

THE NOBLE DINGO.

HIS WALKS, HIS WIVES, AND HIS FUNNY LITTLE WAYS.

(By Robert Kaleski, in the "Western Mail.")

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More nonsense has been talked about the dingo than about any other animal in Australia. By most people he is represented as a fiend in canine shape; by a few others as an early native martyr. Just like the nigger. As a matter of fact, he is neither one nor the other; he will never be sainted in the Australian calendar; yet there are plenty of butter agents worse. Truthfully he is merely an individual who has to live; like most people, he prefers to do it in the easiest way possible. His origin is wrapt in mystery; some fiercely asserting that he is indigenous; others that the Dutch dropped him when they fled from the Gulf of Carpentaria. None of the beggars know, so it is no use arguing about it. Here he is now, anyway.

His Variety in Unity.

There are many different sizes and colours of dingoes; but all over Australia they have the same characteristics. All built like a bulldog; all with the short, stiff, prick ears and wedge-shaped, broad-skulled head, the sidling gait and bushy tail; the body big-sinewed and compact; the brown eye, slanted like a Chinaman's, brimful of cunning and suspicion. The brown colour, which most of them wear, suits their purpose of concealment best. It is doubtful if the piebald and others are pure; for in places remote from man's presence they are always yellow. The blacks, brindles, and red and whites, are most probably the result of the tame crosses; the odd white ones are freaks. The true wild dingo has distinctive markings of his own; his muzzle and jaws are dark brown or blackish, the dark colour running then along his spine to his tail; his chest and fore paws are white, likewise his tail tip; his sides and legs are light brown. Why he should be marked like this no one knows; but he is. Still, the main things to notice in him are his eyes and jaws; the cunning of the one and the muscles of the other. In movement he is like a steel spring; and he comes nearer perpetual motion than anything in the bush.

It is his jaws that make the dingo so terrible to other animals; he doesn't bite, he snaps; and what he snaps he brings away, his jaws tearing out the flesh like a pair of steel pincers. That is why the bitten animal so rarely recovers; it dies from shock. This is very convenient for the dingo—saves him such a lot of running about. If he can only creep up to anything and get one snap at it, it's his.

His Native Wisdom.

It is a funny sight to watch dingoes following a weak bullock. They are too cautious to run in and snap at it; what they do is to follow it about so as to be ready when it gets down for the last time; often they drive it into a soft place and bog it. In either case, as soon as it is helpless, they operate on it. If you look at a carcass they have been at, you won't see a mark on it; look a foot below the tail and you'll see a hole you could put your head in. This is true dingo cunning. To bite through the thick hide anywhere else means work; under the tail the hide is thin and soft as velvet. So the dingo enters there always, and gnaws away inside till only the bare hide is left. Then he begins on the joints and works on them when other meat is scarce till everything is used up. The reason people dislike dingoes in this country is because they are so destructive to sheep. Yet it is not the dingo's fault; his instinct is to blame. Not being used to them, when he gets amongst a flock, he thinks he has struck a patch of over-fat ones, consequently snaps as many as he can to secure them against a hungry day. In the old shepherding days, before fences intervened, he used to drive the entire flock away into rough country till he got them into a blind gully, where he and his mates could run in and kill the lot. On the road thither they would drive the sheep as carefully as any collie could, only occasionally darting in for one snap, then out again before the frightened brutes could split. If the dingo realised that sheep are always helpless and stupid, no doubt he would only take one at a time; the same with goats and fowls. Of course he does make an awful scatter amongst these when he gets at them. Dingoes vary in size, according to the feed and climate—just like any other animal. In the Northern coastal scrubs (N.S.W.) they are big and fierce; in the southern, smaller and quieter. In the dry country, thinner-coated and lighter framed, to travel far for prey and water; on the tablelands, rough-coated and big-boned. The coat itself is grown the same way under all conditions; a loose outer one, and a short inner blanket, to turn any weather—just like a smooth-haired Scotch collie, and every bit as weather-proof.

His Method of Hunting.

Sometimes the dingo is married, and other times a bachelor; while sometimes he goes in for a club. All depends on the quantity of meat available, and what size it is. When it is small, he hunts by himself; then he is sure of having enough to go round. When big enough for two, he picks up Mrs. Dingo; when extra, such as emus and kangaroos, the whole club turns out. Three kinds of his

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His Housekeeping.

