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DESTROYING THE PUPS

By A. R. TOMLINSON, Chief Vermin Control Officer, and C. K. BLAIR, Vermin Control Officer in Charge of Dogging Operations in Pastoral Areas

QUITE apart from the heavy financial losses caused in the sheep industry by the depredations of wild dogs (we use the term to cover both the true dingoes and various breeds of domesticated dogs running wild), the ghastly suffering which they cause should make every sheep-owner anxious to destroy these canine scourges wherever an opportunity offers. Wild dogs on killing sprees will maim and kill far more sheep than they can eat, but they cause the greatest suffering when teaching pups to kill. At such times, the adult dogs will disable sheep and leave them till the pups are brought up to inflict further suffering on the helpless victims. This process will be repeated again and again until the pups are able to make their own kills.

The pupping season, which normally extends from July to September, is a particularly favourable time to intensify the wild dog destruction campaign. The pups are most vulnerable at this season and have not yet been taught to kill. Furthermore, the parents may often be destroyed at the same time and the destruction of a family of wild dogs will pay good dividends.

FINDING THE "NESTS"

The finding of the lairs or "nests" requires knowledge of the habits of wild dogs, together with patience and tracking ability, but it is well worth the effort. From July to September, station hands should always carry rifles, poison and other equipment in readiness for use.

The nests may be in hollow logs, caves, along dry creek-beds, in crevices among rocks, in rabbit burrows or white ant mounds or in thick spinifex. They are usually within reasonable distance of water but seldom in such close proximity that the litters will be disturbed by stock or game.

When the pups are capable of leaving the nests they will often be found in suitable "hide-outs" near the lairs, or will move in closer to the water.

Indications of Pups in the Vicinity.

A freshly-killed carcass found between July and September, with big portions of the hindquarters or the shoulders eaten by one or two dogs, is a good indication that pups are being fed.

Dogs Return Direct to Pups.

The pups may be within a mile or even 15 to 20 miles away but, irrespective of pads, creek beds or soft travelling, the parents will return from the kill in the straightest line possible.

Behaviour of Parents While the Litters are in the Nest.

While the pups are still in the nest, the parent male dog will camp up to 200 yards away while the bitch will care for the litter. She will vomit up food for the

pups. The bitch will then go to where the male dog is located for his vomited contribution and take this also to the nest. After about a month, portions of the carcass are carried back for the pups to feed on.

Sometimes there will be two litters together in the same "nest" being cared for by the mothers (often an old bitch and a young bitch with the one male dog).

If the male dog's camp is found, the smaller tracks of the bitch will lead to the pups.

Parents Will Move the Pups if Disturbed.

If a hunter finds indications that he is in close proximity to a nest, he should make every effort to find it before night-fall. If he waits until morning, the parents are almost certain to have moved the pups any distance up to four or five miles. Alternatively, he should endeavour to destroy at least the bitch and if possible the male dog.

New Lairs Difficult to Locate.

Once a move has been made, it is extremely difficult to find the lair. Well-defined tracks lead to the original nest but, of course, the pups will be old enough to travel before the parents have time to make established pads to a new nest.

DESTROYING PUPS IN A NEST

In some cases destruction is easy as the nests may be readily accessible. In other cases they may be in caves with small openings, under rocks, in hollow logs and in other places difficult to deal with.

Poisoning.

Prepare some very small baits, impale on the end of a long pointed stick and push well into the den. A large poisoned bone can also be left just inside the opening. Barricade the entrance securely.

At some distance back along the pad leading to the den leave fairly large pieces of poisoned carcass. Traps can also be used to advantage if on hand. While the parents are in the vicinity endeavouring to rescue the litter, there is a good chance they will either be poisoned or trapped.

Wire Loop on a Pole.

A wire loop or hook on the end of a pole may be used as a probe to secure and pull out the pups.

Suffocating with Smoke.

Inflammable rubbish and wood should be inserted as far as possible and set alight after the entrance has been blocked. Green leaves will increase the smoke. If the lair is deep, the smoke will not penetrate sufficiently but the method is useful when everything else has failed.

DESTROYING THE PARENT DOGS

While the destruction of the pups will be a major achievement, it is important to destroy the parents or else the trouble will be repeated the following year.

Trapping.

Leave one of the pups in the nest and set two or three traps along the pad leading in. At the same time, set two or three traps in the vicinity of the male dog's hide-out.

However, under no circumstances should the nest be left unattended while obtaining traps. Almost invariably the pups or remaining pup will be removed by the parents before the hunter returns.

Poisoning.

Where the pups cannot be secured, poisoned baits should be inserted into the lair and carcass baits left for the parents as described earlier in this article.

Where the pups may be captured, leave one in the nest. Smear fat or blood behind the ears and under the flanks. Powdered strychnine should then be rubbed into these places. The bitch will return, remove the pup and will be poisoned when licking the fat or blood.

DESTROYING PUPS AFTER THEY HAVE LEFT THE NEST

The parents will make a kill some distance from the hide-out or bring back a portion of a carcass, leaving it some distance from the pups. The pups will be called to the meat and then be left to find their way back again. This procedure is part of the general training and teaches the pups to find their way about.

Tracks and Signs.

There will often be fairly well-defined tracks leading from the feeding place to the playground. It may be necessary to follow the tracks some distance before finding the playground, which is usually in thick scrub, heavy spinifex or among broken rocks in close proximity to water.

Caution and Careful Search Required.

Extreme caution and absolute silence are necessary in tracking or the pups will be frightened away.

If they have not been able to escape from the playground when it has been located, the pups will usually be motionless and well hidden even when the searcher is only a few feet distant. If one pup is found the others will be close by.

If Pups Cannot be Caught do not let them Escape in a Group.

Possibly the pups will be disturbed and be seen making off. Every effort should be made to split them up if they cannot be caught, otherwise they will not return to the same place.

After a litter of pups have been scattered, they will return to the playground and wait for the remainder prior to moving to another locality.

Poisoning of Pups after they Return.

Portions of a poisoned carcass should be scattered over the playground and left until the pups return. They will usually feed on the meat while waiting.

It is important that the hunter should move away from the vicinity for at least 24 hours. The parents may possibly be poisoned at the same time as the pups.

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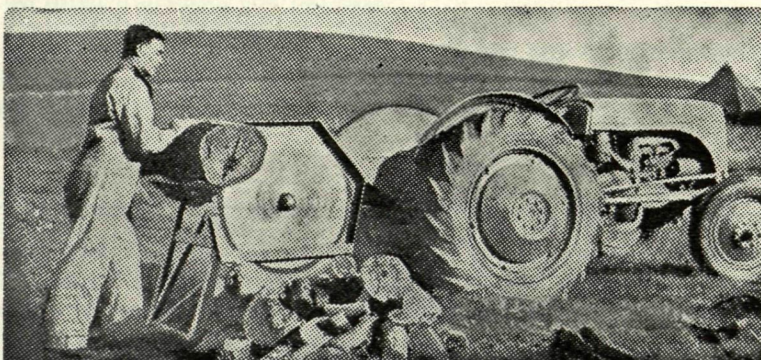
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