

The dingoes of Fraser Island



Safety and information guide

Be
dingo-safe!

Read this brochure before arriving
on Fraser Island and remember:

- Keep kids close—
dingoes move quickly.
- Never feed dingoes.
- 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

Dingoes

in protected areas are wildlife

Dingoes are protected across Queensland's protected area estate, including national parks, conservation 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.



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 subordinates in the pack will appear leaner until they can build enough body mass to fight for pack leadership. 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 higher than that recorded for mainland dingoes. The island provides plenty of food and 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 also a necessary component of Fraser Island's natural ecosystem and feeding them interrupts this natural balance. Since the 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 small berries, and roam along the beaches looking for marine life or the occasional dead sea bird.

Kids story circle



Courtesy of 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 keep dingoes living in the 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 (habituated) and started stalking people and aggressively stealing food. In April 2001, a nine-year-old boy was killed by dingoes on Fraser Island, while 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 (as the boy killed was quite tall for his age). It altered the way QPWS had to approach dingo management. Three options were available:

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

In November 2001, the first formal Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy (DMS) was put in place. Prepared and implemented by an expert team of scientists and dingo experts, the strategy aims to:

- maintain a sustainable wild dingo population
- reduce the risk posed to humans
- provide Fraser Island visitors with a safe, enjoyable opportunity to view dingoes in their natural environment.

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 an essential monitoring tool. Rangers capture, tag and record the size, weight and distinguishing details of individual 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.

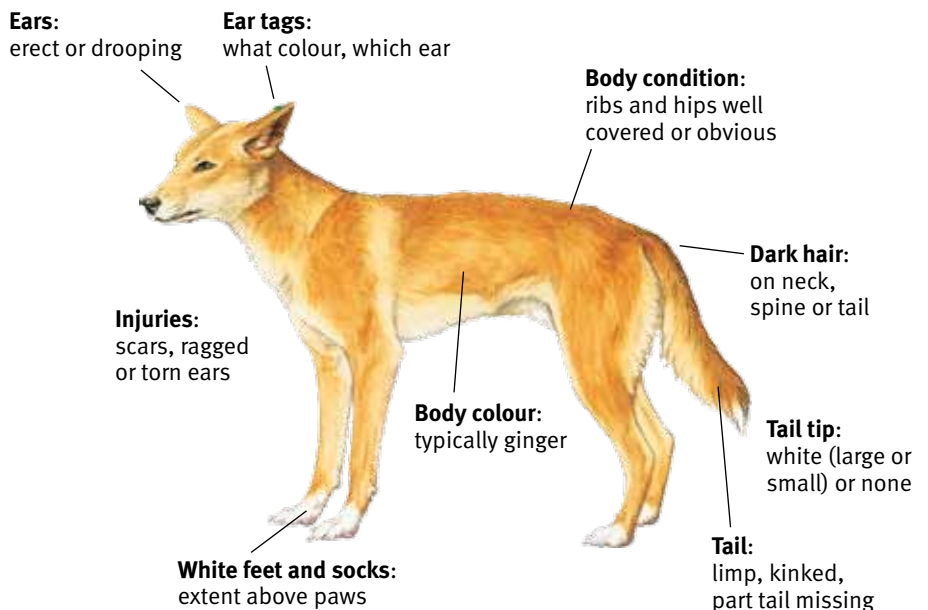
Dingoes don't all look the same. They have different markings—socks, tail tips, scars—which help rangers profile the animal.

Tagged dingoes are identified with their own individual, coloured tag attached to the left ear for males and right ear for females. Most have three different colours, but some tags have only one or two.



Lynda Gaston, DERM

Dingo identikit



Kids story circle



Ian Webb, DERM

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.

The sequence of events— from **feeding** to **attack**

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 wander around people, 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



Darren Blake, DERM

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.

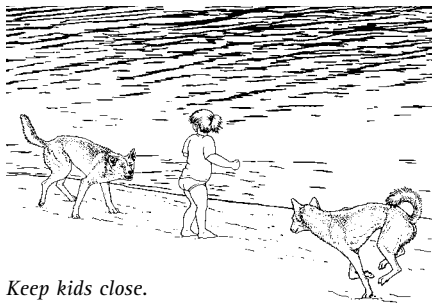
Always stay very close to children, even small teenagers

Dingoes do bite people and, in one case, 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).



