



## Frequently Asked Questions: Wild dog biology, behaviour & ecology

### What's the difference between a dingo and a wild dog?

Wild dogs and dingoes are the same species and will readily breed with each other. Studies have shown that there are more hybrids in Eastern Australia and hybridisation occurs more quickly around larger settlements (see Distribution of pure dingoes and dingo-dog hybrids in Australia).

### Do dingoes and wild dogs have the same colouring?

Yes. Dingoes are predominantly sandy or ginger in colour but black and tan and white also commonly occur. Hybrids can be any combination of these colours as well as those seen in domestic dogs such as patches and brindle colouration. You cannot distinguish between a dingo and other wild dogs simply by looks alone. Only DNA testing will verify the genetic makeup of a wild dog.

### What effect have domestic dogs had on wild dog populations?

Since European settlement, there has been continuous cross breeding between dingoes and domestic dogs and also among hybrids. Domestic dogs have increased the genetic diversity amongst wild dog populations. As a result, there will be differences in body shape, coat colour, breeding cycle and behaviour of individuals within wild dog populations.

### What time of year do wild dogs mate?

Traditionally, dingoes mated once per year in autumn to early winter. However, with the increase in hybridisation, breeding occurs over a longer period of the year.



*Dingoes can be tan, black, white or ginger. You cannot distinguish between a dingo and other wild dogs by looks alone. Image: Peter West*

### Can wild dogs breed twice a year?

Yes, they can breed twice a year based on information on domestic dog breeds but this has not been recorded or observed in the wild. It is unlikely given the nutritional requirements of gestation and lactation that a bitch would be able to raise two litters of pups in a year. Given hybridisation and the longer breeding period, it is possible that pups will be observed throughout the year. This is not as a result of one bitch breeding but more likely to be more than one bitch breeding or having a litter of pups at different times of the year.

### How many pups can they have?

Wild dogs can have between 1-10 pups but on average, they have 5. The litter size will depend on resource availability and the condition of the bitch at time of mating. Similarly, survival of the pups will vary depending on local conditions and food availability. What structures do wild dogs use for den sites? Wild dogs commonly use hollow logs, caves, overhangs, timber piles, burrows of other animals such as wombats, and fox dens. They may also use man made features such as water pipes and culverts.

### **Is there any evidence that wild dogs are getting bigger?**

The average weight of a wild dog is between 12 and 20kgs depending on sex, landscape and hybridisation but individuals over 20kg are likely to be the exception and not the rule.

There is little evidence to suggest that wild dogs are getting bigger although there is a significant amount of variation between body weights of populations of dogs depending on their environment. There are also roaming domestic dogs that cause impacts with the largest recorded being a 72kg cross breed.

### **Is there any evidence that wild dogs are becoming more aggressive?**

There is no doubt that some wild dogs can be aggressive by nature however there is no evidence that hybridisation is resulting in more aggression. Given that wild dogs are becoming more common in urban and public areas, the opportunity for aggressive interactions between wild dogs and humans is becoming more frequent. Aggression is often the result of people feeding wild dogs. There is no evidence that pure dingoes are more or less aggressive than hybrid dingoes.

### **Do wild dogs always live in packs and how big are they?**

Social groups of wild dogs are very flexible and can vary from a single breeding pair to broader groups of dogs containing multiple individuals of various ages. The social structure varies depending on resource availability, habitat and population density. Social group structures are maintained through territorial behaviour and may diminish if resources are readily available and competition is reduced.

### **Do wild dogs only eat wildlife?**

Wild dogs are generalist predators and will eat wildlife and livestock if available. They will also scavenge on carrion and attack domestic pets from time to time. Wild dogs can kill more animals than they need for food, which is referred to as surplus killing.

Invasive Animals Ltd has taken care to validate the accuracy of the information at the date of publication [March 2015]. This information has been prepared with care but it is provided "as is", without warranty of any kind, to the extent permitted by law.

### **Wild dogs have a role to play in the environment so we should not be controlling them**

Wild dogs have a variety of roles in the environment. These roles can be beneficial, neutral or harmful, and can change from time to time. Wild dogs are controlled to reduce the impacts on livestock and other animals. Balancing the roles of wild dogs from environmental and production perspectives is an important challenge for land managers.

### **Are there fewer dingoes in Australia since European settlement?**

No. There are probably more wild dogs, including dingoes, now in Australia than ever, given the ample food (e.g. rabbits, pigs, kangaroos and livestock) and water resources created since European settlement. However, in some sheep-grazing areas wild dog populations have been significantly reduced. Overall, this means that wild dog numbers have increased but the proportion of pure dingoes is decreasing through hybridisation with other dogs.

Pure dingoes are still found in most parts of Australia, although there are fewer in places with the longest history of European settlement.

### **More information**

For more information on wild dog behaviour and ecology visit [www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/wild-dog/](http://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/wild-dog/)



*Wild dogs are generalist predators and will eat wildlife, livestock and scavenge on carrion. Image: Chris Thomas*