Wild dog investigations

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FOLLOWING the information gained during the expedition to the north of Nullarbor Plains in 1951, which indicated that dogs were moving along well defined "leads" on to the Plains from the direction of the Warburton Ranges, the Agriculture Protection Board authorised a further expedition by the Vermin Control Branch to endeavour to trace the origin of the migrations. Large sandhills had prevented the Nullarbor Plains expedition from following the "leads" as far north as planned.

It was decided to head from Laverton to the Warburton Ranges and then to travel as far south as possible following any recognisable indications of movements in an attempt to link up with the Nullarbor Plains "leads". At the same time an endeavour was to be made to check on the general wild dog and dingo situation in this remote area and to follow up suspected westerly migration routes from the Warburton Ranges towards Laverton and the pastoral districts to the north. Ear tags were taken for tagging any pups found in order to establish movements.

PERSONNEL

The party consisted of Mr. C. K. Blair, the Vermin Control Officer in charge of dogging operations in northern areas, Mr. V. R. Lloyd, the Government dogger from the area to the east and north of Laverton, and Mr. A. J. Carlisle, the Government dogger from the Nullarbor Plains. Three native "boys" from the Warburton Ranges Mission Station were attached to the party as guides while the expedition was to the east of the mission.

The party travelled in the special vehicles obtained by the Agriculture Protection Board for these expeditions, consisting of a 4-5 ton International truck to carry supplies and a Willys jeep for mobility. Mr. Carlisle took his motor cycle for "scouting" purposes. The truck travelled 2,230 miles and the jeep 2,879. No mechanical difficulties were encountered with either vehicle although over 1,000 miles of the travelling was over trackless country. A Traeger transceiver was carried to maintain contact by wireless with the Flying Doctor base at Kalgoorlie.

ROUTE TRAVERSED

From Laverton the expedition followed the track to the Mission Station. It took six days to traverse the 372 miles with spinifex, sandhills, granite outcrops and rough "breakaways" rendering travelling very slow. Numerous waterholes were located along the track and, as dog signs were seen at practically each one, baits were distributed in the vicinity.

After leaving the Mission, the party travelled easterly to establish a base at Mt. Eveline (35 miles east of the Mission). From here exploratory journeys were made by means of the jeep and the motor cycle to the east, north and south, near Mt. Squires, Mt. Blythe, Mt. Ranford, Barrow Hill and Winburn Rocks. The most easterly point reached near Lightning Rock was 70 miles from the Mission and about 70 miles west of the junction of the South Aus-
country could be seen extending from the north-west and then south-westerly towards Simpson Hill.

The party travelled northwards through the Mission and up Elder Creek to Granite Springs (20 miles north-west of the Mission) where another base was made. Explorations were made in the jeep to the east and the west. Excellent "crab hole" grazing country with mulga, saltbush, soft spinifex and Flinders grass extended from Elder Creek. Dog tracks were plentiful, while rabbits, emus and kangaroos were seen. "Breakaway" country to the north-west and west towards the Todd Range, Sutherland Range and Lake Gillen, indicated a possible line of movement towards Lake Carnegie and Lake Wells in the west. Dead mulga prevented any further travelling in this direction.

Through the Mission on the homeward journey the expedition branched south-easterly from Weeljarra Rock Holes to investigate Simpson Hill and Pt. Read, which had been seen from the Townsend Ranges to the north-east. Pt. Read is about seven miles south-east of Simpson Hill which in turn is about 25 miles south-east of the Townsend Ranges. It was confirmed that the line of "breakaway" country through spinifex sandhills from the Townsend Ranges and Table Hill passed through these points and continued as far south-westerly as could be seen through binoculars. The "lead" was bordered by high spinifex sandhills.

Fig. 1.—Unusual rock formations in the "breakaway" country.
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Dog signs, both old and fresh, were observed at all points explored along the "lead" which pointed towards Mound Springs, 120 miles to the south, which is the most northerly point known of the Nullarbor Plains "lead".

Another exploratory trip was made on the return journey from near Lake Throssell to a spring five miles beyond Empress Springs about 40 miles north of the Mission track. A few dog tracks were seen.

Numerous dog tracks were seen along the Mission track all travelling in a westerly direction. Many of the dog signs were over the tyre tracks made on the outward journey. A large number of baits had been taken and several carcasses were found.

**GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

**Wild Dogs and Dingoes:** The observations made showed that a large breeding area exists in the vicinity of the Warburton Ranges extending easterly through excellent grazing country which abounds with game. The easterly limit is not known but indications were that it may reach into South Australia. The natives in the area spend some time hunting, particularly for the pups, which are relished as a tasty meal. The Mission gives food and other goods in exchange for the scalps. Up to 1,547 scalps (including 996 pup scalps) have been received from this area in one year. There is also a steady trickle of dingoes towards the west, south and south-west and apparently occasional mass migrations which might result from poor seasons, over-population, or some instinctive desire to travel.

