



Mammal Survey Group of Victoria NEWSLETTER

July 2005

June 12: Nest boxes

The nestboxes were checked using a small portable television attached to the lens on the extendable pole. This revealed 25 sugar gliders in 26 boxes. Some boxes were empty but others had up to 7 individuals with all but one showing signs of use at some stage. Motor bikes driving through the forest appeared to upset animals with some animals leaving the boxes when we were merely approaching the tree without touching it (i.e. the combination of someone on the ground plus loud passing bikes had this effect).

July 17 Nest boxes

In pleasant sunshine (in contrast to Melbourne at the time), about 25 boxes were checked and four that were missing were replaced. Unfortunately no animals were found in any nest boxes although most had signs of past occupation. In this forest there is very little wattle understorey compared with our other site. This is probably the main factor reducing the nest box occupation as these wattles, especially Golden Wattle are a primary food source for sugar gliders.

Working Bee – August 7th

Next Camps

Our permit has now been extended until the end of the year and camps are currently planned September 3-4, October 1-2 and Oct 29-Nov 1 at Clunes, Bunyip State Park and in the Wychitella Flora and Fauna reserve (probably, but not necessarily in that order).

If any one sees or hears of a good camp site or hears of a need for a survey in a new area please let us know so we can add it to our calendar.

MEETINGS: 2ND Tuesday of Feb, April, June, August, October

ENQUIRIES: c/- Arthur Howard ph. 9481 4196

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Howard's Way:

DINGO

The pure dingo, is it vermin or a species in need of urgent protection? The prevailing government attitude is anti dingo, so it was no surprise to me that last May the DSE farm chemical regulator gave the 1080 poison the thumbs up with a provision that the labeling and control of usage are tightened.

The pure dingoes are Australia's top carnivores, intelligent and inquisitive animals with boundless energy and endurance. They are not significant predators of domestic stock in the foot hills of the Eastern Highlands, and in East Gippsland which is where there may be some pure dingoes still holding on. It is the feral dogs that are causing the "wild dog" problems in these areas. The National Farmers Federation said "that the regulators finding meant now the farmers have the essential tool in the fight against the wild dingo dogs. We need to use the same method as NSW which has been very successful with their aerial baiting". I am against the use of 1080, more so if it is to be aerial broadcasted, not only will it get some wild dogs, but the non target carnivore species like pure dingoes, Tiger Quolls, down to the little Antechinus and birds of prey. No animal should have to die a painful death with this poison.

The arrival of white man had a devastating effect on the Australian environment of the 1700's. The introduction of sheep and grain crops changed the face of the land and all creatures dwelling on it. The dingo as much as any. The new age agriculturists became enraged by this natural disaster and created legislation to outlaw the dingo. Poison baits, steel jawed traps and shooting were employed, clearing the dingo from some areas only to be replaced by feral goats, pigs, rabbits, foxes and feral cats, there was no top predator to keep these animals culled. Instead of ridding the country of this animal, as the law and enraged farmers proclaimed, legislation had in fact served to break up the previously rigidly structured hierarchical system of the dingo. By killing the alpha animals and allowing the lesser family dingoes to intermingle with the farmers dogs, thus creating the hybrid wild feral dog, a larger, and a more formidable stock killer than the diminutive pure dingo had ever been, and it also sullied the pure dingo gene pool.

The fact is that the pure dingo is not found anywhere else in the world confirms its native status, and we are therefore dealing with a natural canid which is native to this continent. The roll of the pure dingo in the natural habitat needs no justification because it has been fulfilling it for the past 4000years or for however it has been a resident in Australia, thus it can be assumed that the pure dingo, our top native predator has a role within the natural ecosystem. Federal and State Governments have acknowledged this by protecting them in the National Parks. The reason that the pure dingo's right to exist has been called into question is because as a carnivore in the same area managed ecosystems, it is liable to take domestic stock in addition to native species. This is not surprising but cannot be used as an argument to invalidate the pure dingo's role in the natural environment. Despite popular opinion, domestic stock is not an important part of its diet, up to 2 % until hybridization between pure dingo and domestic dog then it jump up to more than 10 %. It is now recognized world wide that the absence of a top animal predator has serious implications for the ecological health and biodiversity of our planet. Moves have already been made in some countries to restore the top order predator, to reclaim the natural order and to re-establish ecosystems to pre-settlement balance. (e.g. Wolves in the Yellow Stone National Park USA, wolf recovery in Spain). In USA there is already remarkable evidence emerging of the positive effect that the presence of wolves is having on the ecology of the Park.

In Australia our pure dingo occupies a niche in the land and should have been recognized as a native animal, and should never have been listed on the states noxious and vermin list. After almost 3 centuries of concerted cruel ways of extermination, the use of 1080 poison again could bring the true dingo into the critical zone, or it could be like the other medium size marsupial carnivore the Thylacine, gone for ever. Records from the DSE show there are about 8 % pure dingo trapped along with the wild dogs, of the other 94% there are no records. On these figures it looks as if the pure dingo will be bred out of existence by the hybrid wild dog. The situation in Victoria is complicated by this high incidence of hybridization. Hopefully there may be some areas in the rugged forests in the Eastern Highlands and far East Gippsland where the pure dingo is still there in small numbers. There is an urgent need before it is too late to make peace with our wonderful and misunderstood pure dingo.

ARTHUR HOWARD

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