

NSWDOG SOP2

Trapping of wild dogs using cage traps

Background

Trapping of wild dogs is often used where poison baiting is less effective, for example, in or around lambing paddocks where there is abundant food. Trapping is useful for targeting individual problem animals or as a follow-up after 1080 baiting programs, but is regarded as an inefficient method for general population control.

Cage traps are used to capture problem dogs in urban/residential areas and other areas where it is unacceptable or undesirable to use 1080 or foot-hold traps. Animals trapped in a cage can be transported away from the area for euthanasia. Soft net traps may also be useful for capturing individual problem animals in similar situations - refer to [GEN003 Trapping using soft net traps](#). Padded-jaw, foot-hold traps can only be used at sites where the animal can be killed by shooting while still held in the trap. Refer to [NSWDOG SOP1 Trapping of wild dogs using padded-jaw traps](#).

From an animal welfare perspective, cage traps are preferred over leg-hold traps as fewer injuries are sustained and non-target animals can be released unharmed.

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a guide only; it does not replace or override the relevant legislation that applies in NSW. The SOP should only be used subject to the applicable legal requirements (including WHS) operating in the relevant jurisdiction.

Individual SOPs should be read in conjunction with the overarching Code of Practice for that species to help ensure that the most appropriate control techniques are selected and that they are deployed in a strategic way, usually in combination with other control techniques, to achieve rapid and sustained reduction of pest animal populations and impacts.

Application

- Trapping is time-consuming and labour-intensive and is therefore best suited for control of small populations or problem individuals.
- Traps have the potential to cause significant suffering and distress so should only be used when there is no suitable alternative.
- Humane and successful trapping requires extensive training and experience.
- Selection of appropriate traps and trap sites will maximise chance of capture and minimise the distress caused to target and non-target animals.
- Every effort must be made to avoid target and non-target deaths from factors such as exposure, shock, capture myopathy and predation.

- Before euthanasing a trapped dog, first establish that it is a wild dog, rather than a domestic pet or stray dog. The presence of a collar, identification tag or a microchip would indicate that the dog is likely to be a pet or stray. A dog with a quiet or friendly demeanour is also more likely to be a pet than a wild dog. All dogs caught in residential/urban environments and any caught elsewhere that show signs indicating that they may be pets or working dogs-should be taken to a pound where they will be scanned for a microchip and any registration details checked. They may also be held at the pound for a period of time before re-homing or euthanasing. State legislation regarding companion animals varies and should be consulted to determine the operator's obligations with respect to any animals caught. For instance, in some jurisdictions, it may be a legal requirement that ALL trapped dogs are taken to the nearest council pound for assessment.
- Where it has been established that the trapped dog is a wild dog, it should be euthanased in a humane manner. Whenever possible, the dog should be killed with an overdose of barbiturate. This should be performed by an authorised person at an animal shelter, council pound or veterinary surgery. In some situations it may be appropriate to shoot the dog while still in the cage at a site away from urban/residential areas.
- Traps must be used in accordance with the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*. Use of steel-jaw traps is prohibited in NSW, but trapping with padded-jaw traps, cage traps and treadle snares is permitted.
- Shooting of wild dogs should only be performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience with firearms and who hold the appropriate licences and accreditation. Storage and transportation of firearms and ammunition must comply with relevant legislation requirements.

Animal welfare implications

Target animals

- Wild dogs are likely to suffer distress from being confined in a cage trap and they can sometimes be injured while trying to escape, although the potential for injury is less than that for foot-hold traps.
- Cage traps can cause extensive injuries to the teeth and mouth of trapped dogs; this is minimised by using a small mesh size (50mm is recommended).
- Traps must be inspected daily to prevent suffering and possible death from exposure, thirst, starvation and/or shock. Traps are best set in the late afternoon and checked the following morning.
- It is preferable to set up traps at sites where vegetation can provide shade and shelter.
- Shade cloth or hessian can be used for protection during extremes of weather. In hot weather, water should be provided and in cold weather bedding should be available inside the cage. Where possible, trapping should be avoided when adverse weather conditions threaten the welfare of trapped animals.
- Captured animals must be approached carefully and quietly to reduce panic, further stress and risk of injury.

- Trapped wild dogs must be euthanased as quickly and humanely as possible.
- If transporting a trapped dog away from the capture site to be euthanased, the cage should be covered with hessian or a blanket to provide shelter from direct sunlight, wind and rain and to minimise stress from visual threats.
- To minimise the animal welfare implications of leaving dependent pups to die a slow death from starvation it is preferable not to undertake trapping when females are whelping, i.e. June to August in temperate areas.
- If lactating bitches are trapped and shot, efforts should be made to find dependent pups. If located they should either be taken to the nearest council pound or euthanased quickly and humanely either by shooting (with a single shot to the brain) or manually applied concussive blow to the head, depending on legislative requirements.

