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Wild Dog Control

IN THE NORTH-WEST

By R. J. FRASER, Regional Vermin Control Officer, Port Hedland

Because of its sparsely-settled condition, the North-West of Western Australia is almost an ideal breeding-ground and hunting-ground for wild dogs. Even the best of the pastoral country is but thinly populated and there are large areas of rugged country which is seldom traversed by white men.

Wild dogs have always been listed among the pastoralists' "headaches" in these areas but they would present a much more serious problem were it not for the efforts of the "doggers" employed by the Agriculture Protection Board.

In the Pilbara region alone, there are usually from six to ten full-time doggers operating. Each man has a well-defined area in which he works. He must be an expert bushman as he often operates alone over a huge area of wild country. He must know wild dogs and their habits for he often has to pit his skill and knowledge against dogs which experience has rendered more than usually cunning. In addition he must know all about trapping and baiting, be a good tracker, a good horseman and have more than a passing knowledge of motor vehicle maintenance as he works in rough country far from garages and service stations.

The Pilbara doggers operate over an area embracing the Roebourne, Tableland, Marble Bar, Port Hedland and Nullagine Vermin Board's territories. This takes in some very rugged isolated country such as that in the vicinity of the Rudall River and Broadhurst Ranges some 300 miles east of Nullagine.
Doggers traverse these areas laying baits, trapping and poisoning carcasses. On the ground baiting drives, each man usually takes 5,000 prepared baits each containing one half-grain strychnine tablet. In addition, he carries 10 oz. of strychnine crystals for carcass baiting using kangaroo or other meat. The prepared baits are put down near water-courses, creeks, rockholes or on any well-used “beats” patrolled by wild dogs.

**SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

Doggers, using four-wheel-drive vehicles, usually commence from a certain point and work as a team with each man covering a certain area and meeting the remainder of the team at a pre-determined spot every three or four days. This ensures that, in the event of a vehicle breakdown, the man’s plight is known and he is not too far away to be rescued promptly.

Instructions are given that no man is to put up a smoke unless he is in trouble. This means that a smoke in a certain area is a clear indication that help is needed and the nearest man loses no time in rendering assistance.

The professional doggers are of great help in protecting the sheep areas from wild dog attacks. They operate on the fringes of settlement, often in areas which even the four-wheel-drive vehicles cannot reach—country that can only be traversed on foot or on horseback.

Here they lay their baits, particularly at mating time when the dogs are hungry and apt to be less cautious. Big baiting drives are organised in April-May when the breeding season commences. Last year 63,000 prepared baits were laid at this time, plus a number of carcass baits.

In July-August the doggers destroy a large number of wild dog pups which
would normally move out of their lairs in September to harry the pastoralists' flocks. Last year they killed 45 adult dogs and 156 pups in these areas. Their tally for 12 months was 435 dogs.

**PASTORALISTS HELP**

Pastoralists are playing an important role in keeping down wild dog populations by keeping rivers and creeks leading into their stations well baited and by forming into groups to employ doggers on a 50-50 basis with the A.P.B.

In October, the pastoralists in conjunction with the A.P.B. carried out a drive over the whole of the Pilbara area. The country was divided into seven zones and the A.P.B. supplied one dogger and 10 oz. strychnine to each zone plus 50,000 prepared baits to be distributed equally through the seven zones. The pastoralists supplied two men per zone plus whatever horses were needed.

**AERIAL BAITING**

Coincidentally with the October ground baiting drive, aerial baiting was carried out using an Auster aircraft which dropped 15,000 baits each trip in otherwise almost inaccessible areas. The aircraft covered over 3,000 miles in some 34 hours of flying time, and dropped 125,000 baits. A further 155,000 baits were laid in three ground-baiting drives during the 12 months which ended June 30, 1959.

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**This Hillside was once Badly Gullied**

Erosion gullies are caused by running water. No gully filling should be carried out unless provision is made to stop that water running in the future. Good pasture cover and contour working make runoff less likely and contour banks make sure that what does run will not cause damage. If gullies have been filled in the past and by chance they are still well grassed they are still vulnerable to erosion if cultivated. Old stabilised gullies should be protected by contour banks before the next crop goes in. The evening light shows healed gullies in the background on this photograph taken near York.
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