The steady outward movement which was observed this year was occurring despite the fact that local conditions, as far as game and water were concerned were better in the Warburton Ranges than in the west and south. The "leads" observed following country favourable for travelling towards the south, between high spinifex sandhills might be assumed to link up with the "leads" located into the Nullarbor Plains. However, there is a large gap between the furthermost points reached by the expeditions and beyond which the sandhills prevented further investigations so it is impossible to be definite on this point.

The suspected westerly "lead" from Granite Springs towards the Todd Ranges and Lake Gillen may link up with a movement of dingoes from the east encountered by Dogger Lloyd when he destroyed thirteen dogs in one week in the vicinity of the Ernest Giles Range (a minor breeding area also) which is about 120 miles west and which is a route to Lake Carnegie and Lake Wells.

The south-westerly movement towards Lake Throssell and Laverton generally follows the Mission track.
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Observations made established the south-westerly movement but the other “leads” have yet to be proved. It was extremely unfortunate that, although many tracks were seen, no live pups were found owing to the inaccessibility of the “dens”. As a result it was impossible to carry out ear-tagging which might prove the direction and extent of migrations.

Rabbits: Innumerable rabbits were encountered in the favourable country east of the Mission and many warrens were seen. None was observed to the west. It is assumed that the rabbits came from South Australia in the east, although, of course, they may have moved from the south along the suspected “lead”. The rabbits would form an easy source of food for dingoes and foxes.

Foxes: The steady increase in the numbers of fox scalps coming from this area has been rather puzzling but it has now been explained by the presence of rabbits. Once again this seems to indicate a movement from South Australia.

Kangaroos and Emus: To the east of the Mission in the Warburton Ranges, kangaroos and emus were seen in hundreds each day but few were observed near the many soaks and gnamma holes in the more isolated granite outcrops and “breakaways.”

Many kangaroos and emus were observed in the settled areas in the vicinity of Mt. Morgans and Yundaminda and to within 70 miles north of Kalgoorlie.

MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED

The main breeding area is within the reserve for natives which covers part of Western Australia and extends over the border. For this reason, the use of poison baits in the area itself is rather difficult although the opportunity was taken of educating as many natives as possible to the baits. However, arrangements have been made for the doggers concerned to maintain a close watch on the “leads” and to keep them well baited. It will be possible to cover some of the places involved during the aerial baiting campaigns.

SUMMARY

(1) An investigation of the dingo and wild dog situation in the Warburton Ranges area was authorised by the Agriculture Protection Board.

(2) A survey of the breeding areas was to be made and also an attempt to link up outward migrations from the area with inward movements already observed into the south, south-west and east.
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A large breeding area was found to the east of the Warburton Ranges extending in the direction of the junction of the South Australian and Northern Territory borders.

Innumerable kangaroos, emus, turkeys and rabbits were seen in this area and many old and new dingo and fox signs were observed.

Explorations made to the north and south indicated that some dogs were moving outwards in several directions despite the favourable local conditions.

A definite “lead” was located on the Mission track along which dogs were travelling from the Warburton Ranges in a south-westerly direction towards Laverton.

The commencement of a “lead” towards the west was found north of the Warburton Ranges. This may link up with an influx of dogs into areas well to the west in the vicinity of Lakes Carnegie and Wells and the Ernest Giles Range.

The commencement of a “lead” towards the south was found. This may link up with the “leads” on to the Nullarbor Plains discovered in an expedition last year.

As no live pups were found it was impossible to carry out ear-tagging to observe the direction and extent of migrations.

There appears to be a steady movement of dogs from the breeding area with occasional mass migrations which may result from dry seasonal conditions, over-population or some instinctive desire to travel.
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WARBURTON RANGES EXPEDITION
Diary of C. K. Blair—21/7/52 to 30/8/52

July 29.—Left Laverton 11 a.m. for Warburton Ranges. Met Mission truck 30 miles out. Called in at White Cliffs en route. Mileage for day, 50.


July 31.—At Minnie Creek. Two fresh dog tracks here and looking for pups all day, walked about 10 miles, but no luck. Survey trig. HF30 north of Minnie Creek.

August 1.—Travelled along Warburton Road to Terhan Rock Hole. Road very bumpy and slow travelling. Saw only odd sign of dog tracks today. Mileage, 107.

August 2.—Travelled to Windular Rock Hole. Dogs watering here, laid baits. Indications point to pups in vicinity. Road very slow and quite a number of sandhills to cross today. Extensive breakaway country round rock hole. Marked 197 L S 36 Lat. on tree. Mileage, 100.

August 3.—Hunting around breakaways at Windlar Rock Hole for pups—no luck. Ideal small breeding area, but no sign of pups. Laid baits and inspected one fresh dog tracks near Weeljara Rock Hole in afternoon. Mileage, 28.

August 4.—Travelled to junction Elder and Hughes Creeks. Saw numerous dog and fox tracks today. Road very heavy, mostly spinifex sandhills. Bogged in sand at Elder Creek. Took mail to Mission and arranged to pick up three natives as guides. Mileage, 24.

