

Rescued wild dogs adapt to living free



One of the four wild dogs that were released on the Okonjima Private Nature Reserve.



Two of the four wild dogs take a nap in the shade.

• **TANJA BAUSE**

FOUR wild dogs have been released into the 16 000-hectare Okonjima Private Nature Reserve to live as wild animals although they were hand-reared by people.

In 2005 seven three-week-old wild dog pups were rescued near Otjinene after the rest of the pack was poisoned. The pups' den was dug up and they were found barely alive.

Dave Houghton and Carla Conradie of the AfriCat Foundation were called for help. They immediately rushed to Okakarara and fetched the puppies. An Otjiwarongo veterinarian put the pups on a drip to build up their strength before they were taken to the AfriCat Foundation.

One of the male pups had to be put down because his bones were so weak that he broke two of his legs.

When the pups were about two months old they got a bacterial infection which killed one of the little females.

Houghton and Conradie fed the puppies

every two hours for about four months until they were finally put into an enclosure and all direct human contact was stopped. They still saw the dogs each morning and were greeted with friendly yelps but there was no more touching or

stroking. This was done for two reasons: the playful bites of the pups were becoming too painful and the dogs were now old enough to become more independent.

Last year in September Mouse, one of the males, got sick and died. It was

later discovered that he suffered from haemorrhagic gastritis and congenital kidney failure.

After his death Raine, Ruby, Ricki and Spot, the only male left, became an even closer-knit family unit. Spot had a vasectomy to prevent breeding

with his sisters.

In September the four were released on the Okonjima Private Nature Reserve where they have adapted quite well. They have to date killed two kudus, a very old warthog, a wild donkey and a scrub-hare.



Photos: Tanja Bause

ON THE RUN ... The wild dogs come running down the road to greet the vehicle.