



The Killer Wolves of Maiwand

Afghanistan: In Maiwand, South of Kandahar, Cordaid Beneficiaries Live in Fear of their Lives

Jude Barrand Reporting / Kandahar / July 2003

Mandozai Camp in Maiwand Province, an hour's drive southwest from Kandahar, is a sad, subdued place. In the past two weeks, two infants have been snatched in the night and killed by the packs of wolves that have started preying on children, as their other prey has become more scarce. Mandozai Camp is home to 156 families.

It's inhabitants are all Kuchis, (Afghanistan's nomadic people) who have lived in Registan Desert south of Kandahar for centuries herding their flocks of sheep north every summer for the high mountain pastures in Uruzgan and back down again in winter. That cyclical way of life, however, is almost completely finished for these people. The terrible drought of the past five years has devastated the desert's fragile ecosystem, and destroyed the grazing.

The Kuchis have gradually had to sell or eat their flocks to survive. This has had a knock on effect with the wolves. Previously they would have picked off the odd sheep. Now those flocks are gone, the wolves are moving in on the only other available food source; the camps themselves and the people who live in them.



Din Mohammad, a 70-year-old Kuchi sheep owner with 12 children and 36 grandchildren, says life in the camp is now a nightly terror.

"We are afraid of the wolves. They are very big, they come up to a man's waist. Yesterday a wolf bit a boy on the leg during the night, but the child struggled so the wolf snatched a sheep that was also in the tent. We launched a hunt party to get the sheep back, but by the time we found it, the wolves had devoured it. We have only sticks to defend ourselves, so we couldn't even kill the wolves. They just loped back to their desert lair. We are keeping vigil at night and we have posted watchmen, but we dare not sleep at night."

Local NGO, VARA is working in Mandozai Camp with Cordaid support to provide relief and livelihoods to the Kuchis from Registan. Mr Najmuhddin is VARA's director. His reaction was one of shock. "Wolves in the region are not a new phenomenon," he explains. "What is new, however, is that the wolves are targeting children."

All the attacks occurred between midnight and 4am. "We can hear them moving around outside the tent, says Din Mohammad. "In the morning we can see their tracks. Paw prints as big as my hand." Mandozai Camp is one of a cluster of 11 camps strung out along a dry river bed. All the camps are inhabited by Kuchis who have been stranded on the desert's edge by the drought. More than five and a half thousand people with no means of supporting themselves in a place where no water flows and temperatures reach 50 C.



"Our livelihoods are destroyed," says Ghulam Khan, one of the camp elders. "Five years ago the average family in this camp had 200 sheep. A rich family has 500 to 1,000 sheep. Now I swear by my life I don't have a single animal left. The drought has taken them all. What little we have left, the wolves are devouring."

Back in Kandahar, the wolf attacks were reported to a surprised Agriculture and Livestock Department. The head of the local government office, Mr Saleh Mohammad Ushdan said it was the first they had heard of any such attacks. "This is very sad. I shall report the matter at the Kandahar meeting of all local government offices. I will also propose a cull of the wolves in the area."

In Mandozai, the villagers remain very afraid, however. "We need guns to defend ourselves," says Din Mohammad. "Until we can do that we are sitting ducks for the wolves. We know where they are. We have tracked them back to their dens. There are three different packs. The largest pack has 9 wolves in it. We just hope we can get someone to do something about their night-time attacks before we lose another child."

Cordaid and local partner VARA are working with all 11 camps in the Kalai Shamir Riverbed to bring the Kuchi people the chance of a new life. Vocation Training Classes have been set up for men and women. There are masonry, carpentry, and veterinary training classes for the men and tailoring, embroidery, carpet weaving and poultry raising classes for the women.



Cordaid has also funded wells, water troughs, sanitation, tents, food and blankets for the villagers of Mandozai and the 10 other camps. A mobile health clinic, run by another local Cordaid partner, Ibn Sina, also visits the camps regularly.