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***Case Report** (Open Access)*

INCIDENCE OF SARCOPTIC MANGE IN ASIATIC WILD DOGS (*CUON ALPINUS*)

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ABSTRACT
The impact of infectious disease on wild animals is tremendous, especially for populations of endangered carnivores. This short article describes a brief encounter with a pair of dholes, in Nagarhole National Park, with one of the pair being infected with sarcoptic mange, a disease, usually transmitted through feral animals such as free-ranging feral dogs. This is the first report with photographic evidence of this disease affecting dholes, anywhere in the world. This article encourages the further research into disease management in wild populations of dholes to properly assess and evaluate future conservation plans.

***Key Words:** Dhole, Asiatic Wild Dog, Wildlife disease, Ecology*

INTRODUCTION
Wildlife, especially apex carnivores, suffer a great deal from the rampant and unchecked spread of disease from feral animals. Many of the diseases that affect domestic dogs can easily be transmitted to a host of protected and endangered species. One such enigmatic species is the Asiatic wild dog, otherwise known as the dhole. Dholes are estimated to number around 1000-2000 individuals in the world; and so are listed as Endangered by the IUCN. There is a very noticeable lack of research done on the impact of disease transmission from feral dogs to dholes. The only previous reports of the occurrence of sarcoptic mange on dholes are anecdotal notes recorded in Morris (1937) and Phythian-Adams (1939).

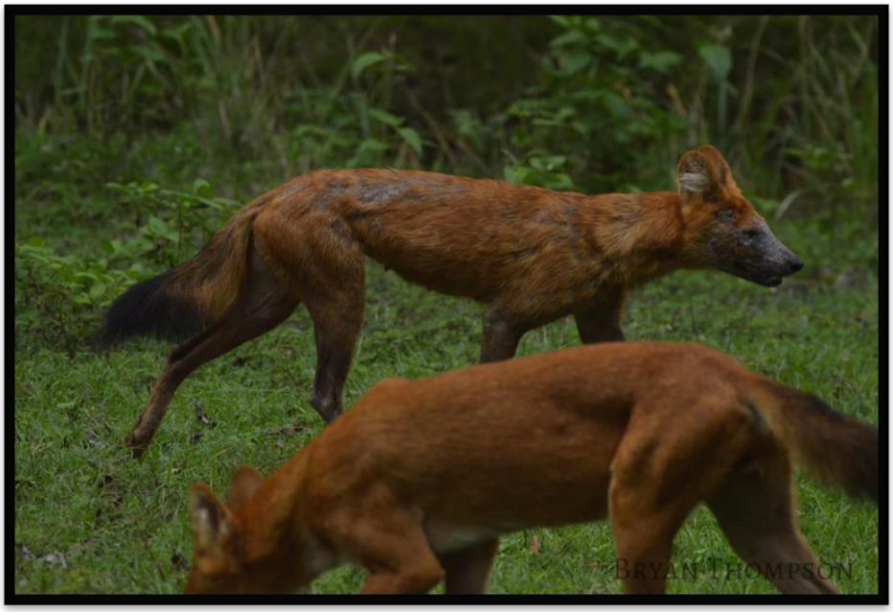

Figure 1: A pair of dholes seen side by side, with the female being infected with sarcoptic mange

OBSERVATION

Described here, is a sighting of a pair of dholes, presumed to be a lone breeding pair, in Nagarhole National Park, Karnataka on 19th May 2023. The pair was first spotted off the main tar road that cuts through the reserve linking Hunsur to Wayanad (Figure 1). The two dholes were following a trail used by the antipoaching unit of the reserve, which linked to the above-mentioned main road. The female individual is seen to have been severely affected with sarcoptic mange (a skin disease caused by ectoparasitic mites) with major portions of the body devoid of fur, including the face, flanks, and legs, with sparse hair loss seen on the neck and shoulders (Figure 2). The individual is also highly emaciated, with the ribs being visible. Despite the visible emaciation and the apparent severity of the mange, the female was still active and was able to keep up with her male partner, who was observed scent marking and defecating in the open, adjacent to the main road. Both the male and female laid down for short intervals. The observation lasted for approximately 10-15 minutes, after which we decided to move on, as to not create traffic around the animals.