One admirable thing about the dingo's housekeeping is that he is most economical; nothing goes to waste. When he has secured his prey, he never leaves it while there is a remnant of bone remaining. It is a great sight to see dingoes after young is great sight to see dingoes after young kangaroos or calves; "confidence-men" are not in it with them. See the sly way they saunter round the mob, till they can safely get between the mother and the young one. Then, quick as light, they dash in and make a couple of snaps at the young one's flanks, tearing out the entrails; then out again before the mother can get at them. The prey will be a few hours dying, so they settle themselves comfortably out of range, till the mob and heart-broken mother have moved on; then they banquet.

All through the dingo is of very business-like habits. When weaned and turned out from home to get his own living, he chalks out a payable beat and sticks to it till it is exhausted. It is generally a circle of about three miles, leading across the pet feeding grounds of his food. He starts about mid-day and circles round it; then, if he gets nothing, returns to his log or rock-hole to doze till dark, when he starts circuiting again. He is almost certain to get something before dawn; then he returns rotund and sleeps till mid-day. By this method he catches day or night meat; birds mostly in the day, and marsupials at night. If on good ground, he sticks to it for years and wears little roads where his short cuts run. His camp is always selected with great judgment—either a cosy hollow log, a hole in the rocks, or, in level country, a grass nest in a dry watercourse. In any case it is always weather proof, and has a reliable back door. The last is the one point upon which the dingo is fanatical. He will never enter a hut, a tent, or, in fact, any enclosed space without making sure there is a good get-away. Being cornered annoys him horribly.

His Personal Habits.

In his personal habits the dingo is very clean; in fact he keeps himself as glossy as a cat. He allows no bones or litter about home either; even the pups daren't bring home remnants. Everything has to be consumed off the premises. Mrs. Dingo's nursery, on the other hand, simply reeks of bones and feathers. The nursery is only temporary, so this is excusable; though she uses the same one every year unless disturbed.

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THE NOBLE DINGO.

**HIS DOWNSITTINGS, HIS UPRISINGS,
AND HIS FAMILY RELATIONS.**

(By Robert Kaleski.)

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Ma Dingo has some curious habits; of course she has her husband's, but these are extra. One is with regard to mothering the pups. She always has and keeps them in a quiet hollow log selected for the purpose. At this period Pa Dingo has to be very quiet and subdued, as her temper (but not her snap) is very uncertain. She collects all the meaty birds and bones possible for the pups; teaches them most assiduously to hunt; and yet, if surprised, will clear out and leave them to their fate without an afterthought. If she comes home, and smells that a man has handled the pups in her absence, she will promptly shift them to another log miles away. If the pair surprise you at the log, they will sneak a little way off and watch till you either take the pups or leave them; in the latter case they shift them as usual. They have been known to watch three days, till they got their chance and removed them. When a candidate for matrimony, if no pure dingo is available, Ma will lure a good, honest, tame dog away with her. She always tires of his company after a few hours or days, and kills him. A tame female dog she tears to pieces on sight.

The pups, when young, are prettier and more graceful than kittens; to see them it play (moonlight is the best time) is worth travelling for. At two months old they are as cunning as a German Jew. The only way to catch them is to have a good-sized dog trained to seize and hold them without hurting; then you can throw your coat over them, and bind their jaws so that they can't chew themselves loose. To chase one on foot is like chasing a sunbeam, and they snap most viciously when cornered; even the baby ones will back up against the handiest log or stone, and snap at a tame dog. Once, on the Bellinger, a dingo pup kept my cattle-dog off for twenty minutes; I had to stun him at last with the axe, he was so savage. The best time to get them is in spring; poke about the water-courses till you find their drinking-hole, then track from that to the log.

His Attitude to Man.

Dingoes are getting scarcer in the settled districts. In the old days they simply swarmed round Sydney. The red road which joins the Southern and Western roads at Granville (known as the Dog-trap-road) was so called because dingoes were so numerous on it that the settlers used to trap them in pit-traps to thin them. In winter, all animals then had to be stabled at night, or else they would be eaten alive. It is not so many years since a pack of dingoes attacked a butcher's cart loaded with sides of beef, on this road; the driver and horse only escaped by the skin of their teeth. There are a fair number of dingoes still in the wild country close to Sydney; in fact, they are plentiful in any rough, inaccessible places in Australia. The only trouble now is to get an absolutely pure one; they are so interbred with tame dogs.

