

The dingoes of Fraser Island (K'Gari)



Safety and information guide

Be
dingo-safe!

Read this brochure before arriving
on Fraser Island and remember:

- Never feed dingoes.
- Keep kids close (within arm's reach)—dingoes move quickly.
- Photograph from afar—stay in the car.

It is an offence to feed or make food available to a dingo or intentionally attract or disturb a dingo anywhere on Fraser Island, whether on public or private land. Penalties apply.



FRASER ISLAND



Queensland
Government

Dingoes

in protected areas are wildlife

Dingoes are protected across Queensland's protected area estate, including national parks, regional parks, recreation areas, State forests, lands in marine parks and forest reserves. These dingoes are defined under the various Acts as 'wildlife' or 'native wildlife' and should be left to live wild. Dingoes cannot be kept as pets in Queensland.

The dingoes on Fraser Island are wild, predatory animals that should not be confused with or treated as domestic pets. They have rarely interbred with domestic or feral dogs and, in time, may become one of the purest strains of wild

dingo on the eastern Australian seaboard, possibly Australia-wide. Therefore, their conservation is of national significance and all conservation efforts seek to maintain Fraser Island's wild dingoes as a viable healthy population. That means leaving them free to roam, hunt and live as wild animals, not semi-domesticated pets relying on hand-outs.

Seeing a dingo on Fraser Island is special because visitors can observe them in an environment as near as possible to their natural state.

Wild dingoes are naturally lean and fit.



Photo: Ruth Thomas

Dingoes are opportunistic hunters and scavengers.

Living well and wild on Fraser Island

Dingoes live very active lives, running or trotting up to 40 kilometres a day, patrolling their territories and hunting. A dingo pack has a natural hierarchy, with alpha animals being the fittest and strongest. The social structure of dingo packs results in some individual dingoes being denied food regardless of availability and they can therefore appear particularly lean. Some don't survive this battle—nature's way of regulating the size of the population.

Studies have shown that the average weight of adult dingoes on Fraser Island is the same as that recorded for mainland dingoes. The island provides plenty of food and water for wildlife. Living wild means the population can regulate itself based on the availability of food—a principle applied to wildlife management throughout the world.

Dingoes are a necessary component of Fraser Island's natural ecosystem and feeding them interrupts this natural balance. Since Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) started preventing easy access to food from people, dingoes have returned to hunting. The island provides a varied diet, including fish, crabs, reptiles, echidnas, bush rats, swamp wallabies and bandicoots. Dingoes also eat insects and berries, and roam along the beaches looking for marine life or the occasional dead sea bird.

Kids story circle



Photo: Kim Fleischfresser

It is early July on Fraser Island and this dingo pup needs to learn a lot of survival skills to grow into a healthy hunter. The little dingo will suckle milk from its mother. It will chase tumbling leaves, snap at flowers and try to eat insects on its first hunting expedition away from the den. Other pups in the litter will cuddle up to it to sleep and have play fights when they are awake. Their mother is one of the lead dingoes in her pack. She is called the alpha female and generally only alpha females have pups that have the chance to survive.



Dingo management also means people management

Managing dingoes on Fraser Island takes careful planning and research. QPWS rangers monitor dingoes and their behaviour all year round. Visitors and residents can help by learning how to be dingo safe and by keeping dingoes living wild.

In the past, many dingoes became dependent on food, either from deliberate hand-outs or careless rubbish dumping. Some dingoes lost their fear of humans (became habituated), started stalking people and aggressively stealing food. In April 2001, a nine-year-old boy was killed by dingoes on Fraser Island, and his young companion was seriously mauled. The immediate response to ensure the safety of the people on the island was the destruction of 28 animals—known to be habituated to humans and to have frequented areas heavily used by people.

The incident confirmed the risk that dingoes pose to people—not just small children. It altered the way QPWS had to approach dingo management. Three options were available:

1. no dingoes
2. no people; or
3. management of both on Fraser Island.

The management of Fraser Island dingoes is undertaken in accordance with the Fraser Island Dingo Conservation and Risk Management Strategy, which aims to maintain a healthy population of dingoes on the island, while keeping public safety as a priority.

