



BACKGROUNDER FOR NEWS RELEASE (February 14, 2007)

Fifth WNAG Flag Expedition heads into Zimbabwe, Africa

About the Worldwide Nature Artists Group (WNAG)

The Worldwide Nature Artists Group is an exclusive, international, non-profit society of world-class nature artists dedicated to the celebration and preservation of the natural world. With a total membership of nearly 500 members, the WNAG is internationally recognized as one of the largest and most prestigious organizations in the nature art community. The Group's mission is to build a community of world-class artists who share a common interest in nature art and nature conservancy. Invited members derive exclusive opportunities to showcase and sell their artwork to a global audience, while promoting the sustainability and conservation of the natural world through art, education and special initiatives. Founded in 1997 by Jeffrey Whiting—renowned Canadian artist, author and biologist—the Group's membership reads like a "Who's Who" of nature art, and includes names such as Robert Bateman, John Banovich, Guy Coheleach and David Shepherd. For more information, please visit www.natureartists.com.

About the WNAG Flag Expeditions Program

The WNAG Flag Expeditions Program was launched in association with the recently incorporated non-profit Worldwide Nature Artists Group Foundation (WNAG Foundation). The WNAG Foundation was created in support of the Group to focus on fundraising and some planned major initiatives, one of which includes the new Flag Expeditions Program.

The objective of the program is to make possible the field study and artistic rendering of endangered species or habitats deserving of greater public attention. Strong emphasis will be placed on the study of unique and threatened habitats and rare or endangered species in remote parts of the world. WNAG Signature Members can apply to the Program for financial support and the privilege to carry the WNAG flag. WNAG's intention is not to subsidize members' regular field trips, but rather to help make possible some ambitious trips off the beaten path that draw attention to a worthy environmental issue.

Funding for the program is provided through donor support of the Foundation, and not through membership dues. The Foundation is grateful for the anonymous financial support received to date, which helped launch the inaugural Flag Expeditions Program.

Upon return from the expedition, participating artists will be required to submit to the Foundation, a written journal and sketchbook of their journey, photos with the WNAG flag in situ, and video footage when possible. Apart from the funding, which the Foundation provides for each expedition, artists will also be given prominence on the WNAG Web site as well as at other venues, where details of the artists' expeditions and findings will be highlighted.

To date, funding has been secured for at least two Fellowships for 2005 of up to \$5000 US each. Interested members may download an application information package from the WNAG Flag Expeditions Program information page at www.natureartists.com/flagprogram.

About Alison Nicholls

Nicholls has traveled extensively her entire life. Her travels have taken her to Nepal and Namibia, Hong Kong and Poland, Italy and New Zealand. While all of these destinations are beautiful and varied, it was southern Africa that captured her imagination and this is where she began to paint in earnest.

Between 1994 and 1996 Nicholls lived in Zimbabwe and then moved to neighboring Botswana until late 2002. She now lives in New York, but returns to Africa on a regular basis. Her years in Africa have allowed her to travel widely, camp in remote areas, and gain a thorough knowledge of the numerous wildlife species that abound there. Says Nichols, "As far as I am concerned there is nothing quite like camping in the African bush, falling asleep in your tent listening to hyenas whooping, elephants breaking branches nearby and the calls of distant lions. It is pure magic and as a result I now paint only the African wildlife I have come to know through hours of observation and sketching."

As a self-taught artist, Nicholls has developed her own style and has discovered the intricacies of her wonderful and demanding watercolor medium by trial and error.

Nicholls writes a quarterly newsletter featuring her latest paintings, exhibits, slide talks and trips to Africa.

Support for Conservation

Even before Nicholls began to paint she was intrigued by the natural world and interested in conservation issues, but as a professional artist she now has a means of raising funds for conservation on a much more personal level by donating her artwork.

"There are so many deserving projects and conservation groups that deciding which ones to support can be a daunting task," says Nicholls. "As an African wildlife artist I have a special relationship with the southern African region which I know best. I try to support small, grass roots conservation groups focusing on that region, especially those which involve local communities, giving them a stake in the future of the wildlife and habitat that surround them."