Non-target animals

- Traps are not target specific; therefore, other species such as birds and reptiles may be caught.
- Traps must not be set near areas that are regularly frequented by non-target species.
- Live non-target animals caught in traps must be examined for injuries and signs of illness or distress and dealt with as follows:
 - Animals that are unharmed or have only received minimal injuries such as minor cuts or abrasions should be immediately released at the site of capture.
 - Animals that have more severe injuries or are suffering from thermal stress should receive appropriate attention. An animal suffering from thermal stress can initially be placed in a suitable quiet holding area that provides warmth or shade to allow recovery before release. Animals with treatable injuries that cannot be immediately released or those failing to recover from thermal stress should be presented to a veterinarian or a registered wildlife carer for treatment.
 - Animals that have injuries that are untreatable or that would compromise their survival in the wild should be euthanased using a technique that is suitable for the species. For more information on euthanasia techniques refer to [GEN001 Methods of Euthanasia](#).
- If foxes or feral cats are caught in the trap they must be euthanased quickly and humanely by a shot to the brain using an appropriate firearm (refer to *NSWFOX SOP6 Trapping of foxes using cage traps* and *NSW CAT SOP2 Trapping of feral cats using cage traps*).
- If a domestic pet is caught, it should be taken to the nearest animal shelter, council pound or veterinarian where it can be scanned for a microchip and the owner contacted or assessed as to suitability for re-homing.

Workplace health and safety considerations

- Trapped wild dogs are dangerous to handle and can inflict serious bites. If these dogs are shot while still in the cage, there should be no need to handle them directly. However,

when handling is necessary, leather gloves and a catching pole should be used. Operators must be protected by tetanus immunisation in case of bite infection.

- Firearms are hazardous. All people should stand well behind the shooter when a dog is being shot. The line of fire must be chosen to prevent accidents or injury from stray bullets or ricochets.
- Firearm users must strictly observe all relevant safety guidelines relating to firearm ownership, possession and use.
- Firearms must be securely stored in a compartment that meets state legal requirements. Ammunition must be stored in a locked container separate from firearms.
- The shooter and others in the immediate vicinity should wear adequate hearing protection to prevent irreversible hearing damage, and safety glasses to protect eyes from gases, metal fragments and other particles.
- Care must be taken when handling wild dogs and carcasses as they may carry parasites which cause diseases such as hydatidosis and sarcoptic mange that can affect humans and other animals. A dog with obvious mange should only be handled while wearing gloves. Routinely wash hands after handling all wild dogs and carcasses.

Equipment required

Traps

- Wire mesh cage traps are used. These can be obtained from commercial suppliers and are available in a variety of sizes (e.g., a dog-size cage is 120cm x 60cm x 60cm, and made of 2.5 mm welded wire with a mesh size of 50mm). The traps have a spring door that is activated either by a treadle plate or a hook mechanism.

Lures

- Olfactory stimuli such as dog faeces and/or urine, or a commercially prepared lure, e.g., synthetic fermented egg, are used to lure wild dogs into the trap.
- The attractiveness of lures will vary with season and location.

Meat baits

- A handful of meat bait is placed inside and also near the trap. Rabbit, chicken, beef, lamb, kangaroo have all been successfully used as bait.
- Attractiveness and palatability of the bait will vary with season and location.

Firearms and ammunition

- Where shooting is the most appropriate means of euthanasia, smaller calibre rifles such as a .22 rimfire, with hollow- or soft-point ammunition, are suitable for euthanasia at short range (from 5-25cm away).
- The accuracy and precision of firearms should be tested against inanimate targets prior to the commencement of any shooting operation.

Procedures

Selection of trap sites

- Traps should be set where the dog is most likely to find and investigate the unfamiliar lure odour (e.g., beside regularly used boundary pads, near scent pads and around scratch points).
- The location of all trap sites must be accurately recorded and marked. This information should be readily available to others in case the trapper is unable to return to check traps.
- Do not place in areas where the traps may be interfered with /damaged by large stock or humans.

Placing and setting the trap

- It is preferable to set traps at the end of each day and check early each morning. If traps are left set during the day, they should be checked again in late afternoon.
- Before setting each trap ensure that it is functioning properly.
- Where possible place the traps parallel to objects such as fences, logs or sheds with the rear of the cage against an obstruction to prevent dogs taking the main bait without going into the trap.
- Cage traps should be set squarely on the ground and the doors of the trap bent upward to increase the openness of the trap space.
- Place the meat bait at the rear of the trap, attached to the hook mechanism if present. A second piece of meat is placed at the mouth of the trap.
- Cover the floor of the trap with 3-5cm of soil.
- If using lures place them in suitable positions inside and outside the trap.
- The trap should be pegged to the ground to prevent the animal from tipping it over and injuring itself and/or releasing the trap door.

Euthanasia of wild dogs

Trapped wild dogs can be killed humanely using one the following methods:

Overdose of barbiturate

- These procedures can only be performed by, or under the direction of, a veterinarian or other authorised person.
- An intramuscular (neck or back-leg muscles) or subcutaneous injection of a sedative (e.g., xylazine at 1-2 mg/kg) may be necessary to restrain the animal before euthanasing. The injection can sometimes be administered to the dog through the wire mesh without the dog being handled. This is easier to perform if the cage has a 'crush' or 'squeeze-back' to restrain the dog at one end of the cage.
- Once the dog is sedated it is euthanased with an intravenous or intraperitoneal injection of pentobarbitone sodium (approximately 150mg/kg).