*Keep kids close.
Dingoes move quickly.*

Illustration: Maria-Ann Loi for DERM

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.

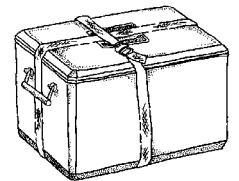
Ben Walker, DERM

Never feed dingoes

Feeding dingoes is cruel because they 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 and rubbish in strong, lockable, secure containers and ice boxes with heavy-duty straps.

Don't take food to the lake shores and beaches

Food at 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 flavoured drinks to lake shores or the beach.

Kids story circle



DERM

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.

This is when rangers try to catch them to give them their own identification markers or ear tags. Each tag has different colours.

Female dingoes are tagged in their right ear and males in their left. It doesn't stop them hunting. People who see tagged dingoes can let rangers know where they have seen them and what they were doing. It builds 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 small 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 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 tents

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 of bins attract birds that soon rip the bags. As well as attracting dingoes, it is 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.

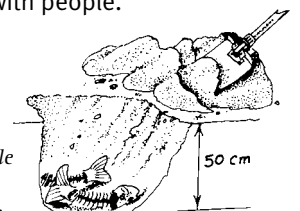
Some species that get their food from humans become aggressively competitive towards other wildlife and people. Their natural population increases and the food may cause them to become overweight and sick.

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



Courtesy of 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 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 fear of people. They became so aggressive towards other visitors, that they savaged a child and, as a pack, 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.

Never encourage dingoes to come close

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 at them or start running when dingoes are near. This encourages them to come closer and threaten people nearby.

Photograph them from afar. Stay in or by your car.



Ruth Thomas, DERM



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.



Matt Lowry, DERM

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.



Linda Behrendorff, DERM

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.



DERM

Summer (December–February)

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



DERM

Find-a-word

Words can be up, down, back-to-front and diagonal. Then use the left-over letters to reveal the secret message.

PUP

FISH

TAIL

SAND

WILD

PACK

SOCKS

N	C	A	M	P	I	N	G	S	F
S	O	C	K	S	T	T	A	I	L
A	Y	F	C	L	S	O	S	S	E
D	R	R	E	T	A	H	P	U	P
L	E	A	A	E	N	O	A	D	A
I	G	S	R	U	D	R	L	T	C
W	N	E	T	S	A	I	A	N	K
D	A	R	A	B	E	D	N	E	I
N	R	G	G	O	S	A	F	G	L
T	E	R	R	I	T	O	R	Y	E

NO FEEDING

TERRITORY

CAMPING

EAR TAG

RANGER

FRASER

LEARN

When dingoes come close

Reporting an incident

For all emergencies phone 000 (zero, zero, zero).

- Try 112 from a mobile phone if there is no reception.
- If deaf, speech or hearing impaired, call 106 using a text phone.

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.

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
- savagely attacking
- nipping
- biting.



For a safe and enjoyable stay, remember to:



- ✓ Always stay very close (within arm's reach) to your children, even small teenagers.
- ✓ Walk in groups.
- ✓ Lock up food stores and ice boxes.
- ✓ Pack away food scraps and rubbish.
- ✓ Store your fishing bait correctly.
- ✓ Follow dingo safety advice provided with permits and on signs throughout the island.
- ✗ Never feed dingoes.
- ✗ Never store food or food containers in tents.

If you feel threatened by a dingo:

- Stand up to your full height.
- Face the dingo.
- Fold your arms and keep 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.

If bitten, immediately seek medical help and report the incident to a QPWS ranger as soon as possible.



Courtesy of 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@derm.qld.gov.au>. Include the time, date, location, nature of the encounter and any distinguishing features of the dingo. Photographs are very helpful, but please advise us if name acknowledgement is needed should they be used in QPWS publications.

Find-a-word: secret message (from page 7):

STAY CLOSE TO ADULTS AND BE DINGO SAFE

Further information

Visit us online at www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks
Search for 'Fraser Island dingoes'.



Cover photo of dingo: Ivan Thrash, DERM
Cover photo background: Briony Masters, DERM

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