

Wild Dogs in the Australian Alps

AUSTRALIAN



ALPS

FACTSHEET



Wild dogs come in all colours: sandy yellow to black, white and brindle.

Photo: Rob Hunt



Many wild dogs have a high proportion of dingo genes.

Photo: Rob Hunt

What is a wild dog?

Wild dogs occur in low numbers throughout the Australian Alps. Though not often seen, they can sometimes be heard howling at night. Wild dogs include dingoes, domestic dogs-run-wild, and hybrids of the two.

Dingoes were introduced to Australia around 4,000 years ago, gradually replacing the Thylacine as Australia's largest land predator. Domestic dogs-run-wild are dogs that have escaped, been abandoned or deliberately released over the last 200 years and have survived or bred in the wild.

Wild dog profile

Appearance: On average adult wild dogs weigh between 15 and 25 kilograms. There is great variation in coat colour from sandy yellow to black, white and brindle.

Behaviour: Wild dogs are social animals, they live in small packs and are mostly active about dawn and dusk. They make dens in hollow logs, caves or wombat burrows. Wild dogs can hunt successfully alone or in packs depending on the type of prey. An average home range or territory would be 100 square kilometres depending on the available resources. Typically, when wild dogs are removed from an area, others will gradually replace them.

Breeding: Dingoes breed only once each year. Domestic dogs-run-wild have the potential to breed twice a year, depending on the availability of food, water and

shelter. Breeding occurs between April and September. Litter size varies with an average of five pups per litter.

Food: Wild dogs are at the top of the food chain. They hunt and scavenge native wildlife, particularly larger mammals such as kangaroos and wallabies. Wild dogs also prey on feral goats, pigs and rabbits and, if in their home range, domestic livestock.

Impacts of wild dogs

As top-order predators, wild dogs hunt native and feral animals. They help suppress other introduced predators, such as foxes, maintaining healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. However, wild dogs can cause losses of livestock on grazing lands and can also spread disease, such as hydatids (tapeworms).

Management and control of wild dogs

Government agencies aim to prevent attacks on livestock from wild dogs moving out of public land. Most wild dogs in or near grazing areas are controlled through a combination of poison baiting, trapping and shooting.

To get the best possible control results it is essential to coordinate district-wide programs using a number of control methods. Public and private land managers cooperate to reduce wild dog numbers within defined areas of private and public bushland adjoining grazing land.



Never touch wild dog or fox scats as they often contain hydatid eggs
Photo: Rob Hunt



Wild dog pups often stay around a pack for up to twelve months
Photo: David Jenkins

The Australian Alps national parks have a Wild Dog Working Group. It is a forum for cooperation and information sharing. The Working Group also supports proactive research and best practice across jurisdictions.

Wherever wild dogs are a problem to national park neighbours, NSW National Parks and Wildlife, Parks Victoria and ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands and other government agencies are working to control them using a range of techniques.

What can you do?

Never feed wild dogs – their natural fear of humans is easily lost if wild dogs are rewarded by scraps of food left around campsites, picnic areas or fishing holes. Please remove all your waste from national parks and reserves. Always secure your picnic or camping food and do not bring pets into national parks.

Never interfere with bait stations or traps – there are usually signs that indicate wild dog baits are in the vicinity.

Look after your pets – responsible dog ownership includes making sure dogs are secured at night and under control at all times. Keep your dog away from animal carcasses, where they risk exposure to hydatids.

What to do if you see a wild dog

Incidents of wild dogs interacting with people are rare. Wild dogs are naturally inquisitive and may follow people, though they normally keep their distance.

Protect yourself from wild dogs – never approach a wild dog or call one to come to you and never tempt them with food. If you observe a wild dog, remain in a group and watch quietly from a distance. Do not touch scats as they may carry disease.

If you feel threatened by a wild dog – face the animal and calmly back away. Never run from a wild dog as this may encourage a chase. In the unlikely event of an attack, strike the animal with a stick or backpack.

Report threatening behaviour – information is gathered to monitor the incidence of wild dog and human interactions.

Scientific Research

Research across the Australian Alps is improving understanding about the ecology and habitat requirements of wild dogs as well as their movement patterns and other behaviours. Regular research continues into innovative control materials and techniques. This research assists land managers in their efforts to limit the impact of wild dogs upon domestic livestock.

For further information

In NSW visit: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au or phone 02 6299 2929.

In ACT visit: www.tams.act.gov.au or phone 13 22 81.

In Victoria visit: www.dpi.vic.gov.au or phone 13 61 86.

Wild Dog Wisdom

Wild dogs communicate with each other in many ways, including scent marking and howling.

Genetic studies show that many wild dogs have a high percentage of dingo genes.

The main threat to humans from wild dogs is the exposure to disease such as hydatids.

Breeding between dingoes and domestic dogs-run-wild is the biggest threat to pure dingo populations.