are released*
- *The only way to solve the problem is to keep the dogs off the farms – that is the only way they'll prosper. farmers will just kill them off*
- *We should make money more available to help farmers remove the wild dogs i.e. relocation*
- *Need more meetings to report back to farmers*
- *Talking to people is the right way to go about the project*
- *There is a lot of misconception about predators and wildlife. we need education to get a more balanced view about life*
- *Come back in 10 years time when there will be a new generation of people*
- *Ignore some of the farmers – go ahead and do it*
- *We should establish a wild dog association in the area*
- *Important to make trips that farmers can bring clients*
- *Tourism will need to catch on. this will assist with costs of conserving dogs*
- *When the new park is in place and the area is bigger then we can even introduce more species including wild dogs*
- *All farmers must open the fences – that is the only way wild dogs will survive*
- *De Beers are doing an excellent job towards ecology and conservation*
- *Compensate farmers for losses to deter them from shooting wild dogs*

Appendix 2: Predicted level of farmer-wild dog conflict on farms neighbouring VLNR. In this case all farms within 20 kilometres of the reserve are considered neighbours. Farms are categorised by what the owners feel about the VLWDP¹

Predicted level of potential conflict	Farm names				
LOW	Bultpan	Gienavon	Kilsyth 2	Montrow	Ratho
	Calais	Goring	Koningsmark	Nekel	Rugby
	Cerberus	Gotha	Kruidfontein	Onrust	Santer
	Coila	Hamilton	La Reve	Parma	Somerville
	Currie	Iceland 1	Modena	Pontdrift	Vergenoeg
	Evangelina	Kilsyth 1	Montagu	Princess Royal	Weipe 4
INTERMEDIATE	Breslau	Iceland 2	Aandstonds	Corea	
HIGH	Ostralenka Ged 1	Luben	Soutra	Kongo	

¹LOW = strongly or moderately in favour of the project.

INTERMEDIATE = neutral

HIGH = strongly or moderately opposed to the project