



# **Waterberg Wild Dog Initiative**

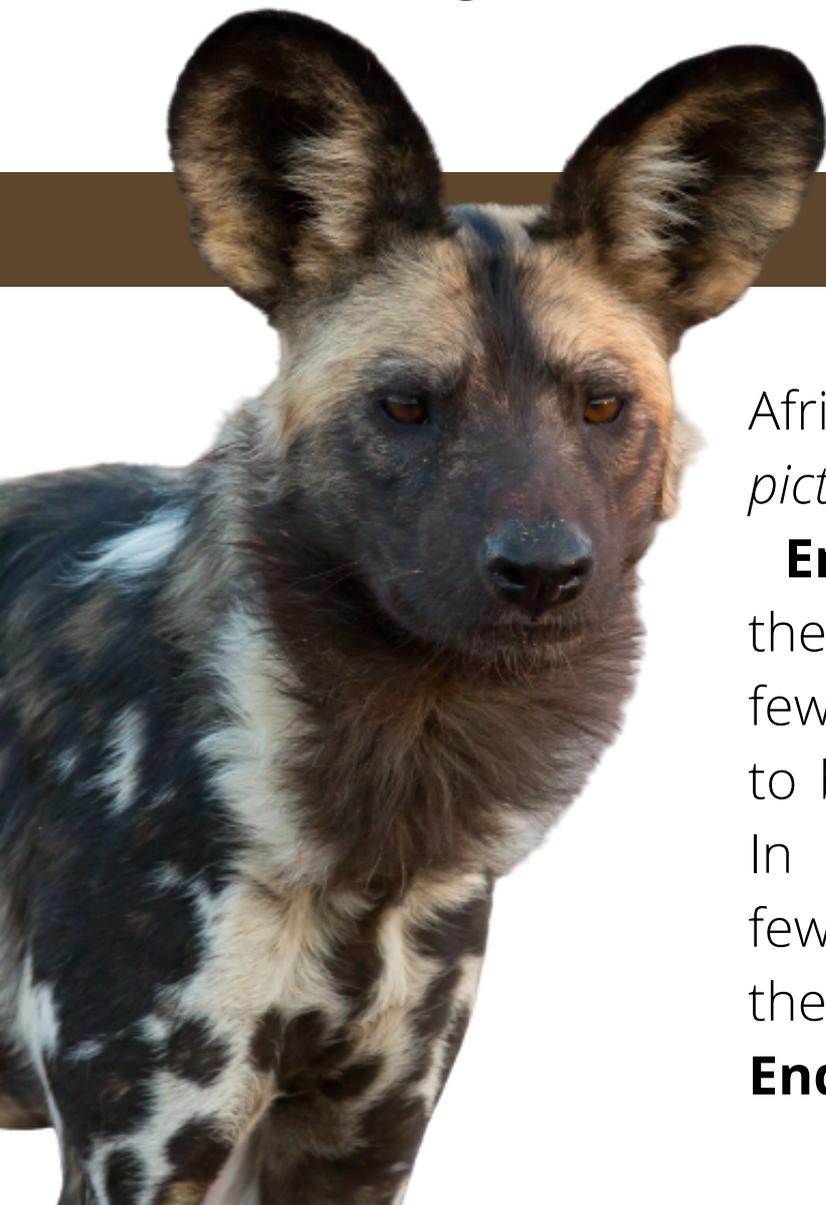
**Project of Waterberg Tourism NPC**

**Reg. No. 2018/539160/08  
PBO# 930064611**



# ABOUT WWDI

The Waterberg Wild Dog Initiative (WWDI) is a community-driven, non-profit project aiming to conserve the free-roaming African Wild Dog population in the Waterberg Biosphere, Limpopo. WWDI works alongside the community to collect data on the Waterberg Wild Dogs, mitigate human-wildlife conflict, raise awareness about their Endangered status, and provide education.



African Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are listed as an **Endangered species** on the IUCN Red List, with fewer than 6000 estimated to be remaining in the wild. In South Africa, there are fewer than 550, making them South Africa's **Most Endangered Carnivore**.



# Structure

WWDI is managed by a dedicated Project Coordinator and overseen by a Steering Committee consisting of community members and stakeholders with varying interests in African Wild Dog conservation.



## **Reilly Mooney**

*Project Coordinator*

Reilly has Bachelors' degrees in Zoology and Conservation Biology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the USA. She moved to the Waterberg in June 2019 and spent a year tracking, habituating, and collecting data on chacma baboons. She is passionate about protecting and conserving the rare animals that call the Waterberg Biosphere home. She lives in the Rooiberg community, near Thabazimbi.

## **Current Committee Members**

Chairman - Michael Embleton of the TOOG Area

Vice-Chairman - André Burger of Welgevonden Game Reserve

Hermann Müller of Lapalala Wilderness

Peet Hennig of Tswana Game Reserve

Derek van der Merwe of the Endangered Wildlife Trust

WWDI was founded in August 2020 and is a project operating underneath Waterberg Tourism NPC, a non-profit company seeking to leverage the tourism potential of the Waterberg to uplift the development of the safety, skills, business, health, farming, infrastructure, and conservation sectors.



