



Steve Austin
Canine Behaviour and Training

A division of Glentoe Pty Ltd
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Standing Committee on Environment and Energy
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Enquiry into controlling the spread of Cane Toads

Cane Toads are poisonous in all stages of growth from eggs to adults, so the establishment of Cane Toads in any location in Australia will devastate natural ecosystems and destroy habitats and other species.

The earlier Cane Toads can be detected, the better the chance they do not get a foothold thereby preventing a catastrophic invasion in the area. This is especially critical in national parks where there are endangered species, and farming communities where Cane Toads can destroy crops.

Without doubt the eradication of Cane Toads will take more than one approach.

Steve Austins' Detection Canines

Steve Austin's extensive experience and innovation for new and more effective methods for the training and use of detection canines is unsurpassed. With many government departments, organisations and councils both in Australia and overseas utilising Steve's expertise he has become a highly respected resource and consultant for conservation and environment.

Some of Steve's most noted achievements with conservation detection canines include:

- Training of canines and handlers for the eradication of rabbits from Macquarie Island utilising detection canines, which culminated with the Island now being declared pest free.
- Training and placement of two detection canines for rodent, Cane Toad and biosecurity detection on the World Heritage listed Lord Howe Island.
- Provision of Cane Toad detection canines for West Australia Parks & Wildlife, Federal government departments, and numerous councils in NSW.
- Ongoing Cane Toad detection on Moreton Island where both live and dead Cane Toad have been located.

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The Canines

Benefits of using conservation detection canines are numerous including the fact that canines do not have any preconceived concepts of where the target odour may be located and operate solely by what their nose indicates. Humans on the other hand can be misled to search in areas where they think the targeted species should be or adversely not look where they think they may not occur.

Another add on advantage of using professionally trained detection canines is that they can be trained on additional odours. An example is where the detection canine can locate both Cane Toads and feral cats.

GPS Tracking

At all times the canines wear GPS collars with a tracking device to enable identification of any hotspots and to make sure the handler knows where the canine is at all times. This is particularly necessary in very heavy bush and harsh conditions. This also allows the handler to provide accurate reports.

Cane Toads

Islands may be considered to be an easier space to eradicate feral and pest animals however they are not easily managed. The biggest challenge is to ensure the Cane Toads cannot get on to the island; and the second challenge is to make sure the any program of eradication has been 100% successful because if there are any left, breeding can begin again. Once a Cane Toad starts to breed they are quite difficult to eradicate without killing all the other amphibians, or causing ecological damage.

The key is to determine the tipping point of the Cane Toads foothold as by the time you see two or three Cane Toads, it may be too late as there are probably already hundreds there.

To demonstrate effects of Cane Toads we refer to Moreton Island (58km north east of Brisbane) where Steve has been conducting Cane Toad detection with his canines for several years. Moreton Island is home to some important native species including the *Varanus gouldii* (Goulds Goanna) that eats large frogs and toads, and the *Burhinus grallarius* (Bush Stone Curlew) that eats tadpoles and small frogs so the presence of Cane Toads on the Island will kill both of those species as amphibians are a large part of their diet.

Gambusia affinis (Mosquitofish) are found on Moreton Island and play an important part in the control of mosquitos as they eat the mosquito larvae. Mosquitofish would also eat Cane Toad eggs which will result in killing the Mosquitofish. As a result, more mosquitos will breed and impact will occur on humans both on the island and the mainland with mosquito born diseases.

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Program:

Steve Austin believes the establishment of a mobile Cane Toad unit comprising a detection canine and a handler who utilises traps and calling techniques will be effective to locate the species. This can easily be managed in conjunction with other Cane Toad detection and eradication processes.

A targeted approach of a detection canine unit is imperative to ensure thoroughness of conducting a search is achieved. By first dividing a specific region into sectors a detection canine unit can complete checks on Cane Toad habitats such as swamps and waterways and maintain a planned schedule.

