

DINGOES

The dingo is a member of a group of primitive canines that are more closely related to a wolf than a dog.

THE ORIGIN OF THE DINGO

There is much myth and controversy surrounding the origin and arrival of the dingo into Australia. The most widely accepted theory is that dingoes were introduced by ancient seafarers from Asia. Another is that they were introduced by the Aborigines.

Carbon-dating of dingo fossil remains estimates its arrival into Australia at approximately 4 000 years ago. Since their arrival it is believed that dingoes have contributed to the extinction of some native fauna on mainland Australia.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The dingo is a slight, medium sized animal. Females weigh 10 to 16kg and males weigh 12 to 20kg. These weights may be increased in captive breed animals. All dingoes are distinguished by white markings on their feet and a white tipped tail. Their coats may be a wide range of colours including ginger, black, tan and/ or white.



Young alpine dingoes

BREEDING

The breeding season (April to May) is accompanied by an increase in social interaction, howling and defecation.

After a successful mating, the female will select a den to raise her pups. It is usually a cave, old wombat burrow or a hollowed out log. An average of four to six pups are born between the months of June and August after a sixty-three-day gestation or pregnancy period.

At two weeks of age the pups start becoming aggressive. At four weeks, positions in the dominance hierarchy become apparent. Weaning occurs at three to four months.



Young dingo pup

The average lifespan is five to seven years in the wild and 10 to 15 years in captivity.

THREATS

The greatest threat to dingoes today is crossbreeding with domestic dogs. This results in the loss of pure dingo genes, which may eventually lead to their genetic extinction.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DINGOES AND DOMESTIC DOGS

The dingo has:

1. Longer eardrums with extra sensitive hearing;
2. Longer and more slender canine teeth;
3. A larger distance between the canine and carnassial tooth;
5. A larger cranium; and
6. The dingo can only produce one litter per year, whereas domestic dogs can have two.

DIET

The dingo is a major predator of small to medium-sized mammals such as rabbits, possums and wallabies. It also eats insects, reptiles and birds. When hunting in packs, it is capable of preying on larger animals such as kangaroos and wallaroos.

DISTRIBUTION

Dingoes are found throughout all of Australia except Tasmania. They are adaptable and able to utilise every habitat, ranging from arid coastal areas to alpine regions.

Adult dingoes have a clearly defined home range, the size of which depends on the availability of prey. Home ranges are often shared by a number of dingoes.



Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary

Jesmond Road
Fig Tree Pocket QLD 4069
Phone: (07) 3378 1366
Email: education@koala.net