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### **New Guinea Highland Wild Dog, Feared Extinct, Found in Wild**

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For the first time in more than half a century, researchers have confirmed the presence of New Guinea Highland Wild Dogs (HWD) living at high altitude locations on the island of New Guinea. The HWD, similar to the New Guinea Singing Dog (NGSD), is the rarest, most ancient canid currently living. (Prior to this discovery, there were only known to be about 200 – 300 NGSDs living in captivity.) With no confirmed reports of wild specimens and only two potentially credible photographs, many feared that the HWD had become extinct in its native range and habitat along New Guinea's remote central mountain spine.



*Some of the first definitive images of the New Guinea Highland Wild Dogs in over 50 years. Here, a pregnant female investigates a scent lure (left); two pups explore scent lures (right)*

Then in September 2016, inspired by nearly three decades of study by Dr. I. Lehr Brisbin of the University of Georgia, and after 3 ½ years of preparation, scientists from UNIPA, with logistical and other support from PT Freeport Indonesia and in collaboration with the Southwest Pacific Research Project, conducted a rapid assessment survey that was able to locate and document definitive proof of an apparently healthy, viable population of HWDs. UNIPA is the University of Papua, located in Papua Province, New Guinea. It has three campuses, in Manokwari, Sorong and Raja Ampat and teaches economics, forestry, agriculture and earth sciences.

The UNIPA team located tracks, predations, scat, two dens, a trail system used for travel, and other signs of the dogs. Based on that evidence along with reports from locals, trail cameras were deployed which captured over 100 photographs of at least 15 individuals, to include males, females, and females with pups ranging in age from about 3-5 months, living in isolated locations between 3700 – 4600 m above sea level. The team also collected fecal samples for DNA sequencing and analysis, and preliminary results have yielded the A29 haplotype, which is consistent with the Australian Dingo and NGSD.

Australian Dingo, NGSD and HWD taxonomy/phylogeny continues to be the subject of controversy, with the exact taxonomic status and relationships of HWDs and NGSDs currently indeterminate.

Conservation/management plans are in development for both wild HWD and captive NGSD specimens, and status/taxonomy/phylogeny determinations are underway. A scientific publication is forthcoming.

The HWD is likely the best living canid example available to scientists outside the fossil record, predating human agriculture and representing a critical “missing link” species having evolved little – and more importantly, free from selective breeding influences imposed by humans - since the time before the dawn of agriculture. It is also the largest and only apex predator on the whole of New Guinea. Further study is not only key to gauging the health and fitness of the ecosystem these dogs inhabit, but vital to understanding canid and human genetics, co-migration and co-evolution. To unlock the secrets of the Highland Wild Dog is to better understand ourselves and our own story.

For additional information about the HWD and NGSD, please visit the New Guinea Highland Wild Dog Foundation at [www.nghwdf.org](http://www.nghwdf.org).

For additional information/permission to publish or use edited versions, contact:

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