Shooting of wild dogs

- In some situations trapped wild dogs may have to be euthanased by shooting whilst still held in the cage trap.
- Head shots (temporal or frontal) should be used for shooting wild dogs caught in traps.
- Unnecessary people should keep away from the area to allow the dog to become less agitated. The shooter should approach the animal in a calm and quiet manner.
- Never fire when the dog is moving its head. Be patient and wait until the dog is motionless before shooting. Accuracy is important to achieve a humane death. One shot should ensure instantaneous loss of consciousness and rapid death without resumption of consciousness.
- To maximise the impact of the shot and to minimise the risk of misdirection the range should be as short as possible i.e. 5-20 cm from the head. When shooting, the barrel should be just inside the cage.
- Shots must be aimed to destroy the major centres at the back of the brain near the spinal cord. This can be achieved by one of the following methods (see also Figure 2).

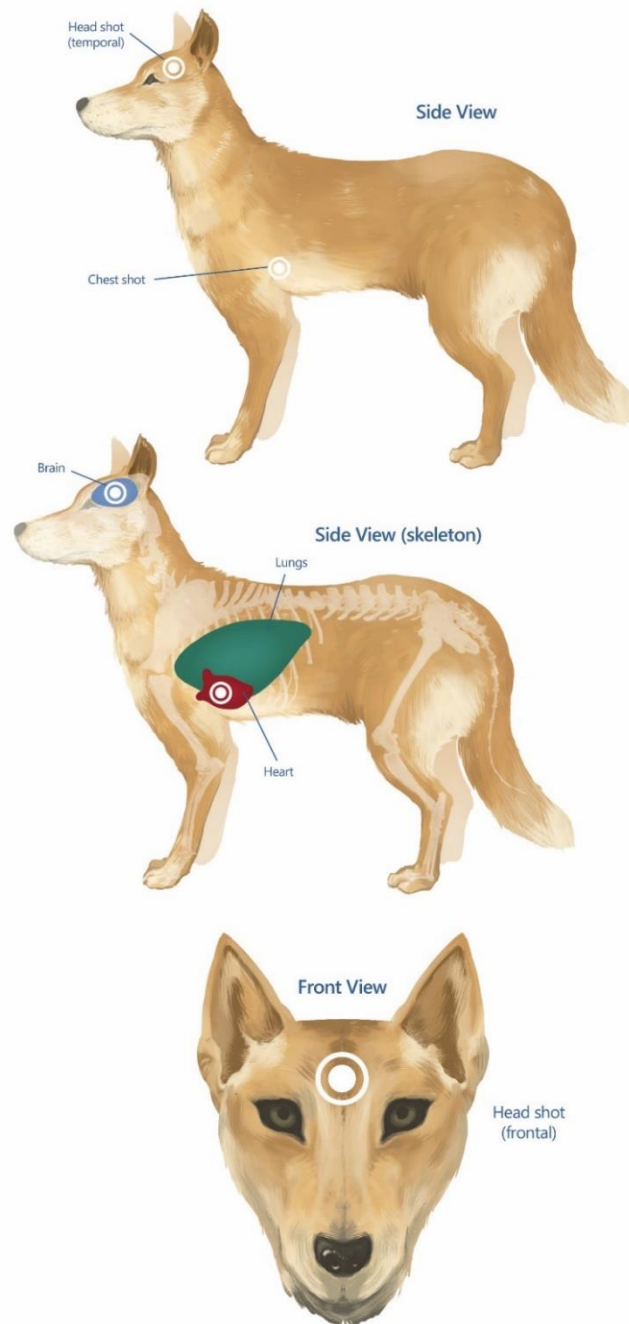
Frontal position (front view)

- The firearm is aimed at a point midway between the level of the eyes and the base of the ears, but slightly off to one side so as to miss the bony ridge that runs down the middle of the skull. The aim should be slightly across the centreline of the skull and towards the spine.

Temporal position (side view)

- The firearm is aimed horizontally at the side of the head at a point midway between the eye and the base of the ear.
- Death of shot animals can be confirmed by observing a combination of the following:
 - no heartbeat
 - no breathing
 - no corneal reflex (no blinking when the eyeball is touched)
 - no response to a toe pinch (a firm squeeze of the pad on the large toe).
- If death cannot be verified, a second shot to the head should be taken immediately.

Figure 2: Shot placement for wild dogs



Head shots (temporal or frontal) should be used for shooting wild dogs caught in traps. See text for details.

Note that shooting an animal from above or below the horizontal level as depicted here will influence the direction of the bullet through the body. Adjustment to the point of aim on the external surface of the body may need to be made to ensure that the angled bullet path causes extensive (and therefore fatal) damage to the main organs in the target areas.

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