

Pest management in NSW national parks

WILD DOGS

FACT SHEET



Pictured above: A wild dog in Wollemi National Park, photographed during DEC fauna surveys in 2005. Photo, H Achurch/DEC

History

Wild dogs in Australia include:

- dingoes, which originated from the wolves of Asia and the Middle East and arrived in Australia about 4000 years ago
- feral dogs – domestic dogs living in the wild
- hybrids, the result of cross-breeding between dingoes and feral dogs.

Distribution in NSW today

Populations of wild dogs, including dingoes, mainly occur along the Great Dividing Range, coastal hinterlands, and in north-western NSW. The proportion of dingoes in these populations is unknown.

Impact on the environment and agriculture

Wild dogs cause substantial losses of livestock for sheep graziers: up to 30% in some areas. They prey on native mammals and birds and may also compete with native predators, such as quolls, for food and other resources. In rare cases, aggressive wild dogs may threaten or attack park visitors.

Breeding between dingoes and feral dogs is one of the biggest threats to remaining native dingo populations. Wild dogs may also suppress other pests such as feral goats and rabbits.

Management by NPWS

The approach endorsed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), now part of the Department of Environment and Conservation, rural lands protection boards (RLPBs) and the NSW Pest Animal Council balances preventing attacks on livestock from wild dogs moving out of reserves and conserving dingoes in the core areas of some national parks. This approach is incorporated into the Rural Lands Protection Act.

NPWS identifies local problem areas and works with other landholders to develop cooperative wild dog control plans. RLPB figures suggest stock losses are declining in some of these areas. For example, stock losses have dropped by around 75% per year in the Wee Jasper area and by 65% in the Glen Innes area between 2002 and 2005.

Wherever wild dogs are a problem in national parks, NPWS has programs in place to control them. NPWS monitors and removes aggressive dingoes from around campsites in national parks, such as Myall Lakes, Yuraygir and Crowdy Bay, where they have become accustomed to people.

Campers are encouraged not to feed dingoes.

NPWS also works with NSW Police and local landholders to prevent illegal pig hunting in national parks because it often leads to the release or escape of hunting dogs that can become feral.

Control techniques

Ground-baiting using buried 1080 meat baits is the most effective control option and the most widely used. It allows

baits to be placed where they are most likely to be found by wild dogs and reduces their uptake by native animals. Dog trappers and shooters will then often target bait-shy or rogue dogs. Aerial baiting is used in some parks where the terrain is inaccessible or other methods have not reduced wild dog attacks on stock to an acceptable level.

Dog-proof exclusion fencing is used in some areas.

SOME NPWS WILD DOG CONTROL PROGRAMS

Southern NSW

In response to reports of wild dog attacks, NPWS has embarked on NSW's most extensive and intensive wild dog control program in and around Kosciuszko National Park, especially Byadbo Wilderness Area in the south-eastern part of the park. The program covers an area of approximately 70,000 hectares. In some areas, baits are laid up to 25 kilometres into Byadbo. NPWS also employs up to six contract dog trappers and three permanent staff dedicated to the control program. Monitoring of sand pads has indicated a significant reduction in wild dog activity over the duration of the program.

Brindabella and Wee Jasper Valley Cooperative Wild Dog Control Plan

Established in July 2001, this plan has been so successful that it is now being used as a model for further cooperative wild dog control plans in other areas.

Implementation of the plan has reduced stock losses by an average of 75% a year.

Northern Tablelands

In the Glen Innes and Tenterfield areas, NPWS is working with other government agencies, the Northern New England RLPB and more than 150 landholders in a large-scale control program. It involves:

- two ground-baiting programs a year
- aerial baiting on private lands and in Guy Fawkes River National Park
- a dog-trapper funded by NPWS and the Northern New England RLPB with over 100 dogs successfully trapped.

Between 2002 and 2005, the program resulted in a reduction of 65% in attacks by wild dogs on stock in the area.

In the Armidale and Walcha areas, NPWS undertakes three

ground-baiting programs each year and supports trappers contracted to the RLPBs. Between January and September 2005, around 60 problem dogs were successfully trapped and removed from these areas. Aerial baiting is also conducted in Oxley Wild Rivers, Cottan-Bimbang and Nowendoc national parks, and Tuggolo Creek Nature Reserve.

Sturt National Park

Strategic ground-baiting in conjunction with the dingo fence provides a buffer zone around Sturt National Park. Trapping and shooting are also used. NPWS is committed to responding within 36 hours if a neighbour reports an attack on stock by wild dogs from the park. However, since 1998, only one landowner has reported an attack. The near absence of such reports, coupled with the reports of an increase in wild dog numbers elsewhere in western NSW, is evidence the local program is working.

Llamas guard against wild dogs in the Upper Murray

As members of the Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group, NPWS and the Hume RLPB have initiated a trial using llamas to guard against wild dog attacks on lambs. Six llamas have been purchased and provided to neighbouring farmers for two years, after which the farmers have the option of buying or returning the llamas. Promising initial results indicate that lambing losses to wild dogs and foxes have decreased where the llamas are on patrol.

Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre

NPWS is committed to assisting and supporting the establishment of a demonstration site on the Northern Tablelands to evaluate new initiatives for controlling wild dogs as part of the work by the Australian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre.