

African painted dog

Lycaon pictus



ANIMAL FACTS



Physical Characteristics

- Physical description: Painted dogs have large, rounded ears on top of their heads which aid in cooling the braincase as they run. They have a short powerful muzzle with teeth designed for shearing and a powerful bite force. Painted dogs have a thin body and long muscular legs with four toes on each foot. The center 2 toe pads are fused which provide additional traction.
- Coloration: The African painted dog's scientific name *Lycaon pictus* translates to "painted wolf-like animal." The pattern of colors on each painted dog is unique. The fur is "painted" with brown, tan, black, gold, and white areas. Painted dogs have short fur with blackish skin. All painted dogs have a dark muzzle, a central stripe on their forehead, dark ears with characteristic hair tufts inside, and most dogs have a white tip on the end of their bushy tail.
- Other defining characteristics: Painted dog pups are born black and white with the white remaining with the individual for the rest of their lives whilst some of the black turning to brown, tan or gold. By two and a half years of age, the color pattern has finished developing.

Size

- Length: Head-body length: 30–47in (75–120cm); tail length: 12–18in (30–44cm); shoulder height: 30in (75cm)
- Weight: 44–71 lbs. (20–32kg)

Lifespan

- Wild: 8-11 years
- Zoos: 15-17 years

Behaviors

- Activity Cycle: Diurnal to crepuscular
- Lifestyle: Terrestrial and nomadic
- Vocalizations: Most the vocal communication is high frequency with can only be heard at a very close range to avoid being detected by other predators. Painted dogs do have a long distance "hoo" call which can be heard by humans as far as a mile away. This call is used as a distress signal and can be used by an individual that is lost or one that is looking for another. Every dog has a unique signature to its hoo call thus enabling pack members to know exactly who is lost and most importantly if it is another member of their own pack.
- Social Structure: Painted dogs live in highly social packs with 6-12 adults and yearlings along with pups. In contrast to wolves and most social primates, fighting is rare to non-existent with hierarchies being reinforced by etiquette rather than dominance. Alphas seem to be 'chosen/accepted' for leadership qualities by siblings rather than by physical stature. Painted dogs do not fight as they practice preemptive conflict resolution as greeting ceremonies. These greetings are undertaken when pack members wake up, prior to activities such as meeting the pups or returning from hunting. Each dog actively seeking out other pack members and with head lowered and back arched, greet each pack member in a submissive fashion with the mouth slightly open. This is reinforced by 'spooning' where the head is placed under the belly of the other dog and it will be partially lifted. These interactions may be accompanied by soft high-pitched yelps and begging squeals.

Diet

- African painted dogs tend to prey on small to medium sized antelope such as impala, duiker, steenbuck and kudu. Painted dogs choose their prey based on what's available where they live.

Reproduction

- Breeding Behaviors: The alpha pair in the pack are generally the only ones to breed.
- Gestation Period: 70-73 days
- Litter Size: Typically based on the number of pups a pack can support. Average of 8-12 pups but can reach litter sizes up to 19 pups for large supportive packs.
- Parenting: Alpha female gives birth in an underground den; the pups remain in the den with their mother for 2-3 weeks. Once the pups are brought out of the den, they become the responsibility of the whole pack. After hunting, pack members will regurgitate meat in front of the pups so they can eat. When the rest of the pack is out hunting, the pups will be guarded by a babysitting pack member. On average packs stay at the den for approximately 12 weeks after which they become nomadic again and will hide the pups when out hunting. This is known as caching and here the pups will also be guarded by a babysitter. Painted dog pups grow very quickly by eating tremendous amounts of meat provided by the pack between 3-12 weeks of age. If they don't receive enough, the legs of pups will not grow as long as needed when they go nomadic. Decreased leg length reduces their survivability rate.

Habitat and Range

- Habitat: African painted dogs are found in open woodlands, rocky hills, savannahs, and grasslands. Their habitat also includes semi-desert to mountainous areas south of the Sahara Desert in Africa.
- Range: Found in sub-Saharan Africa reaching South Africa. Stronghold populations in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and South Africa. Known populations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and Ethiopia.

Conservation

- IUCN Status: Endangered
- Contributing factors: African painted dogs have disappeared from much of their former range. With a population of 1,400 mature individuals and about 6600 overall, painted dog populations continue to decline as a result of ongoing habitat fragmentation, conflict with farmers and livestock, den disturbance from harmful tourism, snares, road accidents, and infectious disease.

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Canidae

Genus: *Lycaon*

Species: *Lycaon pictus*

Interesting Facts

- Painted Dogs can reach speeds up to 45 mph/70 kmph.
- Painted Dogs are neither dogs nor wolves. They're the only living species of a distant evolutionary branch that's distinct enough that painted dogs can't breed with dogs or wolves.
- The name "painted dog" emphasizes the uniqueness of the coat colors and patterns as distinctly different from other canids. Rebranding the species away from inaccurate and inconsistent names has helped improve public attitudes toward them and increased their chances of survival.
- While also known as the African Wild Dog, wild is a derogatory label in this case, coming from an era of despising, persecuting and hunting most large predators. It's largely rooted from fear and a lack of understanding. Wild was applied also to feral dogs, hyenas, and jackals for the same reason.