# Waterberg Wild Dogs

The majority of South Africa's population of African Wild Dogs range on formally protected lands, like the Kruger National Park. The Waterberg is home to some of the last free-roaming wild dogs, making it an incredibly important population. The Waterberg Wild Dogs are an entirely free-roaming population that naturally enter the Waterberg from parts of northern Limpopo, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

The Waterberg Biosphere Reserve is currently the home of 26 known African Wild Dogs divided amongst 5 different packs and groups. The largest pack is the only-known breeding pack and it contains 14 individuals: 3 adults, 4 yearlings, and 7 pups born in 2021.



The Waterberg Biosphere Reserve spans over 650,000ha of mountainous bushveld. Its biodiversity marks it an area of critical conservation concern, containing designated core, buffer, and transition areas that have been drawn up in spatial plans.

Main land uses in the Waterberg include hunting, game farming, ecotourism, cattle farming, and small-scale agriculture. Some threats to the conservation of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve include conflicting land uses, social inequities, loss of vulnerable riverine systems, invasive species, wildlife poaching, and lack of legal protection or enforcement.



# Threats to the Waterberg Wild Dogs

The main threats to the survival of the Waterberg Wild Dog population is habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and persecution.

As a free-roaming population, the Waterberg Wild Dogs come into conflict with landowners when they are suspected to predate on financially valuable stock species, including livestock and high-value game species. Unfortunately for the dogs, the rise of the game ranching industry in South Africa has placed a financial value on their natural prey species, including impala, bushbuck, and blue wildebeest, increasing the risk for conflict.

The risk for conflict is highest during the dogs' denning period, when they remain relatively stationary at a den site for 8-12 weeks while they raise their pups. Outside of the denning season, the wild dogs cover vast ranges and distances on a day-to-day basis, keeping the impact felt to individual landowners relatively low. Efforts to mitigate conflict during this denning period go a long way in ensuring the pack is safe during a critical time.



# WWDI's Efforts

WWDI works alongside the local Waterberg community and other relevant stakeholders to:

- monitor the Waterberg Wild Dogs;
- mitigate human-wildlife conflict;
- collect data;
- spread awareness;
- provide education; and
- boost their ecotourism potential.



By engaging the community with the conservation efforts, WWDI hopes to foster a sense of community ownership and responsibility for the dogs - changing views, increasing tolerances, and creating a sustainably safe environment for the Waterberg Wild Dogs.

Although a comparatively new project, WWDI has made huge strides in conserving the Waterberg Wild Dogs since its inception. WWDI has placed tracking collars on two free-roaming packs that have never been collared before, providing valuable information about the packs and giving an extra layer of protection to the dogs by being able to monitor their movements. Information from these collars is relayed to community members in the area, providing an early-warning system for landowners as the pack moves through private lands.



When the dogs travel too close to livestock farms or breeding camps, the WWDI team assists landowners with anti-predation husbandry techniques. By reducing the high-value game and livestock species lost to predators through these efforts, WWDI is fostering a more tolerant and sustainable environment for the dogs to thrive.

During the 2021 Denning Season, WWDI coordinated an ecotourism operation that generated funds from visitors paying to see the wild dog pack and distributed the funds back to the landowners impacted by the pack denning on their property and the surrounding properties. This model leveraged the opportunity to observe free-roaming wild dogs while they are relatively stationary during the denning season and use the funds generated to mitigate the impact of the wild dogs on the properties around the chosen den site. This period also provided an opportunity to increase awareness and appreciation for the Waterberg Wild Dogs and to learn new information about them that can be shared with the local community and interested researchers.

Over 6.5 weeks, **144 guests** attended the ecotourism and WWDI raised approximately **R137,400 in donations** to support the landowners and the pack during this critical time.



WWDI has helped connect the community with the packs, turning those that were previously intolerant to hosting wild dogs into some of the dogs' fiercest advocates. By inviting the community to participate in the initiative, WWDI inspires community members to take ownership of the dogs, become citizen scientists, and protect them. This has helped a young boy find a new favorite animal – wild dogs - and has prompted him to enter the field of conservation.

**These efforts and successes show that a community-driven initiative and a co-existence framework is an effective way to protect and conserve the Waterberg Wild Dogs.**





# Funding

As a small, community-based project, WWDI relies heavily on donations and sponsorships from private individuals, businesses, and organisations with African Wild Dog conservation values. To date, WWDI has secured sponsorships and partnerships that have given WWDI many of the tools needed to reach the successes it is currently seeing. Private donations have allowed WWDI to operate and function.

Further funding is urgently needed to allow WWDI to continue working in the community. Donations can be made via EFT to WWDI's banking details below, or via PayFast. For sponsorships and partnerships, please contact the WWDI Project Coordinator.

## Current and Past Sponsors

The Aspinall Foundation

The Rory Hensman Conservation & Research Unit

Maxxis Tyres South Africa

Dune Offroad

ImageBuild



Waterberg Wild Dog Initiative

First National Bank

Account No. 629 0401 0270

Branch Code: 210554

SWIFT: FIRNZAJJ

Reference: Wild Dogs



# Contact

For more information about the initiative, please contact the WWDI Project Coordinator at the details below:

**Phone/WhatsApp - +27 073 791 6249**

**Email - [waterbergwilddoginitiative@gmail.com](mailto:waterbergwilddoginitiative@gmail.com)**

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