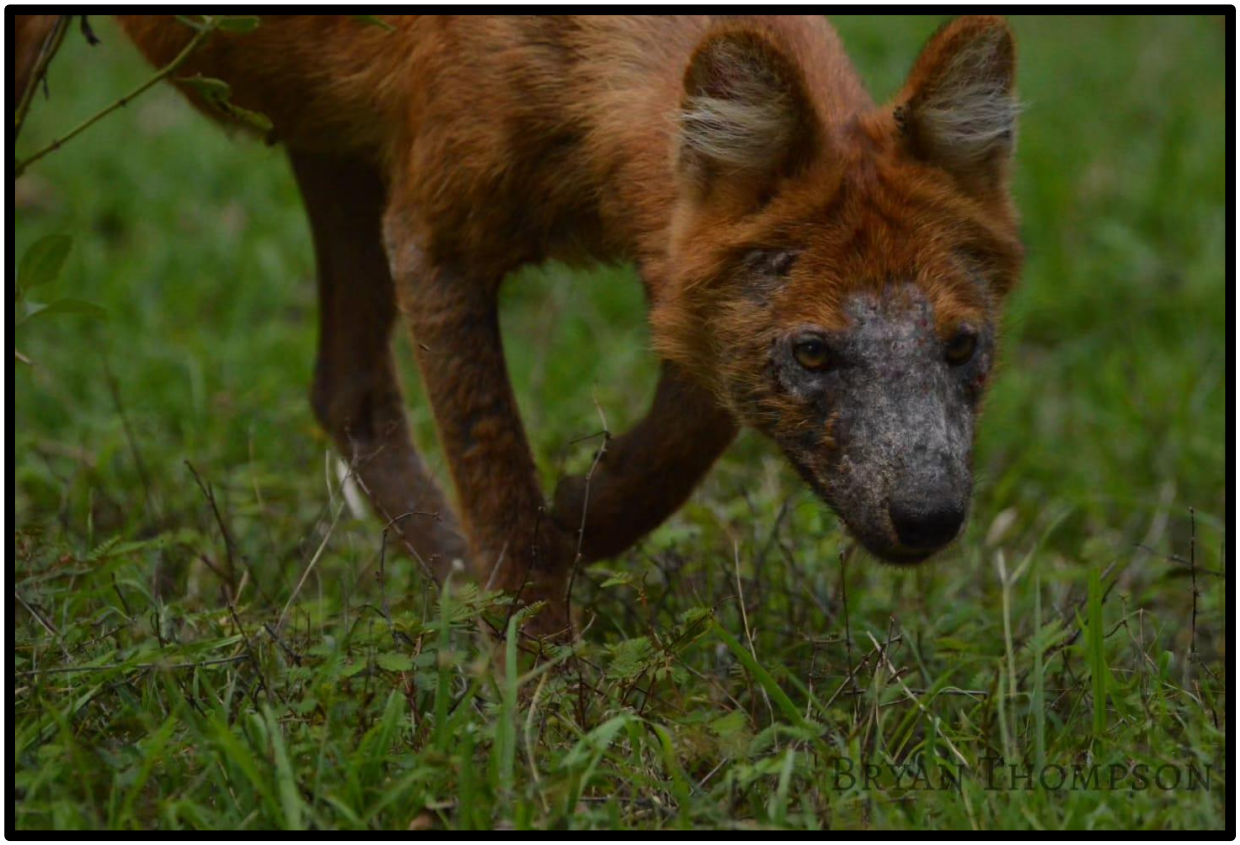

Figure 2: A female mange affected dhole walking towards the vehicles, with her head down

CONCLUSION

This article strives to shed light on this lesser-known issue and to direct scientific and conservation attention to this prevalent problem that severely affects wild carnivore populations. Feral dog management is of utmost importance, especially in areas surrounding ecologically sensitive and protected areas. Disease transmission and pressure from predation by feral dogs are major contributors to the potential extinction of several species. Preventative measures are to be taken to protect the species at risk, and to restore sensitive ecosystems.

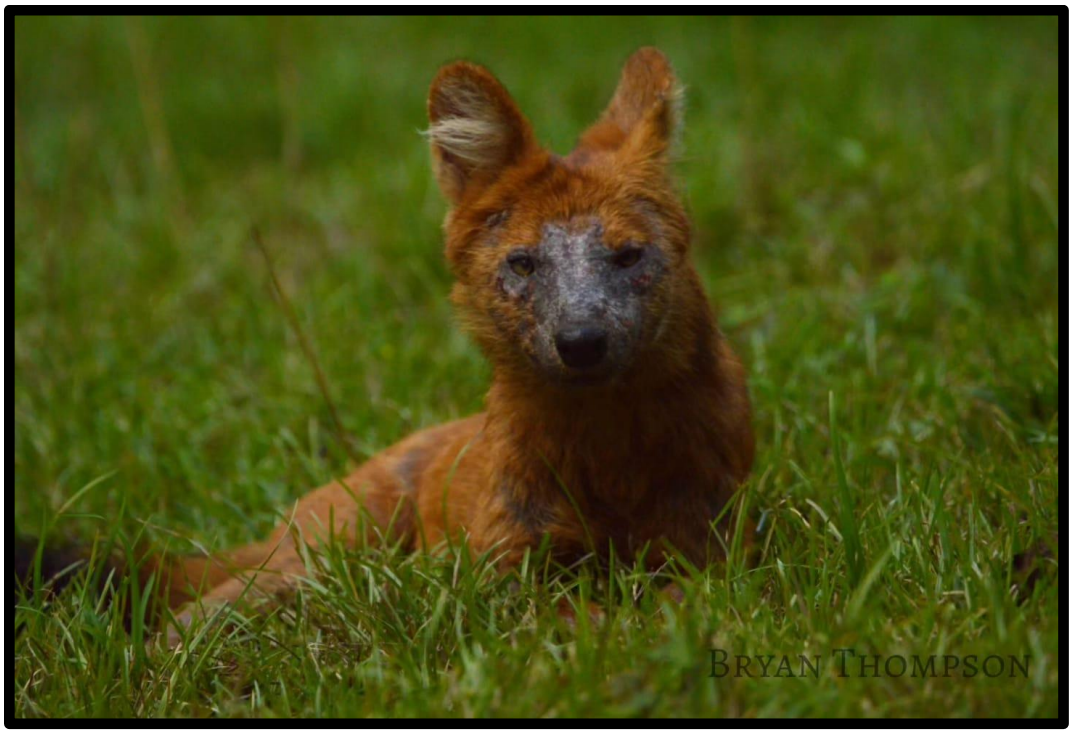

Figure 3: A female mange affected dhole lying down in an open area beside the road (Figure Credits: Bryan Thompson)

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