The targeted areas should also include examination of transport vehicles, areas where mulch is stored, tourists in transit, motor vessels, mail centres and cargo storage areas to name a few.

When other locating and eradicating methods have been used, the use of detection canines can determine if there are no more species remaining before an area is declared as clear. This process has to date proven critical when an area is being cleared of a feral or noxious species.

It is imperative that when Cane Toads are detected a standard operating procedure for humane disposal is followed. We also recommend a procedure for a certain number of Cane Toads be given to relevant bodies for research as required.

The importance of a public education program cannot be understated. Such a program could help the public understand the huge impact a Cane Toad has on the environment and other species.

Yours sincerely

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FACT SHEET #3

Wildlife Conservation Canines

When To Use A Wildlife Detection Dog

A wildlife detection dog works with existing field team members to ensure the success of current projects.

A wildlife conservation detection dog is highly effective when working together with other processes used to locate endangered or invasive species. A good example is the world heritage listed Macquarie Island where first the myxoma virus and callicivirus were distributed in a poisoning program, and then the dogs were brought in to see if any rabbits had survived. They discovered 13 rabbits. The dogs were extremely important and an integral part of the project, because if those 13 rabbits were left, the entire 7 year project would have failed.

Our wildlife conservation dogs have proven to be very successful when entering areas which have not yet been surveyed to quickly obtain information and statistics for the presence of the species to be located.

- A dog can cover a larger area and much quicker than humans. One trial showed a dog was able to locate scats 357% more effectively than humans.
- Our conservation dogs remain more focussed for longer periods of time than humans and is 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 nose indicates.
- 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.

1

RESOURCES

A dog can cover a much greater area than a human

2

TIME

A dog can remain focussed for long periods of time

3

MONEY

A dog is more cost effective to locate a species



Cane Toads

Toxic to wildlife in all stages of their life, destroy habitats, and fast breeders.



Moreton Island Cane Toad Detection

Tommy is one of our Cane Toad detection dogs.



Satellite Navigation

Our dogs wear satellite navigation to allow precise mapping locations.

Protecting The Species

Our canines are trained to indicate from a distance from the target scent.

It is imperative that the endangered wildlife species is not affected in any way by the presence of a detection team. As an example Penny was trained to indicate on the presence of the endangered Eastern Bristlebird from a distance of 10 metres. The habitat and species remain unaffected so scientists and wildlife officers can then complete their work. Our canine wildlife detection dogs can be trained on the scent of feathers, hair or fur, scat, and nests.

One or two dogs?

We recently introduced a unique detection method for the protection of the endangered Smoky Mouse which is proving to be very successful. To protect a species, two levels of detection is required. One is to find the endangered species and one is to find the predator of that species. On our current Smoky Mouse project, one dog searches for feral cats and foxes, and the other dog locates the endangered species to allow the field staff to map their location and if required, obtain the species for a captive breeding program. In some instances we have trained one dog to detect both the endangered species and the feral species.



This double barrel approach adds two very effective weapons to the existing ground staff.

Training the Handlers

A detection dog handler must have more than basic skills for handling a detection dog. The dog and handler must work as a team which means the handler must have specific knowledge to ensure the dog can work at its maximum effectiveness without any confusion of signals to the dog.

After training a dog for specific scents, we train a handler or multiple handlers for the same dog. We then provide regular ongoing accreditation to ensure the handlers skills are maintained as well as train new handlers as required.

We also teach handlers' effective methods to care for their detection dog to ensure long lasting success.

DOG TRAINING

Detection dog training starts at only a few weeks old. Often that dog has already been selected for a specific target odour. After basic training it proceeds to more advanced training on the target scent, followed by field training.

Often we are able to rescue dogs from shelters that we have identified as ideal for detection work which means the dog does not have to be a puppy.

Training never ends as the dog and handler must undergo regular accreditation to ensure high standards are maintained.