The strategy focuses on:

- effectively building and disseminating knowledge;
- adopting the highest standards of animal welfare practices;
- engaging local communities and tour operators to support and incorporate best practice in their businesses and day-to-day lives; and
- fostering safe wildlife experiences for all.

The ultimate aim is to ensure the conservation of a sustainable wild dingo population whilst minimising the risks to human safety and dingo welfare, and ensuring that the wildlife experience of visitors is maintained.

As well as continual research and monitoring of the species, Fraser Island uses one of the most comprehensive education programs in the world (dealing with wildlife and people interactions on protected areas). Queensland legislation also prohibits feeding or making food available for dingoes, supported by heavy fines and possible jail sentences.

How do ear tags help the dingoes?

Ear tagging dingoes on Fraser Island is one of many monitoring tools. Rangers capture, tag and record the size, weight and distinguishing details of some island dingoes. Every sighting thereafter adds to the profile of the animal—its movements, breeding and feeding patterns. Dingo sightings reported by visitors, and ongoing surveys by

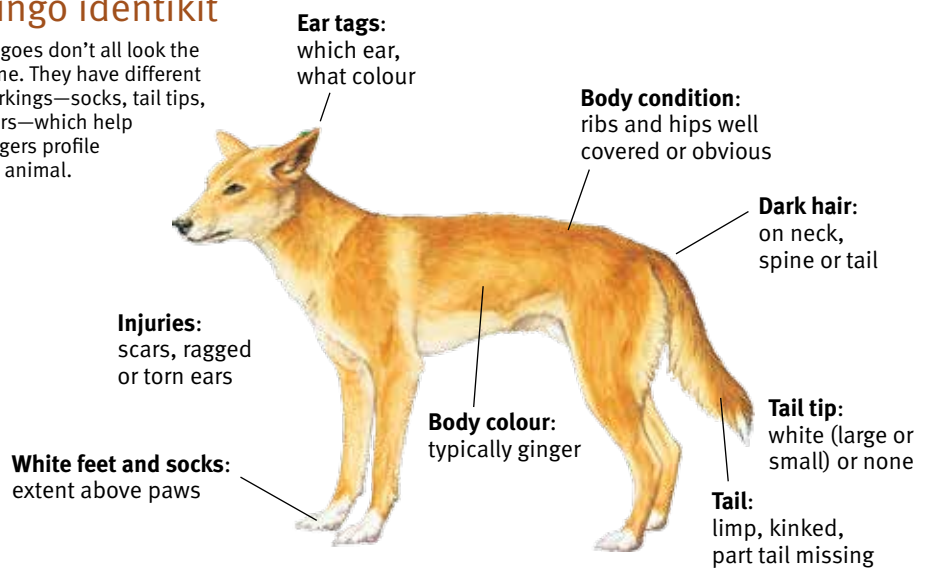
rangers, help to document territories and pack membership. Ear-tagging is targeted at individuals with a minimum weight of approximately 10kg, of reasonable body condition and that exhibit, or are anticipated to exhibit, problematic behaviour.



Tagged dingoes are identified with their own individual tag attached to the left ear for males and right ear for females.

Dingo identikit

Dingoes don't all look the same. They have different markings—socks, tail tips, scars—which help rangers profile the animal.



Kids story circle



Photo: Ian Webb, Queensland Government

It is late September, the dingo pups follow their mother out of the den to explore areas close by. Their mother and other members of her pack help feed the pups. Only the strongest pups survive. These two are waiting for their mother to bring them food. She is hunting close by and will howl if there is danger. As she returns she calls to them with soft huffs and coughs.

From feeding to attack— the sequence of events

Attraction

People leave food out. Dingoes are attracted to food, food smells, drinks, rubbish and odd things like sweets, cooking oil, tea towels, dish cloths and toiletries.

Habituation

Dingoes that lose their natural fear of humans will ignore threats and come close to people. Habituated dingoes expect food from everyone. Pups of habituated dingoes may not be taught to hunt properly.

Interaction

Negative interactions

People try to encourage dingoes to come closer or feed them. Dingoes try to dominate or steal food by aggression.

