The 
dingoes
of
Fraser Island (K’Gari)

Safety and information guide

Be dingo-safe!

Read this brochure before arriving on Fraser Island and remember:

- Never feed dingoes.
- Keep kids close (within arm’s reach)—dingoes move quickly.
- 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.
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 social structure of dingo packs results in some individual dingoes being denied food regardless of availability and they can therefore appear particularly lean. 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 the same as that recorded for mainland dingoes. The island provides plenty of food and water for wildlife. 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 a necessary component of Fraser Island’s natural ecosystem and feeding them interrupts this natural balance. Since 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 berries, and roam along the beaches looking for marine life or the occasional dead sea bird.
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 one of many monitoring tools. Rangers capture, tag and record the size, weight and distinguishing details of some island 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 QPWS rangers, help to document territories and pack membership. Ear-tagging is targeted at individuals with a minimum weight of approximately 10kg, of reasonable body condition and that exhibit, or are anticipated to exhibit, problematic behaviour.

**Dingo identikit**

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

- **Ear tags:** which ear, what colour
- **Body condition:** ribs and hips well covered or obvious
- **Dark hair:** on neck, spine or tail
- **Tail tip:** white (large or small) or none
- **Tail:** limp, kinked, part tail missing
- **White feet and socks:** extent above paws
- **Body colour:** typically ginger
- **Injuries:** scars, ragged or torn ears

The ultimate aim is to ensure the conservation of a sustainable wild dingo population whilst minimising the risks to human safety and dingo welfare, and ensuring that the wildlife experience of visitors is maintained.
From feeding to attack—the sequence of events

**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 display habituated behaviour, 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.

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**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.

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**Kids story circle**

*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.*

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*Photo: Darren Blake, Queensland Government*

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*Walkers take care. Use the gates not the grids.*
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, have 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)
- K’gari campground (private)
- Cathedrals on Fraser (private)

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. Also be aware that running or jogging can trigger an interaction with a dingo.

Keep kids close.

Dingoes move quickly.

Never feed dingoes

Feeding dingoes causes them to 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.

Don’t take food to the lake shores and beaches

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 drinks, other than water, to lake shores or the beach.

Keep all food, drinks and rubbish in strong, lockable, secure containers and ice boxes with heavy-duty straps.

Kids story circle

It is late January, and it 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, nice, bandicoots, frogs and insects at night when it is cool.

Female dingoes are tagged in their right ear and males in their left. It doesn’t stop them hunting. People who see dingoes can let rangers know where they have seen

them and what they were doing. Features like ear tags, scars, sock heights and tail markings are important to note down. This helps to build 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 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 deterrent 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 or place on top of vehicles
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.

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

Pet dogs are passive.
Dingoes are different—wild!
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 or start running when dingoes are near. This may encourage threatening or aggressive behaviour.

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.

**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.

**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.

**Summer (December–February)**
Pups learn pack rules through play, showing aggressive behaviour to gain dominance. Young dingoes will try to dominate people, especially children.

**Photo:** Ruth Thomas

**Photo:** Matt Lowry, Queensland Government

**Photo:** Linda Behrendorff
When 
dingoes come close

Reporting an incident
For all emergencies phone Triple Zero (000).
• Try 112 from a mobile phone if there is no reception.

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. Mobile phone charges may apply.

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
• nipping
• biting
• savagely attacking.

Be dingo-safe!
✓ NEVER feed dingoes.
✓ Always stay within arm’s reach of children, even small teenagers.
✓ Walk in groups.
✓ Do not run. Running or jogging can trigger a negative dingo interaction.
✓ Camp in fenced areas when possible.
✓ Lock up food stores and iceboxes (even on a boat).
✓ Never store food or food containers in tents.
✓ Secure all rubbish, fish and bait.

If you feel threatened by a dingo:
• Stand up to your full height.
• Face the dingo.
• Keep your arms close to your body, and maintain 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.

For emergencies requiring medical assistance, call 000 or 112 immediately.

Further information
Visit us online at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au
Search for ‘Fraser Island dingoes’.

Help QPWS rangers to accurately profile dingoes. Email any information about any encounter with a dingo—good or not so good—to dingo.ranger@nprsr.qld.gov.au. Include the time, date, location, nature of the encounter and any distinguishing features of the dingo. Photographs are very helpful.

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.

Be dingo-safe!

Cover photo: Ivan Thrash, Queensland Government
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