Dingo destruction 3 —The annual habits of dingoes in northern pastoral areas

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3.—THE ANNUAL HABITS OF DINGOES IN THE NORTHERN PASTORAL AREAS

By C. K. BLAIR, Vermin Control Officer in Charge of Dogging Operations in Northern Areas.

While the basic principles of poisoning and trapping are the same throughout the State, there are differences in technique in various localities which are largely based on the annual habits of dogs in those areas. It is hoped that the information contained in this article will assist pastoralists and others who are interested in the control of wild dogs throughout the northern pastoral areas.

During each year there are four separate and distinct seasonal phases in the life of dingoes and wild dogs, the commencement of which are given in the natural order of progression.

April or May—Mating.
July or August—Whelping.
October or November—First movements and initial training of pups.
January—Education of pups in hunting and killing.

Naturally there are variations to this general timetable, but generally speaking there is no great departure from this routine.

MATING

This period usually commences in April or May and lends itself to wholesale baiting and trapping. It is during this time that the wild dogs move from their usual haunts, running in twos and threes, always hungry, always on the alert for any other dogs in the vicinity, and with many of their natural cautious instincts lulled.

Sheep and cattle stations—especially those in outer areas—should not miss this opportunity for wholesale baiting. In addition, traps, may be placed at any points where it is known that dogs may be found during this period.

WHELPING

The whelping period usually commences in July or August and the birth of pups usually takes place in areas where water and game are plentiful while human activity is at a minimum.

Pups will be hidden in hollow logs, along dry creek beds, under clumps of spinifex, in caves found in "breakaways", in white ant hills, in rabbit warrens and in rocky granite country. The granite country is perhaps the most favoured of all hiding places as it provides excellent protection and good natural camouflage.

The author of this article, Mr. C. K. Blair, is well known for his expert knowledge of wild dogs in pastoral areas and the information he has given should greatly assist pastoralists. A knowledge of the seasonal movements and regular practices of the animals will enable control programmes to be planned in advance to fit in with station routine. Emphasis has once again been placed on baiting in preference to trapping. While there is no doubt that trapping is an effective method of destroying dogs, wholesale baiting has many advantages, foremost among which is the large number of baits which may be distributed in comparison with the restricted number of traps which may be used. It should be remembered that each bait is as effective as a trap and much less skill and knowledge are required in baiting than are needed for successful trapping.

A. R. TOMLINSON,
Chief Vermin Control Officer.
The pups are weaned at an early age and from then on are fed by the parents until they are old enough to travel.

Pup hunting requires skill in tracking and a lot of patience as it may take days to locate the den and some additional time to destroy the litter. If the hunter passes too close to the den in the course of his search, the pups may be moved by the parents. The task is thus rendered more difficult as there will be less chance of finding the tell-tale tracks or pads made by the parents when travelling to and from the den. Once a litter is found it should not be left unwatched, even during the day, as the pups may be quickly moved away once the parents' suspicions have been roused.

**FIRST MOVEMENTS AND INITIAL TRAINING OF PUPS**

This phase in the training of the pups usually commences in October and November. At this stage the pups are frequently taken to waterholes and left there while the old dogs hunt farther afield. When a kill is made the pups are led to it instead of the meat being carried to them. They are often left to eat their fill and to return to the waterholes by themselves, thus learning to find their way about.

If game is scarce, the pups may visit a kill several times leaving a fairly well-defined pad from the carcass to the waterhole, and this will help to reveal the presence of the dogs.

Carcass poisoning is most effective when pups are at this stage. The poisoned carcass should not be left in one piece but should be cut up and distributed over an area of 20 or 30 yards. This will enable the parents and all the pups to feed on the bait at the same time. As with most other animals there is usually a “boss” dog and while he is near a carcass—whether he is alive or dead—the other dogs will not approach it.

As the pups are now moving about freely and are being taught to pick up food, this is an excellent time for baiting. As many baits as possible should be placed near waterholes and along “leads” to water such as dried up creek beds. Leads from inaccessible breeding areas such as gorges and passes in the hills should also be well baited. Any surplus of baits from this baiting may be picked up later by young dogs when they are in their next phase of education.

**TRAINING OF PUPS IN HUNTING AND KILLING**

This next stage in the education of the pups usually commences in January when they are five to six months old. At this stage the young dogs are taken on hunting expeditions by the parents and taught to kill for themselves. In the course of training the old dogs will often maim and bail up the victim then, when the young dogs catch up, the parents stand by while the pups do the killing. Often when it is reported that dogs have penetrated into sheep country at this time of the year it will be found that it is the parents teaching the young dogs to kill sheep. As young dogs are travelling freely over the countryside at this stage and are still comparatively inexperienced, they will fall ready victims to baits which should be distributed wholesale in large numbers over country in which dogs are running.

Pastoralists are strongly urged to base their wild dog control campaigns on the seasonal movements of the local dingo populations as described above. Knowledge of this nature serves as an excellent basis for any poisoning or trapping measures employed.
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