

# DINGO

This fact sheet contains information sourced from members of Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers, members of other groups, independent advice, and research.

## Australia's wild dog (*Canis familiaris dingo*)

Eye-catching, curious and sometimes dangerous, the dingo is a common sight across Australia.

The dingo — Australia's only native dog — is thought to have descended from a family of wild Asian dogs.

Introduced to Australia about 4000–6000 years ago, dingoes probably found their way to Australia through trading between Aboriginal people and Indonesians fishing in our waters.



Today, dingoes are found in many parts of Australia. (note: Unfortunately, many dogs which are referred to as dingoes are in fact crossed with uncontrolled roaming domestic dogs. Contact your local trapper of feral animals or your local council for information on how to manage feral animals)

Dingoes are Australia's largest meat-eater (carnivore) and hunt many other animals such as the kangaroo. The dingo is thought to have contributed to the mainland extinction of the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) through increased competition for food.

Unable to bark, the dingo howls at night to keep the family group together and to warn others to stay away.

Watch out — dingoes can bite. A dingo is a wild animal and can be dangerous when provoked.

### What does it look like?

A pure-bred adult dingo, standing more than 60cm high and weighing about 15kg, is slightly smaller than a German shepherd. Dingoes are naturally lean, with large ears permanently pricked and tails with a white tip. Although mainly sandy-yellow in colour, some dingoes are black and tan. A dingo's colour is determined by where it lives. Golden yellow dingoes are found in sandy areas while darker black and tan dingoes are found in forests.

### Where does it live?

From harsh deserts to lush rainforests, the highly adaptable dingo is found in every habitat and state of Australia except Tasmania. Dingoes favour edges of forests next to grasslands. In deserts, access to drinking water determines where the animal can live.

### What does it eat?

The dingo is not a fussy eater, and will search widely for food and eat whatever it finds. Dingoes search for food alone, although they live in a family group which protects its territory from other dingoes.

Dingoes hunt mainly at night. Depending on the size of the prey, they hunt alone or in packs.

Their main meals of choice are Australia's small native mammals, although domestic animals and some farm stock are also on the menu. This makes the animal unpopular with farmers.

### **Where is it seen?**

Dingoes are fairly common and can be seen in national parks. Fraser Island is still one of the best places to see dingoes.

### **Protection**

In Queensland the dingo is protected in national parks and other protected areas. Still widespread, the dingo is not endangered.

While considered a pest, (mostly by farmers) the dingo is an important predator, helping to keep a healthy balance in natural environments.

### **How can you help?**

People travelling through dingo territory has increased contact with people, turning many dingoes into a public nuisance. Some dingoes have even had to be destroyed.

Attracting and feeding dingoes makes the animals less fearful of people and dependent on hand-outs. Hunting-skills decline and they may become aggressive towards people who don't feed them. This has become a problem on Fraser Island.

To protect the dingo, follow these guidelines.

- Never feed them. If dingoes are hand-fed, they become dependent on people. It also upsets the delicate balance between predators and prey. When visitors stop feeding, the dingo has to cope with the loss of this unnatural food source and their reduced hunting skills.
- Lock away food in strong lockable containers or your car.
- Secure all your rubbish in bins provided or your car when camping in places where dingoes may be present.
- Bury fish offal at least 30cm deep in the sand below high tide to discourage dingoes from scavenging.
- Keep your tent wide open so dingoes can see there's nothing to take.

### **Living safely with it**

Naturally curious, the dingo will occasionally approach humans but should be treated with absolute caution. Remember, this is a wild animal.

### **For your safety**

- **Always stay close to your children!**
- Avoid getting too close to a dingo. If you try to befriend, feed or play with dingoes, you could get bitten.
- Let dingoes find their own food. When hand-fed, dingoes can become aggressive.