

Trapper's notes

Trapping provides an important support role to coordinated control programs, often picking up the older dogs that have learnt to avoid poisoned baits.

While it is a difficult skill to master, it's one that has to be done properly to ensure wild dogs are caught first time and do not become trap shy. According to Don, the major failing of inexperienced trappers is to underestimate their quarry.

Wild dogs are intelligent, suspicious by nature and have extremely acute senses. Therefore a trapper must be very careful and skilled to outwit them. There is no such thing as an easy dog and every trap must be prepared with care to ensure you do not educate the dog and end up with a permanent resident.

Before launching into a trapping program, it is important to realise that considerable time and effort must be invested in the process. Dogs, and the environment they inhabit, must be carefully observed to identify appropriate trapping sites; traps must be checked daily; and perseverance may be necessary to achieve success.



Traits of a true trapper

A good trapper:

- has patience (most important)
- is dedicated
- learns from failures
- treats every day individually (what works to attract a dog one day may not work the next)
- alternates decoys
 - Don't use the same scent on every trap site – if a dog gets a fright it will automatically associate that smell with danger.
- invests time
 - Trapping requires regular surveillance of traps - traps that are not checked daily may catch non-target animals (eg a fox) and alert the dog to the traps presence and/or expose trapped animals to undue stress and cruelty.
- is attentive to detail
 - For example, bag rotation is critical. A careful trapper uses a bag to protect the ground around the trap site from his/her scent. Once a dog makes the link between the bag odour and a place where a pack member has been caught it will avoid future traps set using the same bag.
- does not underestimate his/her quarry

1 Wild dog trapping steps

Preliminary 1080 bait

Don recommends that landholders bait during the local coordinated control campaign to take out most of the wild dog population and remove foxes that may prematurely scratch-up traps and alert dogs to their presence.

It should be noted that some trappers disagree with this suggestion because they believe baiting will disperse the remaining dogs and disturb their normal behaviour.

Identify the target dog's 'beat' and scent posts

To trap effectively, dogs need to be padding (checking the boundaries of their territory).

A dog is a creature of habit – a feature that can be used to the trappers advantage. In most cases, study of the local area will reveal a consistent beat. Dogs will maintain a beat over a period of seven to nine days however this can vary with some staying out for four to six weeks.

By identifying repeated tracks, and territory markers, like scratch marks, scent posts and areas of collected droppings, a trapper can position his/her trap in the area the dog is most likely to travel. These territory markers often occur near notable landmarks, such as a kangaroo hole in a fence or the intersection of a road or a creek line.

Walking a domestic dog around the suspected beat will help you identify scent posts as these are the areas your dog will stop to investigate.

Use of decoys to attract dogs to trap site

Decoys are scents that are alien to the dog's territory. If they are placed near the dog's scent post the dog will investigate and be more likely to trigger a well placed trap. Some trappers suggest the use of domestic dog urine – whatever you use, be careful not to leave a human scent as most dogs will recognise this as a threat and avoid the area.

Other points to note

Traps should be set to minimise risk to stock and non target animals.

- Decoys can be used to lure dogs off main livestock corridors.
- Decoys will go stale and have to be replaced.
- Do not set traps in view of livestock as they will investigate the area.
- Working dogs should be managed closely during trapping programs.

Good planning and monitoring takes time but can be very beneficial

Setting traps

Don will provide demonstrations on how to set different types of traps. For step-by step instructions, refer to Part 2, Section 6 of this manual.



Wild dog at scent-post

Indicators of wild dog presence

- Stock kills and bite marks (see Part 2, Section 4.1 for information on how to differentiate kills from scavenging)
- Repeated tracks (well worn 'beats'), especially on newly graded tracks
- Increase in stock losses as pups mature (Spring to Summer)
- Increased localised crow numbers (due to concentration of animal kills in local area)
- Crows following your working dogs
- Birds of prey and scavengers consistently flying across rough, barren areas where you would not otherwise expect to find much food (locating dingo kills)
- Kangaroos drowned in dams during good season
- Young kangaroos hung up in suspension fences when there has been no one present to disturb the mobs
- Sheep that won't work the wind and visit good feed down one end of a paddock
- Changes in stock behaviour: eg. no stock camping on the dam when they have always done so in the past
- Sheep coming into water at a gallop and leaving in the same fashion (lead animal taking tail animal back out before it has watered). This indicates sheep are being attacked at the water – big pups often work these areas.
- Territory markers (scent posts) near roo holes in netting fences, along fence lines and at road junctions
- Feral goat numbers declining or stable in number (no kids or weaner goats)
- Feral goats shifting from the area they have always run in
- Poor lambing percentages in good seasons where baiting has occurred in the past – this may indicate adult dogs are not taking baits or young dogs have recolonised an area. This could also be due to pigs, eagles or high parasite loads.
- Cows that have obviously lost calves – udders bagged up and dry.



Trapping tools, including:

- Trap
- Bag or mat to kneel on
- Dustpan & brush
- Sieve
- Small axe or mattock with hammer head
- Pliers
- Gloves
- Decoy
- Plastic wrap