Donating artwork is one means of raising funds and Nicholls frequently donates pieces for silent auctions at fundraising events. Raising awareness, however, is just as important and in 2005 she began a series of slide talks about southern Africa which she hopes will help to highlight some of the misconceptions held about Africa, its people and its wildlife. Nicholls charges a fee for the talks and donate 75% to the Painted Dog Conservation project based in Zimbabwe.

About the Painted Dog Conservation Project (PDC)

The Painted Dog Conservation Project (PDC) is based near Dete, just outside Hwange National Park and was established by Gregory Rasmussen in 1989. Since the project began, dog numbers in Zimbabwe have increased from 400 to 700, a considerable achievement given the current lack of tourism and declining dog numbers in most other African countries. PDC places a huge emphasis on community conservation, employing local staff (55 full-time currently) and educating local children in addition to providing anti-poaching patrols, rehabilitation facilities and conducting research. The project is primarily funded by European zoos and private donors and has achieved tangible results working under difficult circumstances. Thanks to PDC, Painted Dogs have become a symbol of national pride in Zimbabwe and are now the number one species that visitors want to see on safari.

About the Painted Dog (*Lycaon pictus*)

- 300,000 – estimated dog numbers in 1900.
- 3,000 – estimated dog numbers today (exterminated from 25 of the 39 countries which were formerly part of their range).
- Average range 550-800 square miles (up to 1500 square miles in the Kalahari Desert, Botswana).
- Speed: 37-40 miles per hour (in bursts).
- Average height at shoulder 24-31 inches.

- Average weight 37-80 kilograms.
- Lifespan 11 years in the wild.
- Painted Dogs are unusual in that it is the males in a pack which are genetically related.
- Females disperse from natal pack at 3 years of age in order to breed.
- Pack contains one dominant male and usually only one breeding female.
- One litter per year is normal although there may be a second if the first litter dies.
- 60-80 days gestation period. Average litter size 7-10 pups (up to 14/15 possible).
- One third of pups die in first year. Pups leave den at 3 months, mature at 1 year and become sexually active at 12-18 months.
- Male: female ratio in pack is 6:4.

About Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is located in central southern Africa, bordered by Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana and has an area 150,760 square miles. Populated by just over 12 million people, mostly from the Shona and Ndebele tribal groups, the country is slightly larger than Montana and contains an astounding array of wildlife species and diverse habitats.

Hwange National Park is Zimbabwe's largest national park, covering nearly 6,000 square miles in the north-west of the country. This former royal hunting ground of Ndebele chiefs is the proposed study area for "Painting the Painted Dogs" and has recorded an impressive 107 animal species and over 400 species of birds. Hwange National Park is largely unfenced, allowing the free movement of game into adjacent forest reserves and neighboring Botswana. The park is home to an Elephant herd numbered at more than 30,000, all the African big cats and a huge variety of rare species including the Brown Hyaena, Sable and Roan Antelopes, Lappetfaced Vulture and Stanley's Bustard. Northern areas of the park contain Teak and Commiphora (corkwood) woodlands while the southern two-thirds of the park consist of Kalahari scrubland.

The World Heritage site of Victoria Falls or Mosi-oa-Tunya ("the Smoke that Thunders") is situated on the border with Zambia, 2 hours drive north-west of Hwange National Park. A mile wide and 300 feet deep, the falls are an awe-inspiring sight. Victoria Falls town will be visited on a regular basis to send updates.

Lake Kariba resulted from the damming of the Zambezi River in 1958. Starvation Island, at the northern end of the lake near Matusadona National Park, earned its name because resident antelope struggle to find sufficient food during the dry season. Painted Dog Conservation Project (PDC) uses the island to rehabilitate injured dogs prior to their release in protected areas on the mainland. A visit will be planned if PDC has dogs located on the island during the expedition.

For More Information:

Worldwide Nature Artists Group: www.natureartists.com
WNAG Flag Expeditions Program: www.natureartists.com/flagprogram
Alison Nicholls – Nature Artist: www.natureartists.com/alison_nicholls.asp
Painted Dog Conservation Project: www.painteddog.org

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