The large, roundish ears of the African

Wild (or Hunting) Dog

Lycaon pictus and its mottled coat are two

unmistakable diagnostic features of the

species.

**Spotlight** 



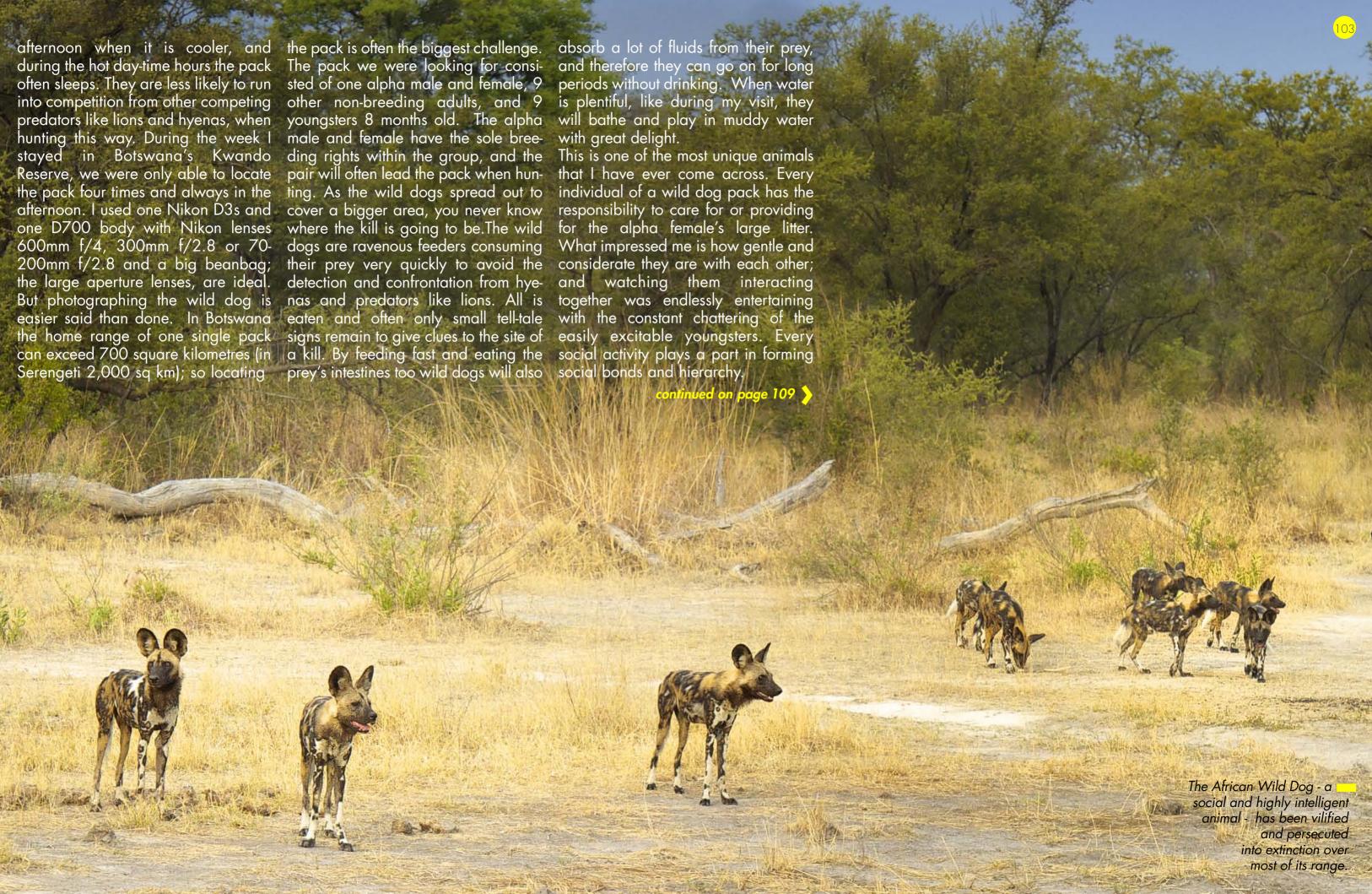






When prey is targeted, some of the Dogs run close to the animal, while others follow behind, taking over when the leaders tire.

Owing to their good stamina Wild Dogs do not rely on ambushing their targets, instead, the pack fans out and pursues at speed. They are often out-run initially, but over a distance of several kilometres the exhausted prey is run down.