Positive interactions

People leave dingoes alone. Dingoes shy away from people, cars or buses.

Neutral interactions

People keep a good distance from dingoes. Dingoes may display habituated behaviour, but keep their distance or walk away.

Aggression

People get involved with dingoes that are feeding, roaming or being aggressive. Dingoes—individuals or as a small pack—are displaying aggression when they actively stalk or circle people, lunge at them, nip or bite savagely.

Dingoes are capable of killing people.



Juvenile dingoes—aged between six months and two years—may be seen searching for food around campsites and high visitation areas. Keep food secure and let them live wild.



Aggression can quickly turn to attack. Please report any instances of aggressive dingoes to QPWS rangers as soon as possible.



Dingo bites are serious. This person may have been a victim of someone else's careless or deliberate actions, causing the dingo to become aggressive.

Safe people—safe dingoes

Certain townships and campgrounds on the island have fences to stop dingoes entering and accessing rubbish bins or food from people.

This saves dingoes from habituation (becoming too familiar with humans) or exposure to situations that may cause aggression. Protecting people also protects dingoes from developing negative behaviours, possibly leading to being humanely destroyed. Since the fences have been in place, there has been a noticeable reduction in incidents of nips or bites around these areas.



Walkers take care. Use the gates not the grids.

Kids story circle



Photo: Darren Blake, Queensland Government

It is November, and this pup has started to learn important survival skills that will last a lifetime. These skills will make sure she finds enough food, so that she grows up into a wild and healthy adult dingo.

Fights are a part of living in a dingo pack and this pup has to compete with the larger dingoes for food. She has found a dead sea turtle washed up on the beach, which is a decent meal for a growing pup.

Be dingo-safe

QPWS rangers make all attempts to protect people and conserve dingoes. Visitors, workers and residents must also take responsibility to ensure the survival of the dingoes on Fraser Island by following these dingo-safe rules.

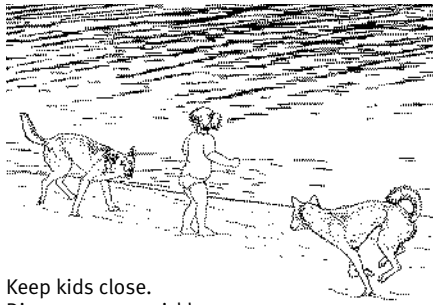
Always stay very close to children, even small teenagers

Dingoes do bite people and, in one case, have killed a child. Dingoes are attracted and excited by children running or playing. They move quickly and can attack without warning—always keep children within an arm's reach. Never let children sleep in a tent without adults and keep house doors and low windows secure.

Travelling with children?

For extra safety, stay in a fenced campground, resort or township:

- Lake Boomanjin
- Dilli Village (private)
- Central Station
- Dundubara
- Waddy Point (top campground)
- Eurong (private)
- Kingfisher Bay (private)
- Happy Valley (private).
- K'gari campground (private)
- Cathedrals on Fraser (private)



Keep kids close.
Dingoes move quickly.

Walk in groups

People walking alone have been threatened, nipped and bitten by dingoes.



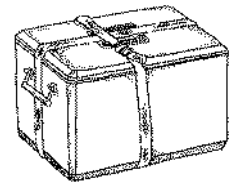
Walk together, stay alert and carry a stick for extra protection. Also be aware that running or jogging can trigger an interaction with a dingo.

Never feed dingoes

Feeding dingoes causes them to lose their hunting skills and become dependent on hand-outs and scavenging for waste. They can become aggressive towards people once they come to rely on this food source. Dangerously aggressive dingoes are sometimes humanely destroyed, sadly because of the habits people have taught them. Feeding dingoes can cause an artificial increase in their natural population, which then leads to greater inter-pack fighting and increased risk to people.

Lock away all food items and containers

Dingoes are always on the hunt for food and will chew or tear anything (unsecured iceboxes, tents, etc) when following the scent of food.



Keep all food, drinks and rubbish in strong, lockable, secure containers and ice boxes with heavy-duty straps.

