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DINGO CONTROL

Organised Ground Baiting Drives at Mating Time

By C. D. GOODING and J. J. FREETH

DINGOES in Western Australia, like all "creatures of nature", have a well defined seasonal pattern of behaviour. This is influenced somewhat by weather variations, but even in remote areas where violent fluctuations in rainfall occur from year to year, the dingo still breeds at roughly the same time. The numbers of pups born and the numbers which survive each year varies a lot, but life goes on at roughly the same tempo under most seasonal conditions.

It is therefore with some certainty that we know dingoes will be mating during April and May each year. This period is a strained one in the dingo community. It is a time of sorting out, a time of assertion amongst the males and a time of greatly increased sexual activity amongst the females. As a result much of the cautiousness which normally marks the activities of this animal is forgotten during this time of family upheaval, leaving them much more vulnerable to attack from man. This is one time in the annual cycle of the dingo when man may temporarily find his task of control made very much easier. With less time spent hunting food, and more time and energy spent seeking and retaining mates, the dingo becomes very hungry, loses weight and will often take baits at this time which, in other circumstances he might pass by.

The Agriculture Protection Board makes a determined effort each year to take advantage of this period by carrying out extensive ground baiting drives, and strongly advises all landholders troubled by dingoes to give more time to their control at this time of the year.

Details regarding suitable baiting materials and poisons have appeared in past issues of this Journal and reprints of these articles can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture.

Concerted attacks by A.P.B. officers extend over most of the wild dog infested areas of the State with particular emphasis being given to the Midlands coastal area, the South-West, Kalgoorlie, Wiluna, Meekatharra, Ashburton and the Pilbara areas during mating time.

Organisation

Drives conducted at this time are organised and controlled by the regional vermin control officer for the area, who arranges for a responsible officer to take charge of at least four doggers. The size of the control unit depends on the type of country and the size of the area to be treated. Bulk supplies of baiting materials and poisons are organised as well as a system for communication between the men taking part. Often the party works as one unit, camping together and working out each day from the central camping spot. In other cases each man may be
allocated a set area which he works more or less independently.

There are no hard and fast rules for the allocation of territories so long as the whole area receives attention during the drive period. Drives last until all places where wild dogs are known to exist have been treated. This usually takes about three weeks, but once the work starts every effort is made to finish it before the men leave the area.

Four wheel drive vehicles are used extensively in these drives, having gradually replaced the horses and pack mules used in the past. Without these vehicles it would be impossible to get into a lot of the terrain where dogs live quickly enough to carry out simultaneous action over a wide area.

**Working Programme**

A thorough search is made of the areas where wild dogs congregate. These are mostly in and around rock holes, soaks and creek beds. Creek beds are particularly important as they often form what are called “leads” into water.

Wild dogs do not just wander aimlessly but have well defined “leads” or “pads” which take them from breeding grounds, or their resting places to water. These routes are followed (in some cases every day) by the dogs, so naturally the paths selected are always over the softest ground possible. Creek beds, stock pads, and sandy areas are much easier to walk on and these are preferred by the dingoes. As a result, these “leads” are the key to successful control. They are used also by the dogging staff as a means of assessing the numbers of dogs in a particular locality. It is possible for men skilled in this work to identify individual dogs from the tracks they leave in soft soil. The reduction in tracks is a sure sign that success has been achieved in the control programme, even when carcasses cannot be found.

During the course of the drive a particular note is made of the places where dog tracks are seen and these are revisited by the regular district dogger later on. If dogs are still present it is then the task of this man to spend more time in baiting and setting traps in an effort to catch individual dogs. The purpose of the drive is to cover an extensive area in a limited time and to leave those dogs which are missed to the more intensive work of the regular dogger who is more conversant with local conditions.

**Baiting Materials**

In each area up to 90,000 prepared baits are used. Sometimes these are commercially made baits but in the cooler agricultural areas the doggers themselves make most of the baits in the few weeks before the start of the drive.

Brisket is the main material used for these small baits. It is cut into cubes about 3 in. square and each one loaded with a ½-grain strychnine tablet. Besides these small baits fresh carcass baiting is also used. In this case, kangaroos or emus are shot, cut into four or five large pieces and loaded with alkaloid strychnine before being placed out in a position to attract dogs either by sight or smell. It is always a good idea when using carcass baits to hang them slightly above the ground. This simple precaution allows the material to dry out and any larvae resulting from blow fly strike fall to the ground. If fly activity is reduced in this way the bait will last much longer.

**In Brief**

1. Ground baiting drives are conducted against wild dogs during mating time over most of W.A.
2. Dogs are more easily poisoned at this time as some of their natural wariness is forgotten and they will take baits more readily than at other times.
3. The drives are organised by a regional vermin control officer and teams of four or more doggers are employed.
4. Four wheeled drive vehicles are used to bait “leads” and watering points.
5. Prepared baits and carcass baits (all containing strychnine) are used exclusively—up to 90,000 baits in one region.
6. The district dogger is instructed to follow up the drive and check results. If dogs are still present he then sets to work to clean-up those that have escaped the main drive.
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