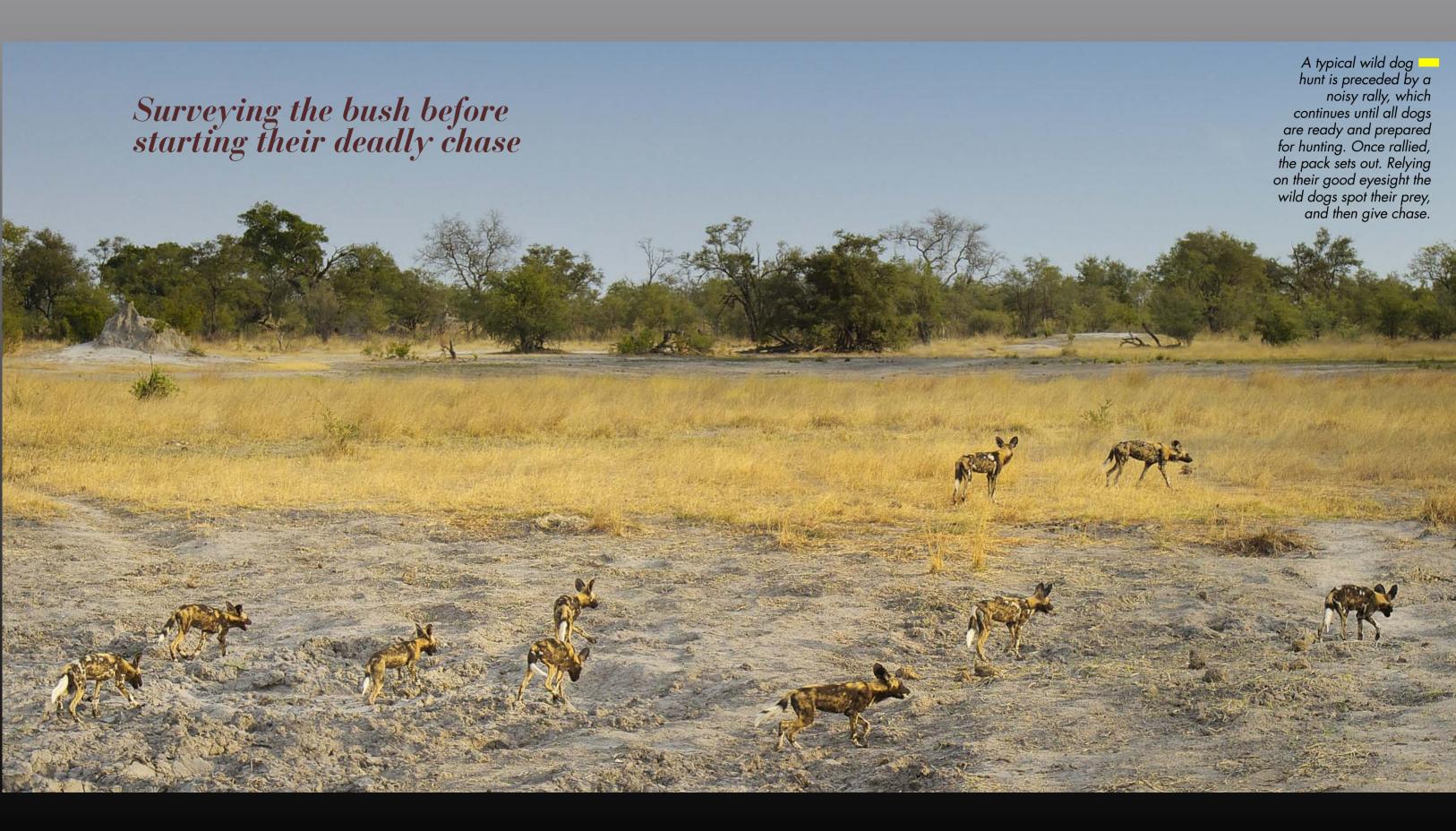








African Wild
Dogs are rarely
seen, even
where they
are relatively
common, and
it appears that
populations
have always
existed in very
low densities.
The "big five"
which most
tourists want
to see in Africa
have been a
successful
marketing story however, it can
be argued that
this has been to
the detriment of
other less wellknow species,
such as the
African
Wild Dog.

