



Reappearance of Dhole *Cuon alpinus* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Canidae) in Gujarat after 70 years

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Dhole *Cuon alpinus* (Pallas, 1981) is a pack hunting, highly social canid and the only species of this genus (Pocock 1936; Cohen et al. 1978; Johnsingh 1982; Alfred 2000). Dholes are also known as Wild Dogs or Whistling Dogs, but the terms are misnomers since they are taxonomically more closely related to jackals than wolves and correctly termed as Dhole – the Asian origin term meaning recklessness and daring (Mivart 1890). In the past, Dholes were the most widely spread canids in the oriental region, distributed from around 50°N and 70°E over the continental Asia (Pocock 1936; Ellerman & Morrison-Scott 1966; Johnsingh & Acharya 2013; Selvan et al. 2013). Due to loss of forests and thereby the prey base (Gopi et al. 2010; FAO 2020), Dholes were extirpated from more than 75% of their global historic range with the remaining estimate of 949 to 2,215 individuals (Kamler et al. 2015). Looking to this scattering trend, IUCN categorized Dholes from Vulnerable to Endangered (Kamler et al. 2015), and are placed in Schedule II of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, and in Appendix II of CITES (2019).

India lost around 60% of Dholes in the last 100 years (Karanth et al. 2010) and less than 1,500 individuals are left in Indian forests (Johnsingh & Acharya 2013; Kamler et

al. 2015), surviving majorly in Western and Eastern Ghats, Terai, Kumaon, Himalayan region, northeastern states, and relatively larger population in central India (Srivastava & Singh 2003; Durbin et al. 2004; Iyengar et al. 2005; Jhala et al. 2008; Karanth et al. 2009; Gopi et al. 2010; Johnsingh & Acharya 2013; Kamler et al. 2015). Although the population disappeared from former range (Johnsingh 1985; Kamler et al. 2015), the recent rediscoveries in newer areas have raised the hope in Sikkim (Bashir et al. 2014), western Himalaya (Pal et al. 2018), Tso Kar, Ladakh (Kamler et al. 2015), and in different parts of Nepal (Khatiwada et al. 2011; Thapa et al. 2013; Lamichhane et al. 2018; Yadav et al. 2019). These discoveries indicate that the species is moving out to ensure fewer competition and less disturbance, which in future may foster resilience and expand its range.

In Gujarat, many claim to have sighted dhole in Dangs, Shoolparneshwar, Bharuch, Surat, Ratanmahal, and even in northern Gujarat (Singh 1998, 2001, 2013; Alfred 2000; GFD 2013; Kumar & Pathan 2016); however, no authentic evidence could ever be produced to ensure the certainty of the species in these areas, and therefore, the literatures endorsed Dhole as an exterminated species

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