

# Extinction just an ink spot away

**CONSERVATION:** ZIMBABWEAN PROJECT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MAINTAINING WILD DOG POPULATIONS

» **Simplicity key in raising awareness of endangered species' plight.**

Olivia Schaffer

Travelling from Bulawayo to Vic Falls on a three-month overland trip through East Africa a friend and I, with time on our hands, make a short detour to explore Painted Dog Conservation (PDC). There are many deserving protection projects in Africa and we learn this is one such commendable initiative.

Obvious Nkomo and Maria Njamba extend a warm, hospitable welcome and leave us to explore a little before inviting us to the Visitor Centre. We realise this project is bigger than we'd anticipated. A raised boardwalk, with interpretive signs about the birds and the trees of this teak woodlands community, allows visitors to view the rare painted dog.

The rehabilitation facility is near Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park and it became operational in October 2002. Designed and built under the supervision of Australian John Lemon, it deals with any eventuality concerning compromised painted dogs, also

known as wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*), or their translocation.

Njamba and Nkomo take us around the Visitor Centre that comprises enlarged pages from a book entitled *The Real Eyespot*. The opening paragraph tells us that Eyespot was a painted dog – one of the most extraordinary individuals the PDC project had known. His life, as portrayed in words and illustrations, is a simplified version of a complex and fascinating, true story of heroism in the face of tragedy and overwhelming challenges. It's in the heart-warming simplicity that we are charmed and moved.

It was a burning desire to do more for conservation that led to Lemon being awarded a New South Wales Zoo Friends Fellowship to undertake field work with the Painted Dog Research Project in Zimbabwe in 2000. He returned to the project in 2001 with own funding and during 2002, aware that the plight of the dogs was worsening, he resigned from

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## 5 000

**Wild dogs remaining in 13 African countries**

Western Plains Zoo in Australia to work full-time for the initiative. In 2003 he completed the world's largest rehabilitation holding facility. As chairman of Painted Dog Conservation Incorporated Australia and chairman of Zambian Carnivore Programme, Lemon balances his time between curator operations at Perth Zoo and working in the field in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia.

The rationale behind the facility is based on the ethos that animals in the wild should not suffer and so where such suffering is identified it should be ameliorated.

At the turn of the 20th century there were some 500 000 wild dogs in 39 African countries; however, bounty hunting, poachers' snares and roadkills have decimated the population. A realistic estimate of today's numbers is about 5 000 in 13 African countries. Unless public prejudice and ignorance is addressed the species could become extinct within the next few decades.

To ensure the painted dogs' long-term survival, PDC has created a model comprising the



**CAUTION.** Motorists are urged to be on the lookout for rare wild dogs to avoid accidents. Pictures: Olivia Schaffer.

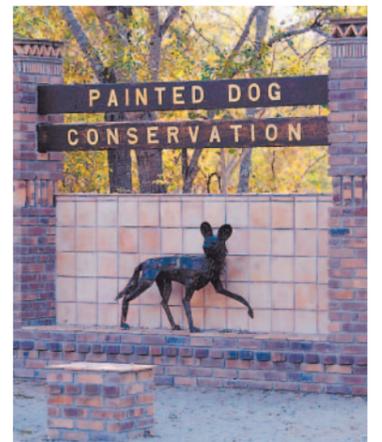


**COPYDOG.** A conservation vehicle painted in colours of the wild dog.

working together of a scientific community, the local community and the international community. The result – ranging from a daily collection of snares to a craft centre where local talent creates artworks using snare wire – has been a resounding success. Warning road signs have helped cut mortality by half; dog packs have been relocated from sensitive farming areas, because the painted dog is often falsely blamed for killing domestic and farm animals; local ranchers have been encouraged



**EDUCATION.** Learners in the Painted Dog Conservation Visitor Centre.



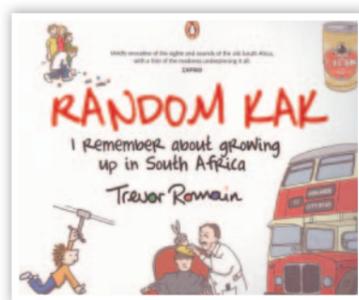
to cease fire, and dog collars have been fitted with anti-snare plates. We leave enlightened, mulling over an extract from *Shadows In The Forest* by CD McClelland: "Suddenly they were there. Lean ghost-like shapes in the moonlight; their dappled coats of black, tan and gold, like ink spots on blotting paper. Only a new day would reveal their full beauty. Only Man could hope to prevent their extinction."