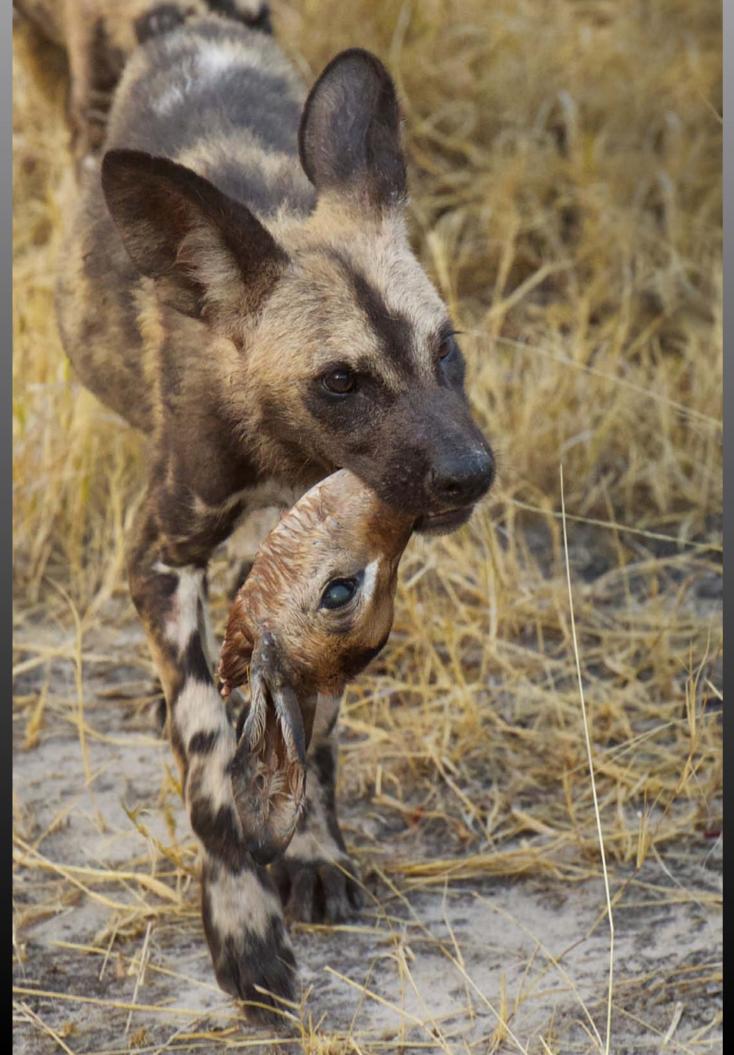




Wild Dogs
need to be fast
eaters to avoid
confrontations
with other
predators –
both lions and
hyenas never
need an
invitation to
challenge
Wild Dogs
for their meal.



In order not to attract hyenas and lions, the Wild Dogs are very careful not to puncture the stomach, which could alert these bigger predators gifted with a keen sense of smell. Being so much larger, lions are a real 24-hour threat to Wild Dogs and their youngsters, and by some estimates 25% of all Wild Dog deaths can be attributed to lions.







The pack has killed a female impala with a young fawn, and we observed at close range one of the young Wild Dogs running around holding the head of the baby impala as a trophy – and all of the other youngsters chasing it.

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Unfortunately, because of their social nature diseases like rabies and canine distemper can spread rapidly and severely affect individual Wild Dog populations.

Alpha females often utilise old aardvark burrows for their den, and the same den can be used for several years. In the breeding season after a litter is born, they will limit their traveling and hunting in areas closer to the den. All the females cooperate in raising the pups, and kills are shared, and when one is made some distance from the den, adults return with meat to regurgitate to the young pubs. According to the Botswana Predator Conservation Trust the cooperative hunting is likely to be the main reason why the Wild Dog is the most effective hunter in Africa in terms of kills to hunting attempts: Wild Dogs: 44%, Cheetahs 41%, Spotted Hyenas 35%, Lions 27%. I should add that all the 3 hunts that I witnessed were successful. Spending a week in the territory of wild dogs was an unforgettable experience. Unfortunately the population of Africa's most endangered carnivore is decreasing in spite of meaningful conservation efforts in South Africa, Botswana, and East Africa. Development of Wild Dog tourism ventures and other new initiatives are however evidence of how conservation NGOs are working hard to find new ways to establish a lasting place for the "underdogs" in a developing continent.

