

THE ETHIOPIAN WOLF



CHARACTERISTICS

<i>Kingdom</i>	Animal
<i>Phylum</i>	Chordata
<i>Class</i>	Mammalia
<i>Order</i>	Carnivora
<i>Family</i>	Canidæ
<i>Genus</i>	Canis
<i>Latin name</i>	Canis simensis
<i>Weight</i>	12 to 18 kg
<i>Length</i>	84 to 112 cm
<i>Height at withers</i>	60 cm
<i>Sexual maturity</i>	24 months
<i>Reproduction</i>	August to November
<i>Gestation</i>	60 to 62 days
<i>Number of young</i>	1 to 6
<i>Diet</i>	Carnivore
<i>Longevity</i>	6 to 8 years
<i>IUCN status</i>	In danger of extinction

With a population of just 500 individuals in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian wolf is the rarest canid on the surface of the planet, and the only representative of wolves in Africa. Its adaptation to high altitudes (3 000 m to 4 100 m) is exceptional for that family of animals. Also called the "Siemen jackal" because of its fox's profile on a jackal's paws, it lives in family groups, although it hunts alone, going mainly after rodents. It is thus set apart from other wolves, which hunt larger preys in group.



Giant mole rat captured by an Ethiopian wolf.

Over the centuries, its muzzle has grown longer to enable it to dig at the entrance to galleries and capture its prey there, the giant mole rat in particular. The IUCN classes the Ethiopian wolf as being in danger of extinction, the main reason being the destruction of its habitat. The rise of pastoral activity on the high plateaux, where 80%



Ethiopian wolf marking its territory.

of the 73 million Ethiopians have lived to date, has converted 60% of the area into agricultural land and pasture. The consequence is that the wolf's main prey are slowly disappearing from their own natural areas, thus condemning their predator to certain death. For the last twenty years, Claudio Sillero of the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Pro-

*Ethiopian wolf
on the Saneti
plateau.*



Awareness-raising panel indicating the presence of the wolf on the trails of the Saneti plateau.

gramme (EWCP) has been working with a local team to protect the species. They raise the population's awareness of the wolf's conservation, and the message is rather well received. The Ethiopian wolf feeds on rodents, thus reducing competition for pasturage for livestock, so it is seen as an ally by farmers.

In November, at the end of the mating season, packs mingle more than usual when farmers take their dogs and put their livestock out to mountain pasture. As a consequence, distemper, rabies, and other infections are transmitted by the dogs to the wolves, which are very vulnerable to those diseases. Over the last few years, almost 75% of the male population has died. In 1992 and 2003, two rabies epidemics affected the species. How-



ver, epizootics can still kill off three quarter of the remaining animals. A free vaccination campaign for dogs has been set up. It was too complicated to vaccinate all the wolves that lived in remote mountain regions. According to Dan Haydon of the EWCP, vaccinating domestic animals that live close to corridors that connect the various wolf packs allows an epidemic to be contained. Another threat induced by closeness between animals is

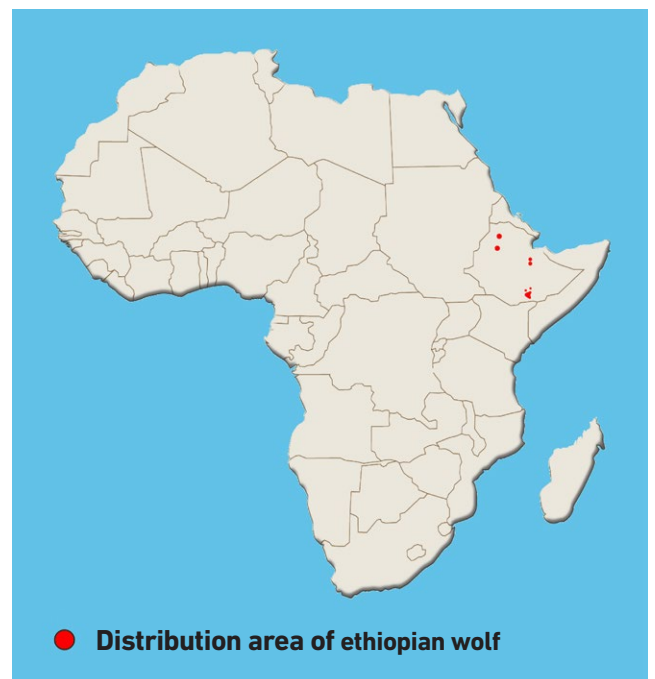
**The
Ethiopian
wolf (*Canis
simensis*).**





Biopsy of an Ethiopian wolf by an Ethiopian biologist.

cross-breeding between dog and wolf, caused by mating between a she-wolf and a dog. The hybrid is fertile. If it remains within the wolf population, it can spread the dog's genes and threaten the integrity of the species. To counter that eventuality, the EWCP captures those hybrids and sterilises them. Moreover, for the last fifty years, Ethiopian wolves have been the victims of road accidents and of poaching. They have been protected by Ethiopian law since 1974, but in fact, only since 1996.



*Text by **Laurent Tenard** - Photographs by **Gilles Martin***