

# The Devoted Nanny

**Marlice van Vuuren** runs a wildlife rehabilitation centre on her farm near Windhoek in Namibia. It is called *Nla'ankuse* which, in Bushman language, means "God is watching over us".

In early October 2007, she received a telephone call from one of the beef farmers in an area some 700km north of *Nla'ankuse*. He said a pack of African wild dogs had come onto his farm, that they had already killed 24 of his cattle and that he had managed to shoot 7 of them. The farmer said he felt sure the pack had a den somewhere and that there were probably pups in the den.

About a week later, Marlice received a second call. This time the farmer told her he had found the den, that he had managed to smoke out three pups and the 'nanny' wild dog in whose care the pups had been left. He had trapped them in a cage as they emerged from the entrance of their den.

Marlice jumped into her jeep and travelled the 700km to the site of the den where she found three more pups still inside. She brought all six together with their nanny back to *Nla'ankuse*. "The pups were tiny," said Marlice, "not more than a month old."

People who have studied wild dogs, know that the pack always leaves an older member behind to look after the pups when they go off hunting. The pack then comes back from the hunt and regurgitates food for the pups and 'nanny'. This time, however, no member of the pack had returned from the hunt. They had been killed by the beef farmer. Marlice said it was clear that they hadn't eaten for a week. Marlice also said that the nanny was in a very emaciated condition and she estimated that

she was probably about 15 years old. "Her teeth were completely worn down," she said.

Marlice and husband Rudi placed the wild dog nanny and the pups in an enclosure at *Nla'ankuse* and with food and water, they immediately began to gain condition, although the nanny was old and remained emaciated.

Then, two weeks later, said Marlice, "one of our workers left the gate open and without us knowing, the nanny ran off, taking all six of the babies with her."

Immediately, the *Nla'ankuse* trackers formed a search party. "Our trackers saw that the nanny and the pups were heading north, back towards the site of the den 700km away. She was busy returning the pups to their mother," explained Marlice. From the spoor, Marlice and the trackers could see that the nanny was carrying the pups in turns along the way. "We tracked them for kilometre after kilometre and then the rain came and wiped out every trace. The next day, the search party set out again.

"On the third day, we found the tracks and once again we felt we were getting close. The nanny had covered 100km in three days, carrying the pups in turn.

"Then again that night it rained and we lost every trace of them. Eventually, we realised that we had lost them and all I could do was alert the farmers in the district to watch out for them and call us if they were spotted."

Three days later, Marlice was awakened at 2am by the yelps of baby wild dogs. She woke Rudi and



together they went outside with a spotlight. What they found brought them both to tears. The nanny had brought all six of her charges safely back into the enclosure at *Nla'ankuse*. Her emaciated body lay at the entrance of the enclosure. She was dead.

"I believe that she realized that she was not going to make the 700km journey back to the den," said Marlice. "So she turned around and brought them back to a place of safety where she knew they would be fed and cared for."

**This issue of Animal Voice is dedicated to Nanny African Wild Dog whose devotion, self-sacrifice and immense wisdom humbles every one of us who hears this story. And we honour Marlice and Rudi van Vuuren and the trackers and caring people at *Nla'ankuse* for providing a safe haven for so many victims of the meat farming business. After rehabilitation, most of the wild animals at *Nla'ankuse* are expertly reintroduced back into the wild.**

Contact details for *Nla'ankuse* are: website:

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