

LARGE HERDS, LARGE PASTURES, SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION

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THE WILDS (www.thewilds.org) is one of the largest conservation centers in North America located on nearly 10,000 acres of reclaimed mine land in rural southeastern Ohio. It was the brainchild of a group of forward thinking civic leaders and zoo professionals who believed science is a very important aspect of finding realistic solutions to environmental concerns. At the Wilds we combine conservation science and education programs with a very unique guest experience.

Visitors tour large pastures in open air buses to view mixed species herds of herbivores – our specialty is providing habitat for those species that thrive in large herd populations. Visitors can see a large herd of white rhino, including the only fourth and fifth generation offspring outside of Africa! Also in pasture one can see Asian one-horned rhino, giraffe, three deer species including Pere David’s deer, which are extinct in their native habitat. We are breeding endangered Grevy’s zebra, Persian onagers and Przewalski’s horses that roam the pastures mixed with several antelope species. We have a successful breeding herd of scimitar-horned oryx, a species extinct in the wild until very recently, when they were successfully reintroduced to native habitat in Chad and Tunisia. Oryx born at the Wilds contributed to this reintroduction project.

In addition to our large herds, the Wilds also contributes to the conservation of mid- sized carnivores and is a breeding center for cheetah, has packs of endangered African painted dogs and dholes (Asiatic wild dogs).

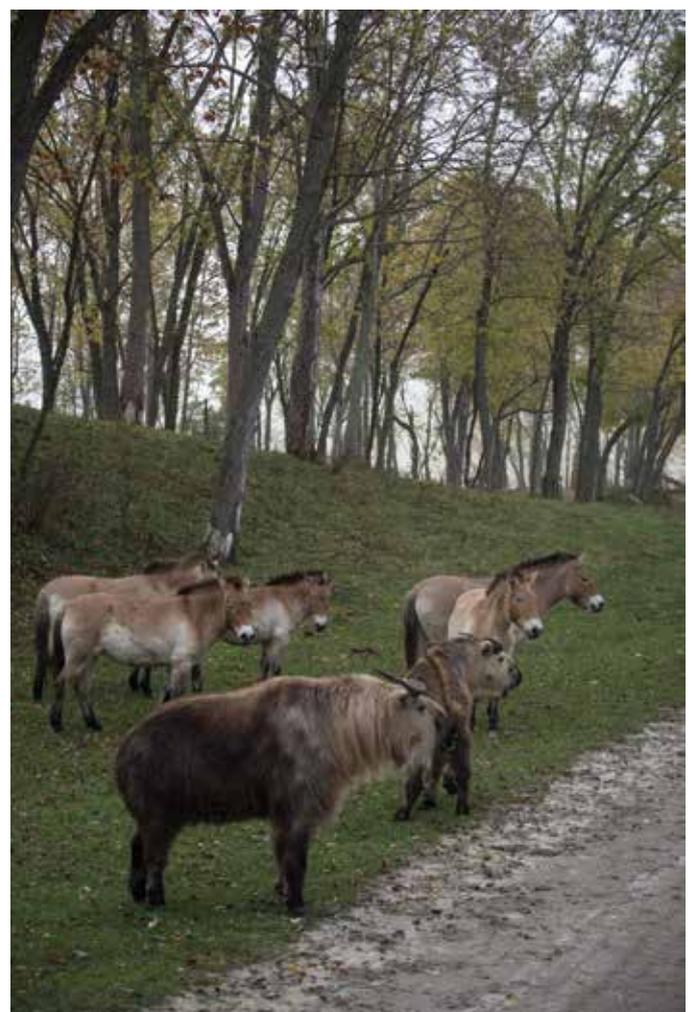
Our commitment to conservation science is also reflected in strong departments of restoration ecology, wildlife ecology, conservation medicine and education. From hellbenders to burying beetles to prairie grasses, we work together to restore our grounds to native prairie, forest and wetlands, study the plants and animals that call our grounds home, and to teach across generations the thrill of science, discovery and simply being in nature.

Veterinary medicine at the Wilds can be challenging. Our cost benefit decisions on clinical cases are very similar to those we make when working with free ranging wildlife. We must consider the implications for the herd when we move

an animal into the clinic for treatment. Some species will not readily accept an individual back into the herd once they have been away for a period of time. This means we frequently conduct field veterinary procedures, recovering the animal from anesthesia to return to the herd as soon as possible. Unfortunately, sometimes the case is so critical that the benefit of bringing the animal into the clinic for 24 hour care far outweighs the cost of removing her from the group.

A recent case in point is one of our young female African painted dogs (*Lycaon pictus*), an endangered species that lives in packs with strict social hierarchies. Selina, the subordinate female in our pack, suddenly stopped eating.

Animal management specialists and veterinarians watched her closely and had some long discussions before making the decision to anesthetize her for diagnostic purposes. With painted dogs, it can be



African Painted Dog



extremely difficult to get the pack to accept an individual back into its folds if she has been out of the pack for more than a day or two. But Selina developed diarrhea the next day, was clearly sick, and needed medical attention.

She was anesthetized and transported to the clinic where she received a full physical examination including blood and fecal collection, radiographs and ultrasound. She was treated prophylactically with antibiotics, fluids and anti-inflammatory medications, (but unfortunately we would not know until we got the bloodwork results the next day that she was suffering from acute renal disease).

Her BUN, creatinine and phosphorus were off the charts. This meant daily anesthesia to deliver IV fluids, phosphate binders, antibiotics, and potassium, and to monitor kidney parameters. We also introduced kidney-friendly food via an orogastric tube, because she was not eating at all. For the next week we were on pins and needles as we treated daily. As expected potassium fell initially, but with our therapies all parameters returned to normal by the end of the week and she was successfully reintroduced to the pack. Her sister, the alpha female, accepted Selina immediately. We still don't know the etiology of her disease, but are thrilled that she is back in the pack as a contributing member.

While this case ultimately had a good outcome, our jobs on the next critical case will be much more efficient with our new VetScan VS2 Chemistry Analyzer, which will give us immediate blood chemistry results, allowing us to make timely treatment decisions. Many thanks to Abaxis from the veterinarians, animal management specialists and all the animals at the Wilds!

