



FrontiersEcoPics

Predators intersect: dingoes, wedgies, and humans

This photo shows two wedge-tailed eagles (*Aquila audax*) feasting on a freshly killed dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) in the Australian outback. Dingoes have been Australia's largest terrestrial predator since their arrival 3000–4000 years ago and since the thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) went extinct on mainland Australia around 2000 years ago. Today, humans persecute dingoes: more than 5600 km of exclusion fence runs through Australia to keep dingoes out of farmland. And even on the other side of the “dog fence”, dingoes are shot or poisoned if they are likely to impact livestock.

Wedge-tailed eagles, or “wedgies”, are the largest raptors in Australia, and show considerable adaptability in their diet, preying on rabbits and hares that were introduced by European settlers 200 years ago. They also team up to prey on much larger animals like wallabies, kangaroos, and sheep. As such, dingoes and wedgies have surprisingly overlapping niche requirements.

The impacts of dingo management may extend through both trophic and competitive interactions. Control measures are taken to facilitate livestock grazing, but the removal of dingoes, or rather, access to their carcasses, may affect biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. It is unlikely



that these wedgies killed this dingo – it was probably shot by a local farmer, as this scene was encountered near an Outback road. Thus, dingo management may benefit other apex predators and facilitate population growth among prey species. More ominously, however, it may allow population increases in introduced mesopredators, including feral cats and foxes. When humans control invasive mammals, such as wild dogs, goats, camels, or cats, what are the consequences for native predatory species?

Sabine Both and CE Timothy Paine
University of New England, Armidale, Australia
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