



Conservation Detection Dogs Capability Statement



Introduction

SWIFT NRM, the commercial arm of natural resource management group, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee, offers a comprehensive feral animal detection and control service to private landholders, government and business agencies through its Conservation Detector Dog Program.

Established in 2013, the program is comprised of qualified, experienced pest animal technicians teamed with highly trained Conservation Detector dogs in detecting specific target species including foxes, wild dogs, feral cats and rabbits, and their scats and dens.

The technicians specialise in pest animal control programs and application and are handlers for the English Springer spaniels known as 'Sophie' and 'Rocky'. These dogs represent a ground-breaking conservation management tool with now proven effectiveness in feral animal control when applied in conjunction with traditional management practices.

Sourced and originally trained by Australia's renowned conservation dog trainer, Steve Austin, the dogs are the first and only conservation canines to be owned and offered as a commercial service by a natural resource management body in Queensland.

Their role is specifically to track the scent of certain pest animals and help their handlers establish population densities so that appropriate control methods can be applied.

The dogs are particularly valuable in areas where control methods have been applied and there are few animals remaining, and in areas where the terrain makes it difficult for pest technicians to operate. When out in the field, the dogs wear GPS units so their location can be recorded against what they find, enabling handlers to produce detailed reports and if required, undertake appropriate, targeted control of the pest.



Why use dogs?

Conservation Detection Dogs are highly effective when working together with technicians trained to locate and dispatch feral animals. The dogs are able to search areas yet to be surveyed and enable their handlers to rapidly obtain and record evidence of the target species. They can also provide a reliable check of whether an area is free of feral animals.

Did you know?

- A dog can cover a larger area and much more quickly than humans.
- Conservation dogs remain more focused for longer periods of time than humans and are not distracted by day to day life.
- Dogs do not have any preconceived concepts of where a species may be located and operate solely by what their noses indicate.
- A dog can work in many environments with the same level of success, such as in cold or hot temperatures, snow, and extreme terrain.
- A human resource is only as good as their electronic equipment and eyesight yet a dog operates with excellent hearing, eyes and a nose that is able to detect the scent at least 1,000 times better than humans.

Source: Steve Austin, Canine Training and Behaviour.

What are the dogs trained to do?

Our Conservation Detector dogs are trained to locate any sign of foxes, wild dogs, feral cats or rabbits, and will indicate by showing excitement (tail wagging and rapid darting movements) when a scent is detected.

The dog will then sit and wait for the handler at the site of the scent location eg. a fox den or a feral cat haunt.

GPS collars attached to the dog's collar record their search path while the handler records the location of sites (e.g. fox dens) and the number of den openings as they are found.

In the case of foxes, once the dens are located, they are fumigated and a trapping program is undertaken.

All treatment and control options for the specific species being targeted are part of the service.

All data is recorded and reproduced in maps and in a report.



In many instances, without the special benefits afforded by a Conservation Detector Dog, many den sites found can remain undiscovered.

A dog can find dens in areas where access is limited and unless a handler is present to control the dog, to follow its path and to understand the indications of activity, the dens would remain unrecorded.

There are four steps recognised as best practice for integrated pest management which SWIFT NRM adheres to:

Step 1. Understand the problem and assess the impact

Step 2. Determine clear and measurable objectives

Step 3. Develop and implement a plan of action

Step 4. Monitor, evaluate and modify the management plan

The Conservation Detector Dog teams apply this process to every pest control contract they undertake and a comprehensive report is provided once the commission is complete.

The teams

Pest Animal Technical Officer Tom Garrett and Conservation Detector Dog 'Rocky' (pictured left).

Regional Pest Technical officer Dave Berman and Conservation Detector Dog 'Sophie' (pictured right).



A proven track record

The teams have worked with multiple agencies, private landholders, and with Local, State and Federal government departments to achieve effective outcomes in regard to integrated pest animal management. Below is a list of some of the highlights to date:

- Fox dens - for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and the Burnett Mary River Group at the Mon Repos Conservation Park near Bundaberg as part of a four-year \$7 million Federal Government Nest to Ocean Turtle Protection Program. The aim is to

protect turtle eggs and hatchlings in Australia's premier mainland turtle nesting site from predators such as pigs and foxes. Since 2012, the teams have helped save 5,600 turtle hatchlings from being preyed upon by foxes and in 2017, this work resulted in nil predation by foxes of turtle eggs or hatchlings – the first instance of no predation since records began in the 1970's.

- Feral cats – to help restore a critical bilby population in south-west Queensland at Currawinya National Park. The dogs were tasked with sniffing out the last of the feral cats inside a purpose-built bilby enclosure. The Currawinya area was once home to the endangered bilby and the Queensland Government hopes to re-introduce them to the park in the future.
- Feral cats in the Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary, a property managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) north of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. The cats are preying on threatened native species such as the Great Desert Skink and the Mulgara, a carnivorous marsupial. 'Sophie's' handler Dr Dave Berman was asked demonstrate how to train sniffer dogs and to see if it was possible to integrate them with Traditional Owner feral cat tracking techniques.
- Feral cats - Taunton National Park near Dingo, Central Queensland, as part of a Queensland Government Biosecurity Queensland Feral Cat Project. 'Sophie' was tasked with finding feral cats the department are tracking in order to improve feral cat management and protect the vulnerable bridled nail-tail wallaby.
- Fox dens – Detection, fumigation and trapping completed over two years and remains ongoing with Noosa Regional Council, the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (Noosa).
- Fox dens – Detection, fumigation and trapping scheduled for Yeppoon Regional Council in 2018 following a successful program in 2017.
- Fox dens – Detection, fumigation and trapping scheduled with the Fitzroy Basin Association in February 2018.
- Fox dens – Detection, fumigation and trapping as part of a cooperative project between Burnett Mary Regional Group, the Frazer Coast Council, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (Maryborough) and two private landholders at Hervey Bay Queensland.
- Fox dens – Detection, fumigation and trapping as part of the cooperative project between the Livingstone Shire Council, Capricorn Catchments, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Department of Natural Resource Management and the Fitzroy Basin Catchment Management Association on reserves in and around Yeppoon, Queensland. Rocky searched for den openings near beaches important for turtle nesting in the Yeppoon area from Emu Park in the south to Corio Bay in the north. Den openings which were active with signs of fox presence as indicated by the dog were fumigated.
- Demonstrations to the South East Queensland Pest Advisory Forum while working for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife on North and South Stradbroke Islands.
- Fox and wild dog trapping training incorporating use of Conservation Detection Dogs with two Indigenous Ranger groups.

For further information contact:

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Appendix 1: Please see attached a reference from the Burnett Mary River Group in regard to recent commissions of the Conservation Detector Dog Team.



Produced by: QMDC Regional Coordinator Communications Donna Hurley, January 2018

For further information, contact QMDC on (07) 4637 6200 or visit www.qmdc.org.au

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