



Book Review

Dingo bold: the life and death of K'gari Dingoes

By R. S. Lennox
2021, Sydney University Press, Sydney
pp. 275, Paperback
Price AUD \$35, ISBN 9781743327319

Associate Professor Rowena Lennox is a casual academic at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and has worked for many years with large international publishing houses as a book editor. She is currently a tutor in creative writing at UTS. She publishes journal articles, chapters and various creative works. Her first book *Fighting Spirit of East Timor: The life of Martinho da Costa Lopes* (published by Pluto Press, in 2000) won a New South Wales Premier's History Award.

This book, *Dingo Bold*, is an exploration of the varied perceptions held about the Dingo *Canus familiaris*, which are used within to interpret its behaviour and critique its current management on K'gari (cotemporally known as Fraser Island). The author employs the often polarised perspectives held by the tourism industry, the indigenous Butchulla people of K'gari, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) and other involved parties to develop her arguments. Throughout the book, the author draws on her chance meeting with a Dingo on K'gari, whom she names Bold, after interpreting its behaviour as being bold in manner. Bold's history as recorded by QPWS is used throughout to make the management actions of QPWS less impersonal. Eventually Bold is culled. I presume naming Bold is a literary device to bring the reader closer to the emotional arguments regarding ear-tagging and culling Dingoes, which the author regards as torture. Overall the book's aim is to question the current thinking about the Dingo either as a wild or domesticated animal, and to then critique the current management strategies of QPWS.

The author has researched widely to develop her argument and her image of the Dingo. To do this she has woven together information from: interviews (personal and professional), citations from the general historical and scientific literature, and media accounts, to develop her own personal reflections, which challenge the current thinking about Dingoes and humans on K'gari. The book is divided into 15 chapters that

focus on one body of evidence at a time. These are followed by a coda, references, acknowledgements and an index. All chapters are referenced with footnotes, which give the author and date. The audience addressed is a mixed academic and general one, academic because of the depth of research and its referencing.

Both the greatest strengths and weaknesses of this book lie in the same place – the research. The research has been both broad and deep, yet it has been cherry-picked to enhance the author's apparent anthropogenic view of the Dingo which is negatively juxtaposed with the objective (unbiased) position of the QPWS. This subjective approach no doubt helps develop the author's objective in challenging the position of the Dingo as a wild animal and presenting it as a more domesticated one.

Despite the anthropomorphising found throughout this book it still presents a very useful and in depth view of the debate surrounding both the understanding of the Dingo as a domesticated or wild animal and ongoing debate about its management, particularly with regard to culling individuals thought to be dangerous to humans. To managers working with the Dingo or researchers and post-graduate students starting to delve into this argument, this book provides a compelling start point – and this has become the greatest strength of the book.

The text is organised in line with the evidence, in chapters, and this advances the usefulness of the book allowing readers to focus on the particular arguments presented in the chapters. The book is advanced by being well referenced, although this advancement is somewhat diminished by the biased cherry-picking, which critiques the QPWS's approach to the management. The author teaches creative writing and is a skilled writer. In consequence her book is colourful and easily read – a bit of a page turner. The author's arguments

are well developed and clearly presented, although she favours a more anthropomorphised view of the Dingo. The supplementary material includes a useful map of K'gari given at the start and pictures of specific Dingoes that are mentioned in the text (especially Bold) and are used to support the author's view of the animal.

I would recommend this book to all those who work with Dingoes or are planning to work with them. It will act as an important reference for those interested in the emotional arguments surrounding the Dingo as a wild or domesticated animal and the consequent management decisions that are impacted by how the animal is perceived. However, it must

be read with caution given the creative approach and anthropomorphism used by the author. Beyond this, I recommend this book for readers interested in understanding the emotionally charged atmosphere in the wild versus domesticated dichotomy that pervades Dingo management.

Graham R. Fulton
Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science,
University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld, Australia
and
Environmental and Conservation Sciences,
Murdoch University, Murdoch, WA, Australia.

Conflicts of interest. The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgement. Thank you to Mike Calver for reading a draft of this review.