A curious thing about the dingo is, that he is not the least afraid of either man or fire. He will not attack human beings, nor will he run from them. Of course, if he finds you in the bush with a broken arm or leg, that is in the way of business. Driving or riding through rough country at night, if you follow those tracks next day you will find behind them the tracks of one or more dingoes, sometimes following for miles. I don't know whether this is merely curiosity, or whether it is an eye to the main chance: you might meet with an accident on the road. In the day time, a dingo will pop out of the bush into the road, and stare at you thoughtfully as if guessing your weight. If you run at him, or go to shoot, he will run at you or from you as his cunning prompts. Riding along bush tracks in the moonlight, I have often had a dingo trot alongside me for a mile or two, just like a tame dog; keeping just out of stirrup-iron swing. The half-breed, on the other hand, especially the cross with the kangaroo dog, is a nasty, savage, snarling brute. He will attack on sight if he can get behind you, like an aboriginal.

His Opinion of Dogs.

Fire the dingo treats with lordly indifference; he has been used to it by the blacks perhaps. Also, he never seems to get caught in the bush-fires like the other animals. Many a night in the Dorrigo Scrub, N.S.W., when we have been sitting round the galley fire, our dogs would bark suddenly and then run up to us for shelter; to lie growling at our feet, straining across at the wall of scrub in front. Straining our eyes, we would see one or more of the gentlemen standing there looking at us. They would watch the fire, sometimes for half an hour. A camp-fire draws them like a magnet.

You might wonder why the dogs wouldn't run out. Well, once is always enough for a tame dog to meet a dingo; that is, if he survives. The dingo has no respect for tradition; when the tame dog runs at him and innocently grabs for his throat, under Queensbury rules, he just flicks himself aside and tears out half that tame dog's neck with one of his terrible snaps. Then, if the tame dog is able, he screams

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I have only known one cattle-dog a successful dingo killer: he belonged to a cedar-getter named Jim Coghlan, on the Dorrigo. "Rowdy's" method was simple. He used to trot about 50 yards ahead of Jim in the scrub; then, when the dingo ran up to inspect him, he would throw himself bodily on top of it (he was a big heavy dog) and scream for Jim. As soon as the dingo saw Jim running to Rowdy's assistance, he would get flurried, and forget to snap at Rowdy till Jim's stick (a broken bullock-bow) took him on the skull and it was too late. One day, however, Jim stopped to lace his boot or look at a cedar, or something, and Rowdy got too far ahead; the bullock-bow was not forthcoming; and when Jim did arrive, he only found remnants of Rowdy.

How to Catch Him.

There are many ways of killing dingoes. At first, when the country was alive with them, people used to trap them in pits; also run them down with the kangaroo dogs before mentioned; poison them with strychnine in meat, or shoot them when occasion offered. Then, as they got scarcer, dog-traps came in. The poisoning, shooting, and trapping still survive; though nowadays the dingo has become so educated to baits, especially on the plains, that the Winchester and the dog-trap are the only means of acquiring him. A gun is not the slightest use for the dingo; he is too tough. His hide will carry shot like an old bull's. A 32 or 44 calibre bullet put in behind the forearm as he throws it forward is the ideal. In every sheep district there is one particular dingo (generally a female), of matchless cunning and endurance, which feeds on prime mutton and goes unscathed for years. The price for such a one's scalp runs from £20 to £50; so there are no lack of hunters for it. Sometimes it gets shot—almost always by accident—or trapped, by design.

The dingo trappers are experts in their line; provided the reward is big enough, they can get any dingo. Considering that such a one often kills £300 worth of sheep in a year, £50 is cheap for it. The trap itself is like a gigantic steel rabbit-trap; the trapper studies the dingo's habits for a couple of weeks or months before (every outlaw has his peculiar habits); then sets it on the outlaw's beat. Generally he is too wary to be decoyed by meat; the bait is generally taken from freshly-killed dogs, and sprinkled over the set trap. After setting burning a few bushes over and about, so that the dingo can't smell the iron or your hands. He is particularly curious about another dog on his beat; and generally pays the penalty. In open country, with a good horse, the great game is to ride the dingo down, and brain him with a swing of the stirrup-iron when puffed.

His Musical Voice.