August 5.—Travelled to Mt. Eveline. Excellent travelling today through mostly broken dolomite and basalt country with sparse mulga thickets and salt-bush flats. Heavy going last five miles to Weeljara. Evidence of numerous dogs this area, both past and present. Game also fairly plentiful. Kangaroos and rabbits. Mileage, 41.

August 6.—Hunting around ranges towards Mt. Squires. Kangaroos, rabbits, emus, foxes and dogs very plentiful. Saw five dingoes, and shot shot sluttuckin pups, but unable to locate them. An abundance of limestone caves on mulga flats where pups and dingoes may be. Heavy sandhills and spinifex sandhills. Road heavy going, but no sign of dogs. Mileage, 37.

August 7.—Travelled 100° to Mt. Squires on Barrow Range. Limestone outcrops and mulga flats with low sandhills bordering range. Saw three dogs this side of range. Dog tracks and pup tracks along sandhills. Dog tracks everywhere and saw two today. About 20 natives visited camp today. Mileage, 17.

August 8.—Travelled north to Mt. Elvrie and east to Mt. Elsie. Splendid country and good rains in this area some time previously. Dog tracks numerous, also rabbits, but kangaroos scarce. Had light rain today. Saw native fires north of us today, travelling east. Mileage, 27.

August 9.—Mt. Eveline to depot camp in Townsend Ranges in morning. Took half a day off and climbed peak on range to take stock of country. Excellent country and good rains in this area. Found puppies in cave, but could not get them. Laid baits. Found rock hole in ranges where dogs are watering. Mileage, 37.

August 10.—Went south of depot camp 192° through five miles heavy sandhills. Camped on one of new mulga scrub with good crab hole flats, vicinity Table Hill. Numerous old and new dog tracks in evening. This area appears to be the commencement of the south-western lead for dogs towards Nullarbor Plain and plains. Country runs some distance south-western direction. Game plentiful, and dingoes howled all night. Mileage, 57.

August 11.—South of Table Top Hill then westerly for 10 miles. Spinifex sandhills to the south. Broken country south-westerly towards Simpson Hill. Headed north over heavy sandhills back to wards depot camp. Picked up one black dog poisoned at rock hole in range. Natives arrived at camp today. Mileage, 40.

August 12.—Left depot camp north through Mission to Granite Springs. Left three natives. Heavy going up Elder Creek. Splendid country consisting of mulga, saltbush, soft spinifex, crab holes with Flinders grass. Good rains. Again dog tracks becoming plentiful. Did some scrub cutting and digging today. Mileage, 60.

August 13.—Arrived Granite Springs after further road making for ranges and making crossing over creek. Camped on F. Hann’s site to the north. Mileage, 42.


August 15.—Moved to Weeljara on Mission Road. Picked up one poisoned slut with pups somewhere. Mileage, 50.

August 16.—Travelled south-east from Weeljara to Simpson Hill, Pt. Read and Pt. Roberts. Heavy sandhills, abundant spinifex. Saw one dog today. Natives again west from Nullarbor Plain and east from Barrow Range country. West and eastwards leads to Nullarbor Plain and Lake Yeo areas. Here again evidence of dogs found which linked up our previous findings at Table Hill, Mileage, 42.

August 17.—Two nests of pups were also found here. This now completes the survey of breeding areas and leads both westerly from Granite Springs, and eastwards to Nullarbor Plain and Lake Yeo areas. Evidently westerly lead 50 miles further north along Lake Gillan and Salt Creek. Mileage, 57.

August 18.—North of Lake Throssell to Minnie Creek. Saw where dogs travelling westerly along road. Saw one, but missed him. No fresh tracks this rock hole. jeep travelled along edge of Lake Throssell. Mileage, 108.


August 20.—North of Lake Throssell to five miles beyond Empress Spring. Located spring in break-away country, but only small area surrounded by large sandhills. Saw one dog and another fire under jeep today. Only odd tracks. Dogs here and probably westerly lead 50 miles further north along Lake Gillan and Salt Creek. Mileage, 57.

August 21.—North of Lake Throssell to Minnie Creek. Saw where dogs travelling along road. Saw one, but missed him. No fresh tracks this rock hole. jeep travelled along edge of Lake Throssell. Mileage, 108.

August 22.—Minnie Creek to four mile well through White Cliffs Station. Checked truck and jeep, changed all oils and greased up. Mileage, 12.

August 23.—Arrived Laverton, reloaded and camped along Linden Road. Mileage, 40.

SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION GIVEN BY NATIVES ON DINGOES

Some interesting information was secured from the natives in respect to three distinct types of dingoes and the habits of these vary somewhat from each other. The most widely established is that of the so-called ‘Dilly-baroo’ which is known to the natives as the ‘Marru’. It is a large dog with heavy head and higher forequarters than hindquarters. The white is an important feature of the ‘Dilly-baroo’ and resembles the kelpley having a much smaller head and ears and a very bushy tail. The yellow type is also known by the name of ‘Warragoo’, but as far as I could ascertain the habits of the last mentioned do not vary much.