

'Understanding wild dog ecology in Western Australia'

Project Synopsis

Project commencement:	1 May 2008
Project completion:	June 30 2009
Total project investment:	\$200,000

Project Aim

This project will use molecular tools to enhance understanding of the movement characteristics of wild dog populations on a much larger scale than previously possible, thereby assisting how they are managed. Using a new and innovative approach, it will aid in the collection, analysis and extension of DNA research into wild dog populations in Western Australia. Funding from Rangelands NRM WA was essential for collecting samples and engaging the pastoral community in the project.



The Challenges

Key challenges for the project include:

- Collecting samples from remote regions of Western Australia.
- Managing the interest and expectations of project participants.
- Managing continuity in the team in remote regions.



Benefits to the Rangelands Regions

This study will add to the existing scientific information on several key aspects of wild dog ecology in Western Australia. Most prominent will be the potential for an enhanced understanding of the movement characteristics of wild dog populations on a much larger scale than previously possible. It should also reveal the extent of hybridisation between feral dogs and dingoes in different parts of the state. Collectively, this information will be used to evaluate, refine and possibly reinforce existing strategies to tackle wild dog issues, including wild dog control and dingo conservation. The sampling performed in Western Australia will also be integrated into a national survey of dingo purity and genetic variability.

Key Outcomes

A key outcome of this project is to determine the geographical area over which wild dog populations are interbreeding, allowing deductions to be made about patterns of movement. This will lead to new insights into the size of family groups and their territories, increasing information on movements and potentially assist in targeting control efforts.

Additionally, an assessment of the levels of hybridisation between dingoes and wild dogs will be made, which will lead to the identification of any remaining pure dingo populations.

Hybridisation poses a rapidly escalating threat to the genetic integrity of dingoes, and there has not yet been a

systematic survey of the extent of hybridisation in Australia. Identification of pure dingoes is also important from the perspective of wild dog management, to allow for the planning of control measures that can take into account potential concerns over the conservation of dingoes.

This project is a component of a larger project by Danielle Stephens investigating the population genetics of wild dogs in Australia. In addition to Rangelands WA, Danielle's work is supported by the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, BHP Billiton Nickel West and the Department of Environment and Conservation.

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