A curious thing about the dingo is that he can't bark to save his soul (if he had one). But he can howl. When courting at full moon, or when deeply annoyed, that howl will haunt the hearer for years. It is a wail like a lost spirit in torment—a long guttural "O—oh!"—the worse by in the bush. The native-bear's child-like sobbing; the insistent moan of the wopoke; the blood-curdling whoop of the screech owl, these are all bad, but the dingo's howl can give them points and a beating. It is the sort of noise which makes nervous people in the bush go inside hastily and bar up the door. Some say the blacks' "cooce" came from it; it could originate almost anything evil.

The dingo when wild has only two diseases—worms and old age. Neither is curable; and both are nearly always fatal.

Taming the Dingo.

The aboriginals were the first people to tame the dingo; most likely in watching him hunt they recognised a kindred spirit. Finding them so useful for hunting dogs, they have kept them ever since. They generally find the wild pups, and keep the pick. An old gin often thinks more of her pup than of her piccaninny—not that there is anything to choose between them. These

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niggers' dingoes are a fearful nuisance where sheep are, so squatters generally manage to give them a bait on the quiet.

The old shepherds were the next tammers. Finding the pups when out with the sheep, or given them by friendly blacks (in exchange for tobacco), they kept them as companions, or rather pets, to break the monotony of their lonely lives. At the present time odd people keep them as pets; or, like myself, for crossing with cattle dogs to improve the breed. For this purpose they are invaluable, giving shape, stamina, and great sense.

Tame dingoes vary as much in disposition as girls. Like them, some are no trouble to tame; others you can never quieten. All a matter of disposition. A few years ago I had one I used to lead about Sydney on a light string. He was especially fond of children, yet the purest one I ever owned. The next one I had, to the day of his death, wouldn't so much as let me lay a hand on him, though I reared him from a baby. He would creep behind a jam-tin sooner than let you see him. He was especially fond of cats: I have known him to eat six in one morning. People thought some new disease must have broken out, cats got so scarce in the suburb where I had him.

His method was simplicity itself. He always carefully saved some of his food from each meal, placed it near a hole in the palings, and lay down beside it as if asleep. Not a muscle stirred as the cat crept through; just as its mouth was opening on the food his mouth would open too, and the cat would enter, to bid good-bye to this beautiful world. I never knew him let one make a sound, either.

A third dingo I had was of a curious disposition—something like an alderman's. He was kept on a chain; his yard looked out on to a vacant allotment much patronised by the suburb's fowls. He always had a hole scraped under the palings, so that he could lie partly through. How it did it was never known; yet, go when you would, he would greet you with a sweet smile, but never move. Lift him up, and underneath would be a pair or more of fowls, untouched save for the delicately nibbled thighs. It was wonderful how the garden grew the summer after I had him.

The Dingo in the Suburbs.

There you see the great drawback to keeping the dingo tame: mostly he is more affectionate than a wife, yet he will kill neighbours' poultry. And they never have any consideration for you; they would just as soon give him a bait as not. Another trouble is his howl. I had one vocalist in this line who kept half a terrace vacant for months, till the landlord found out, and bought him in self-defence. Tenants would move in and hear him howl; then say it was a "warning" and leave at the end of the week. It was the pianos made him so bad. Ours was a musical suburb, and no dingo can endure that.

One thing that gets the dingo a bad name as a pet is his habit of snapping at strangers. Yet what can you expect? The spirit of distrust, fostered for centuries in self-preservation, is in his very bones. The patronising stranger dabs a hand at him, and, naturally, fearing for his life, the poor dingo snaps at it. Then he is "a nasty, dangerous brute!" Why can't tame people treat a wild person properly?

Another funny thing about the tame dingo is that he doesn't like his master to correct him too much. He will stand being beaten up to a certain point; after that—snaps. So when, following the tenth welt or so, he smiles and shows his fangs, it is well to forgive him; then all is right again. This is one case in which the dingo is superior to the tame dog. He says, in effect, "To a reasonable amount of punishment I will submit; but no more. If you do, you know the alternative. Death before dishonour!"

In captivity the dingo has only one enemy; the indignant neighbour with baits. It is easy to teach him to leave them alone, though. Leave some tempting ones, dosed with salts, scattered within his reach. One experience will make him too wary to be caught. I have had some marvellously intelligent dingoes. The last one I taught to read and write; but when I caught him practising my signature in his spare time, I thought it best to get rid of him.

If you want to annoy a dingo deeply, call him a dog.