Don't take food to the lake shores and beaches

A picnic on the shore of a lake or beach puts food at 'dingo level'—hard to resist for an animal that is always on the look-out for an easy meal. They may try to dominate people, especially children, forcing them to drop food. If this happens even once, dingoes will try again with other people—maybe more aggressively. Think of others and don't take food or drinks, other than water, to lake shores or the beach.

Kids story circle



It is late January, and is very hot. This growing dingo pup is now six months old and is resting with her pack in the shade. She will hunt for rats, mice, bandicoots, frogs and insects at night, when it is cool.

Female dingoes are tagged in their right ear and males in their left. It doesn't stop them hunting.

People who see dingoes can let rangers know where they have seen

them and what they were doing. Features like ear tags, scars, sock heights and tail markings are important to note down. This helps to build up a good life story, or profile, of the animal. Rangers catch them in a soft trap that is padded with rubber. The dingo is not hurt when it is trapped and only feels a pinch when the tag is put in their ear.

Clean up rubbish and food scraps

Dingoes love to lick anything that smells like food, so after use immediately clean all dishes and barbecue plates. Keep all waste secure inside strapped bins or a closed vehicle. The tiniest oversight will attract dingoes. Campers have reported dingoes stealing dish cloths and tea towels. Their sense of smell is very sensitive and tiny morsels of food around the table can attract them from quite a distance. Be careful and clean everything up.

Make campsites and house yards boring for dingoes

Dingoes are curious and roam free all over the island, except where dingo deterrent fences have been installed. Keeping campsites tidy is the best way to discourage dingoes, especially if leaving it for a while.

- Store loose items—camping and cooking gear, clothing or toys—securely inside locked boxes, a closed vehicle or house.
- Ensure house doors and low windows cannot be pushed open.

Never hang rubbish bags from trees or place on top of vehicles

Dingoes and other wildlife will rip into rubbish bags, scattering the contents and creating an even bigger temptation. Store rubbish in lockable containers and bin everything as soon as possible.



Rubbish hanging from trees attracts dingoes and other wildlife.

Rubbish bags left outside enclosed bins attract birds that soon rip the bags. As well as attracting dingoes, the rubbish can be blown into the ocean where it becomes a hazard for marine life.

Around houses, lock rubbish bin lids or store bins inside a closed garage, laundry or secure outdoor bin enclosure.



QPWS provides bulk bins, for both general and recyclable rubbish, in fenced waste transfer stations along the eastern beach. Close the lids and if a bin is full, please use another.

What happens if people feed or leave food for dingoes?

QPWS aims to help dingoes live wild and free, while keeping people safe. The best method is for everyone to follow dingo-safe rules and for rangers to be informed of any negative behaviour by dingoes—so they can intervene early enough to prevent the dingo becoming aggressive.

Feeding is also an offence inside the fence

It is an offence to feed or make food available for wildlife, regardless of being inside or outside a fenced area. Good camping habits are needed everywhere on Fraser Island.

Wildlife lives best on wild foods. Dingoes and other wildlife—kookaburras, currawongs, goannas and butcher birds—can become serious problems if they come to rely on campers' food.

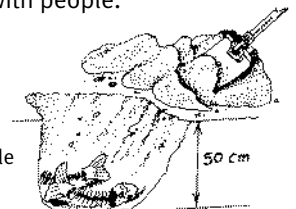
Some species that get their food from humans become aggressively competitive towards other wildlife and people. Their natural population increases and the food may cause them to become overweight and sick.

Keep fish and bait in sealed containers or in vehicles

Fish cleaning in campsites is prohibited. Keep bait and the catch in a shoulder bag or inside a closed vehicle, not in a bucket on the beach. Keep berley and fish remains in sealed containers inside a closed vehicle. Do not hang these on the outside of the vehicle.

Look around before burying fish remains. Try to do this when there are no dingoes in sight, to avoid them associating food with people.

Bury and cover fish remains in a deep hole (at least 50 cm), just below high tide mark.



Kids story circle



Photo: Charmaine Savage

This dingo is now three years old and she is the alpha female in her pack. She is strong and healthy and had her first litter of pups. If she is still the alpha female next year, she will have another litter. She kept her pups in a well hidden and carefully guarded den. She teaches her pups to hunt and survive on Fraser Island as wild and free dingoes.

