

Australian dogs trained to sniff out endangered species

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.02.18

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Image 1: Border collies are just one of the many dog breeds that have been trained to sniff out endangered animals in Australia. All the the dogs being trained have a strong sense of smell. Photo from: Pixabay.

Australian dogs are being trained to sniff out the droppings of endangered animals. The effort offers greater understanding of threatened species through the less-intrusive method of canine tracking.

Emma Bennett is a Ph.D. candidate at Monash University in Melbourne. She is working with environmentally conscious dog owners who have volunteered their pets in a rainforest region of Victoria state to track the scats, or droppings, of the endangered tiger quoll. The quoll is a small marsupial.

"Scats contain DNA, so you can identify the individual animal," Bennett said. "They also contain information about diet distribution."

Border Collies And German Shepherds

The volunteer dogs are of varying breeds, including border collies and german shepherds. They have been found to have "very high" early detection rates of 50-70 percent accuracy in discovering the samples.

"They are working just as efficiently as you would expect a full time working dog to do," Bennett said.

Using canines to obtain the droppings samples is a "non-invasive" alternative to traps, the researcher added. Avoiding traps reduces the risk of injury or stress to the endangered animal.

"When you collect scats you're not impacting the threatened species at all, but you're still able to collect its DNA and a whole range of other information about it," she said. "So you don't have to trap the animal."

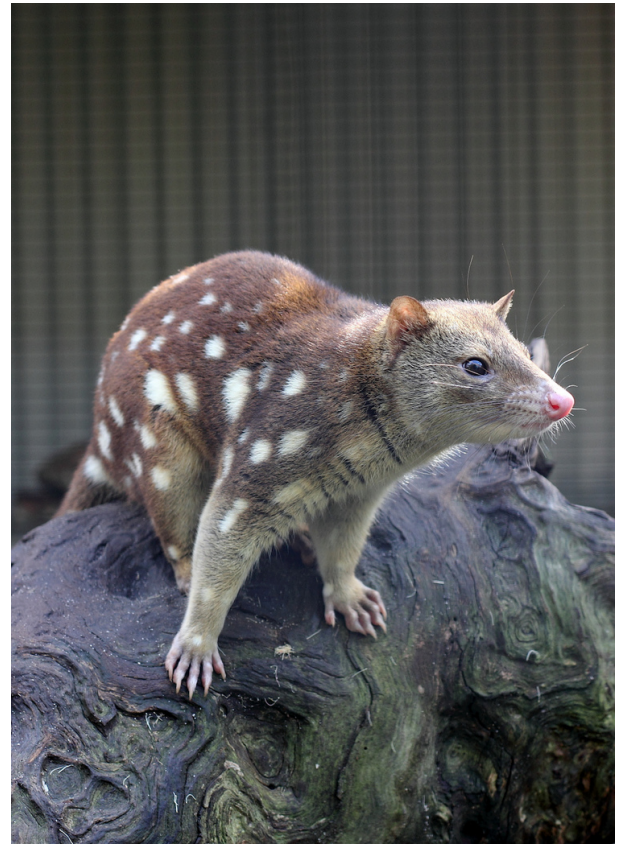
Tracking Other Species

The tiger quoll is a spotted carnivorous cat-like marsupial. It is threatened in the southeastern Otway rainforest region by land clearing. Foxes and cats are also putting the quoll at risk.

Bennett said the animal was thought to have died out in the area. Then, in 2012, it was rediscovered.

She expects her study will be expanded to track other threatened species. The use of volunteer dogs will open up the research techniques to smaller community groups as a cheaper alternative to other methods.

"There is potential for finding someone in the community who is really passionate and into dog training to step up and go: 'I can help find that rare orchid or that burrowing frog,'" Bennett said.



Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article supports the idea that using dogs to sniff out scat is a safer way to learn about an endangered animal than other methods?
- (A) She is working with environmentally conscious dog owners who have volunteered their pets in a rainforest region of Victoria state to track the scats, or droppings, of the endangered tiger quoll.
 - (B) "When you collect scats you're not impacting the threatened species at all, but you're still able to collect its DNA and a whole range of other information about it," she said.
 - (C) The use of volunteer dogs will open up the research techniques to smaller community groups as a cheaper alternative to other methods.
 - (D) "There is potential for finding someone in the community who is really passionate and into dog training to step up and go: 'I can help find that rare orchid or that burrowing frog,'" Bennett said.

- 2 Read the selection from the article.

Bennett said the animal was thought to have died out in the area. Then, in 2012, it was rediscovered.

What conclusion is BEST supported by the selection above?

- (A) The tiger quoll has had a huge improvement in numbers since they have been rediscovered.
 - (B) The tiger quoll died out in a part of Australia so people had to bring them from other places.
 - (C) The tiger quoll was not thought of as a real animal until people first discovered it in 2012.
 - (D) The tiger quoll numbers were so low that people thought they had disappeared completely.
- 3 Which two of the following sentences from the article include central ideas of the article?
- 1. *Australian dogs are being trained to sniff out the droppings of endangered animals.*
 - 2. *The volunteer dogs are of varying breeds, including border collies and german shepherds.*
 - 3. *Using canines to obtain the droppings samples is a "non-invasive" alternative to traps, the researcher added.*
 - 4. *Foxes and cats are also putting the quoll at risk.*
- (A) 1 and 2
 - (B) 1 and 3
 - (C) 2 and 3
 - (D) 3 and 4

- 4 Read the following detail from the article.

Avoiding traps reduces the risk of injury or stress to the endangered animal.

HOW does this detail develop the central idea of the article?

- (A) It shows one reason why canine tracking is better than other ways of studying animals.
- (B) It demonstrates how much Emma Bennett knows about wildlife conservation.
- (C) It describes one reason why the tiger quoll has become so endangered.
- (D) It shows how skilled and well-trained the dogs that track tiger quolls have become.