**For details and to contribute** towards the survival of the painted dog, go to [wildnet.org/wildlife-programs/african-wild-dog](http://wildnet.org/wildlife-programs/african-wild-dog).

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Visual nostalgia

A refreshingly different offering for fans of South African cartoonist Trevor Romain's book recalls and interrogates, with accuracy and poignancy, what it was like to grow up as a white person in South Africa in the Seventies and Eighties. Criticism regarding an unwillingness to tackle the serious political and social issues of that period is valid but off the mark, as the title of the book clearly states that it's about one man's memories, and Romain, as a child for much of that time, would not have been aware of the wider scenario in which he grew up. For anyone from a similar background, Romain's recall – the illustrator and author has lived in Texas for many years, so much of this material had to be dredged up from the memory banks – proves freakishly accurate, down to the turn of phrase favoured by boys of a certain age in a certain Johannesburg suburb (Orange Grove). To foreigners, or readers very much older or younger than Romain,



**Random Kak I Remember About Growing Up In South Africa**  
Humour

★★★★★

**Authors:** Trevor Romain  
**Publisher:** Penguin  
**ISBN:** 9780143538172

much of *Random Kak* will be little more than annoying insider jokes, but for its target market, this is great visual nostalgia.  
– Bruce Dennill.

**Failing to fit in**

**Penelope**  
Drama

★★★★★

**Author:** Rebecca Harrington  
**Publisher:** Virago  
**ISBN:** 978844088645

Harvard is a world where Penelope O'Shaunessy has to fend for herself. She arms herself with Noel Coward repartee and a *Dirty Dancing* poster and wonders why it's so hard to make friends. She falls for a snob called Gustav who never dates her in the daytime. She doesn't know how to defend herself and goes along with Gustav's whims. No-one wants to share a room with her and she is terrified of becoming a "floater", which means she'll have no friends. She has a mother who rings up to find out whether she has a boyfriend, and says: "Don't be too enthusiastic, don't talk to people who seem to be getting annoyed, and stop playing Tetris on your phone at parties."  
– Dee Andrew, [writerswrite.co.za](http://writerswrite.co.za).



**Flamboyant tale**

**Merivel: A Man Of His Time**  
Drama

★★★★★

**Author:** Rose Tremain  
**Publisher:** Random House Struik  
**ISBN:** 9780701185213

*Merivel: A Man Of His Time* provides hours of reading pleasure. Merivel is a strange character living in the time of King Charles II. He is enchanting, funny and fumbling and as a friend of the king he enjoys many favours, though he has great trouble granting favours back. These cause him all kinds of personal problems, including the trust of his loving daughter. Rose Tremain creates this wonderfully strange tale with flourish and in a style of writing that is rich and flamboyant. She uses this approach with great effect to recreate a unique atmosphere that is almost Shakespearean but easily digested, putting the story squarely in 1680s England. – Dries Brunt.



**A legend lived**

**Fated**  
Drama

★★★★★

**Author:** Alyson Noel  
**Publisher:** St Martin's Press  
**ISBN:** 9781447206804

Daire has grown up on the set of Hollywood movies with her makeup artist mother. She is sure she has seen it all until she really starts "seeing things". After a disturbing episode she is shipped off to her paternal grandmother, whom she has never met only to learn this is all part of her heritage and the reason for her father's death. Not only must she fight the demons of the nether world, she must navigate her way through small-town politics and even worse, high school. I love Native American legends. It was slightly sluggish at the beginning, though. The alliteration of the names of two main characters annoyed me, but other than that it was fun. – Mia Botha, [writerswrite.co.za](http://writerswrite.co.za)