Watch dingoes quietly from a distance: don't encourage or excite them

Never attract dingoes for photographs. Heavy penalties apply. Remember other people may suffer the consequences of teaching dingoes this habituated behaviour.

In 2010, a photographer was fined \$40 000 and given a nine-month suspended jail sentence for a series of offences related to feeding and attracting dingoes on Fraser Island. The dingoes fed by the photographer, in this case over a period of time, had lost their natural fear of people. They became so aggressive towards other visitors that one dingo savaged a child and, as a pack they cornered fully grown adults—a frightening experience. Although all other avenues of management were attempted, these animals continued their aggressive behaviour and had to be humanely destroyed to protect other visitors.

Pet dogs are passive. Dingoes are different—wild!

It is very dangerous to attract dingoes; they are unpredictable and capable of killing people. Don't be fooled into thinking they will react like a pet dog.

Avoid calling out to dingoes, making excessive noise or splashing water when they are around. Do not flick towels, throw things or start running when dingoes are near. This may encourage threatening or aggressive behaviour.

Photograph them from afar. Stay in your car.



Photo: Ruth Thomas

Dingo calendar

Dingoes' natural behaviour changes throughout the year. They are more aggressive in autumn and summer, when they are vying for dominance over other dingoes in the pack and competing for food.

Autumn (March–May)

Mating is a time for testing dominance, protecting territories and expelling intruders from other packs.



Photo: Matt Lowry, Queensland Government

Winter (June–August)

Although the whole pack pitches in, a female dingo with pups is naturally protective and potentially aggressive. She needs to find food for herself and her pups. Unlike domestic dogs, dingoes only have pups once a year.



Photo: Linda Behrendorff

Spring (September–November)

Pups are learning survival skills from their parents. If potential food sources from humans are available, pups may not learn natural hunting skills.



Summer (December–February)

Pups learn pack rules through play, showing aggressive behaviour to gain dominance. Young dingoes will try to dominate people, especially children.



When dingoes come close

Reporting an incident

For all emergencies phone Triple Zero (000).

- Try 112 from a mobile phone if there is no reception.

For all non-urgent medical assistance, call 13 12 33.

Seek medical advice if injured, and report any negative dingo encounters to a QPWS ranger or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68) as soon as possible. Mobile phone charges may apply.

Negative encounters are when one or more dingoes steal something, come close and threaten or attack. These can be:

- tearing tents
- stealing property
- circling
- lunging
- chasing
- bailing up or 'herding' people into a lake or the ocean
- nipping
- biting
- savagely attacking.



Be dingo-safe!



- ✓ NEVER feed dingoes.
- ✓ Always stay within arm's reach of children, even small teenagers.
- ✓ Walk in groups.
- ✓ Do not run. Running or jogging can trigger a negative dingo interaction.
- ✓ Camp in fenced areas when possible.
- ✓ Lock up food stores and iceboxes (even on a boat).
- ✓ Never store food or food containers in tents.
- ✓ Secure all rubbish, fish and bait.

If you feel threatened by a dingo:

- Stand up to your full height.
- Face the dingo.
- Keep your arms close to your body, and maintain eye contact.
- Calmly back away.
- If in pairs, stand back to back.
- Confidently call for help.
- Do not run or wave your arms.

If you are attacked by a dingo:

- Defend yourself aggressively, you are fighting for your life.
- Strike the dingo with an object such as a stick, backpack or coat.

For emergencies requiring medical assistance, call 000 or 112 immediately.



Photo: Linda Behrendorff

Dingoes have been known to chase joggers and interact with children playing. What appears as playful dog behaviour is actually serious dominance testing by the dingoes, which can lead to aggression. An aggressive dingo ready to attack, may often lower its head, curl up its tail and fold back its ears.

Help QPWS rangers to accurately profile dingoes. Email any information about any encounter with a dingo—good or not so good—to dingo.ranger@nprsr.qld.gov.au. Include the time, date, location, nature of the encounter and any distinguishing features of the dingo. Photographs are very helpful.

Further information

Visit us online at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au

Search for 'Fraser Island dingoes'.

