



Frequently Asked Questions: Wild dog impacts

What are the impacts of wild dogs?

Wild dogs can have positive and negative impacts on livestock and threatened species. These impacts can be economic, environmental or social. If wild dogs are killing livestock or koalas, they are likely to be considered a problem. If wild dogs are killing foxes, feral cats or rabbits, they are likely to be considered more favourably. Wild dogs can have positive impacts in some situations, but may present negative impacts when the situation changes. Management of wild dogs to balance these positive and negative impacts is an important challenge for public and private land managers.

Are wild dogs found across Australia and do they have impacts across the country?

Dingoes and other wild dogs are distributed across most of the country except for the grain growing areas of western Victoria, central NSW, South Eastern SA and the south west of Western Australia. Wild dogs cause a variety of impacts across their distribution from attacks on livestock in rural areas to killing domestic pets in peri-urban and urban areas.

Why are wild dogs considered a pest and what impact do they have on agriculture?

Wild dogs are a declared pest in most states due to their impacts on livestock. Wild dogs can cause significant damage to livestock production enterprises, particularly sheep and goat producers, through predation and disease transfer. For example, the estimated cost of damage in Queensland in 2008-9 due to wild dogs was approximately \$67 million dollars in stock loss, attacks, disease and control activities.

What do wild dogs eat?

The vast majority of their diet comprises mammals such as livestock, kangaroos and wallabies, rabbits, bandicoots, possums and mice. However, wild dogs also eat birds, reptiles, insects, plants and rubbish. In fact, wild dogs will eat whatever is available in the place they live, and often switch between different food sources depending on what is available. Wild dogs can have negative impacts on populations of the animals they eat.



Image: Graham Wienert

Do wild dogs kill for fun?

Wild dogs often kill animals that they do not intend to eat, and they often kill more animals than they need to for food alone. This is called 'surplus killing' and is a common behaviour of many predators around the world. The reasons for this could be related to learning and development or their innate drive to hunt. Wild dogs are 'programed' to chase and kill things that run away, so many surplus killings might occur simply because wild dogs see something fleeing. This is often what happens between wild dogs and sheep. Domestic cats often do the same thing around the home, killing wildlife not because they need to, but because it is innate predator behaviour.

What negative impacts can wild dogs have on native wildlife?

Wild dogs primarily prey on native wildlife and this predation can drive some populations to the brink of extinction, particularly if that species is suffering from other threatening processes. For example, where urbanisation, habitat fragmentation or drought forces koalas to spend more time on the ground moving between trees, wild dogs can have greater impacts on their numbers. The impact on local wildlife can be worsened when wild dog densities are higher than normal. High dog numbers can also potentially threaten or displace more common species due to an increased risk of predation. Some individual dogs can also become specialist predators of a particular species and can at times persecute a small population of native animals until there are few left in that locality.

Why are sheep and goats so susceptible to wild dog attack?

Maintaining a viable sheep and goat enterprise is almost impossible when wild dogs are present. These small livestock animals are susceptible because they are a good size for a wild dogs to attack and because of the way they respond. When sheep and goats see a wild dog, they usually bleat, form a mob, circle, break and run. Whether a wild dog is hungry or not, this fleeing behaviour instinctively triggers a response from the dog to chase and attack. A wild dog can attack many individual sheep or goats as they break from the circling mob. These individuals are often uneaten, and left maimed and wounded. Unless wild dogs are controlled or physically kept away from sheep and goats, attacks will be ongoing and grazing small livestock is no longer viable.

Do wild dogs kill cattle?

Yes. Calves, weaners and adult cattle are all at risk of being attacked by wild dogs. Wild dogs can certainly have major economic impacts on cattle production enterprises under the right conditions, particularly on calf production. The risk wild dogs pose to cattle may be influenced by the availability of prey and other food sources. Wild dogs also transmit parasites and diseases to cattle that can be economically costly for cattle industries.

When are wild dogs good for cattle enterprises?

Wild dogs can also kill animals that compete with cattle for forage, such as kangaroos. Wild dogs can suppress kangaroo numbers and one of the outcomes of wild dog management in cattle country may be an increase in kangaroo numbers. If the abundance of kangaroos increases significantly after wild dog control then they should also be controlled to manage total grazing pressure. In regions of mixed livestock enterprises, no wild dogs can be tolerated because of the sheep and goats.

Are wild dogs a risk to people?

Individuals and groups of wild dogs can be dangerous to children and adults, but most of the time they are not a threat. In urban areas people fear for the safety of their children when wild dogs attack their pets or are regularly seen around their properties. Wild dogs tend to present a greater public risk in places where they are being intentionally fed, or in urban areas where pets and other food resources encourage closer encounters between wild dogs and people. Like any wild animal, wild dogs should be approached with caution and treated with respect. People may be directly affected by disease infections transmitted by wild dogs (eg



Image: Darren Marshall

hydatids). These infections can be contracted from exposure to wild dog faeces in public places and on private property.

What other impacts do wild dogs have on people and communities?

Attacks on livestock and domestic pets are extremely distressing and many graziers and farmers who are faced with the constant threat of wild dogs attacking their livestock can become depressed, impacting on their family life. In addition, research has shown that landholders experiencing wild dog impacts on their livestock suffer from emotional and psychological trauma similar to that of heart attack victims and survivors of major motor vehicle accidents. Rural communities also suffer as a result of forced enterprise change due to wild dog predation. Wild dog impacts on sheep production in some regions has resulted in diminished employment opportunities, loss of businesses, loss of services, and subsequent population decline in rural towns.

More information

For more information on wild dog impacts visit <http://www.pestsmart.org.au>.

Invasive Animals Ltd has taken care to validate the accuracy of the information at the date of publication [April 2016]. This information has been prepared with care but it is provided "as is", without warranty of any kind, to the extent permitted by law.