



Frequently Asked Questions: Wild dog home ranges and movements

Where do wild dogs live?

Almost all habitats in Australia are suitable for wild dogs, and they do not see fence lines or any difference between public and private land. Wild dogs can live in all sorts of habitats, including bushland, coastal zones, pastoral grazing and cropping areas, sandy and stony deserts, alpine and in urban residential areas. They are often found in places where they were thought to be absent, and in some cases are frequently seen but not recognised as a wild dog. The vast majority of Australia's wild dogs do not live in or come from parks and reserves.

Do wild dogs have home ranges and how large are they?

All wild dogs have a home range. This is the area where wild dogs forage, take shelter, mate, raise offspring and spend most of their life. The size can vary from hectares to many square kilometres and will vary depending on the landscape and the availability of resources. In higher production areas where resources are more readily available, wild dog home ranges are generally smaller. In the suburbs for example, they might spend their whole life within a few hectares in comparison with desert environments where home ranges may be quite large due to limiting resources.

How often do they travel around these home ranges?

Wild dogs regularly traverse their home ranges but we are unsure about how often this occurs.

Some research suggests it might be monthly, weekly, or even every few days. Different individuals are likely to exhibit different territorial behaviour and utilise their home ranges differently depending on seasonal conditions and breeding cycle.



Wild dogs usually move along landscape features that provide the easiest pathway. Image: NSW DPI

Do they use certain areas of their home range more than others?

Yes. Wild dogs favour certain parts of their home range according to the landscape and breeding cycle, for example, water points, rubbish tips, and den sites. Carcasses can act as focal points with increased wild dog activity at various times of the year.

What features of the landscape do dogs use as travel routes?

Wild dogs usually move along natural features within the landscape that provide the easiest pathway. Their preferred travel routes will depend on the local environment, the time of year, and other local factors such as available corridors- ridges, dry creek beds and watercourses, tree lines, sandy edges around Spinifex, stock routes, property roads, 4WD tracks, fire trails, bushwalking tracks, powerline easements and railway lines.

How far can wild dogs move?

Most of the time, wild dogs remain within their home range. Individuals can however sometimes explore outside of their home range before returning or can disperse large distances relatively quickly. It is not fully understood why they undertake these long distance movements or why they settle in certain

areas. Research has shown that they can move up to 560kms in 30 days in rangeland environments and up to 75kms in a week in forested environments on the Great Dividing Range.

When are wild dogs most active?

Data from tracking and movement studies across Australia show that wild dogs are most active around dusk and dawn, and moderately active during the night. However, a notable proportion of wild dogs are also active throughout the day, depending on a variety of different factors such as region, temperature, wild dog abundance and the availability of different types of food sources.

How do they mark their home range and communicate?

Wild dogs use scent in the form of urine and faeces, visual signs such as scratchings, and a range of vocalisations such as howling to communicate with other dogs. Wild dogs have an acute sense of smell, and studies have shown they can detect chemicals at levels as low as a few parts per billion. Trained sniffer dogs are widely used throughout the world because of this ability. This remarkable sense of smell is an essential factor to consider when



Wild dogs mark their home ranges by urinating, defecating and scratching.
Image: Luke Woodford



Image: Clare Mulcahy

controlling wild dogs.

Where am I likely to see wild dog sign on my property?

Wild dogs will mark their home ranges in areas where their scent is likely to be encountered by as many other individual wild dogs as possible, for example, at the junctions of 4WD tracks or property trails, along animal pads, and around water points. It is common for wild dogs to mark their presence by urinating, defecating and scratching on or near elevated objects such as on tussocks and rocks or on the upwind side of tracks. (See [Factsheet: Have you got wild dogs?](#))

Do wild dogs kill other dogs?

Wild dogs will defend their home range and can kill other dogs including domestic dogs that intrude. Wild dogs will also leave their home range to kill other dogs such as domestic pets on occasion. This may occur because they see the domestic dog as a food source or as a result of aggression during the breeding season.

Balancing the roles of wild dogs from environmental and production perspectives is an important challenge for land managers.

More information

For more information on wild dog behaviour and ecology visit www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/wild-dog/.

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