

## Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*)

### Conservation Status

**International: Vulnerable** (*IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*)

**Victoria: Threatened** (*Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*)

In 2008 the Dingo was declared a "Threatened Species" in Victoria. The Dingo is also protected in Federal National Parks, World Heritage areas, Aboriginal reserves, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. However, the dingo is a declared pest throughout much of its remaining range, and landholders are obliged to manage populations.



### Description

Dingoes were introduced to Australia from South-east Asia between 3 500 years to 11 000 years ago. As Australia's largest predator they occupy an important ecological niche that is important for maintaining the balance of animals within ecosystems. They help suppress populations of feral animals, and findings of research funded by FAME suggest that they help maintain populations of endangered species by excluding introduced feral predators like cats and foxes.

The Dingo is a medium built dog of great nimbleness and agility with a head and body length of 860 - 980 mm and tail length of 260 - 380 mm. Adults generally weigh between 10kgs and 20kgs. Although Dingoes are typically ginger in colour with white feet, chest and tail tip, they can also be sable, black, and white. The outward appearance also varies considerably from the sinewy, single-coated dog of the tropical far north, to the fox-like, thick double-coated dog of the colder southern mountain regions, or the smaller, finer dog of the arid regions.

They are distinguished from domesticated dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) by their short coats, erect ears, characteristic skull shape and teeth and, most importantly an annual, rather than biannual, breeding cycle.

### Behaviour

Dingoes are highly intelligent, strongly individualistic, affectionate, but cautious animals. They are highly skilled, natural predators with highly developed senses of sight, scent and hearing. They are strongly territorial and form lifetime bonds with family, either Dingo or Human. Cat-like in their agility, Dingoes use their paws like hands, and like to survey their surroundings from a height. Although they seldom bark, Dingoes have a wide variety of vocalisations from a howl to the high pitched yodel, yelp, crow and purr.

### Distribution

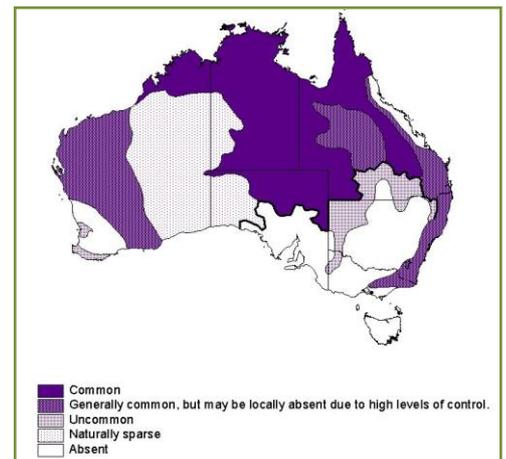
Historically, found throughout mainland Australia. The dingo is now extinct in much of the sheep and cereal production zones of eastern and southern Australia because of habitat modification and the success of early poisoning campaigns.

### Diet

Dingoes are predominantly carnivorous, but will eat a wide variety of foods including plant material and insects.

### Threats

The two main threats to the dingo are hybridisation with domestic dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and pest animal eradication programs, conducted by state governments at the behest of the farming industry. Scientists believe that there will be no pure dingoes in the wild within 20 years. These two threats are interconnected. Dingoes within intact packs are not very likely to breed with domestic dogs. Whereas packs that are disrupted as a result of poisoning and trapping programs, are more likely to hybridise.



Adapted from Fleming *et al.* 2001

### Conservation Measures

The dingo has been nominated as a threatened species in the State of NSW, where it is presently regarded as a pest animal. Several Dingo conservation societies have instigated captive breeding programs. Sadly a major obstacle to the restoration of the Dingo to the wild is that of human fear and prejudice.

### References & More Information

Dingo CARE Network. <http://www.dingo.org.au>

Dingo Sanctuary. [http://www.dingosanctuary.com.au/about\\_dingoes.htm](http://www.dingosanctuary.com.au/about_dingoes.htm)

Fleming P., Corbett L., Harden B. and Thomson P. 2001. *Managing the impacts of dingoes and other wild dogs*. Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra.