

News Release:

Wild dogs need our respect, authors say

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Honorary membership of their own domestic "pack" of Rhodesian ridgebacks inspired the authors of a new book titled *Spirit of the Wild Dog*.

The dogs "were with us throughout the writing of this book" say the authors, Lesley Rogers and Gisela Kaplan, in dedicating the book to them.

Professor Rogers and Professor Kaplan, from the University of New England, are world-renowned specialists in animal behaviour. They were able, therefore, to interpret their intimate, insiders' experience through scientific as well as compassionate eyes. The book is, among other things, a plea for the understanding of, and thence respect for, wild dogs. (Wild dogs include wolves, jackals, foxes, the coyote and the dingo, as well as species actually named "dogs", such as the African wild dog.)

It is important, the authors believe, to correct the common confusion between "wild" and "feral" dogs. "Most of the serious problems people have with livestock, for example, are not caused by families of wild dogs, but by packs of domestic dogs gone feral," Professor Kaplan said. Focusing on Australia's own wild dog, the dingo, she continued: "Experienced dingoes much prefer a diet of native animals, such as kangaroos, to killing sheep. But if a farmer shoots a dominant dingo, the group, now without its experienced leader, can develop aberrant behaviour. Therefore, by shooting dominant animals you're making the problem ten times worse than it was before." This sort of consideration, involving knowledge of animal behaviour, has been lacking in most plans for the management of wild dogs, the authors say.

They are both prolific writers of scientific books and articles, and *Spirit of the Wild Dog* is the sixth book they have written together. (Their most recent collaboration was *Birds: Their Habits and Skills*, published in 2001.) The new book, aimed at a general readership, outlines the plight of wild dog populations around the world, many of them under serious threat of extinction. It explains why populations of pack-hunting dogs, such as the wolves and the African wild dog, have declined dangerously while the solitary hunters, such as the foxes, have done relatively well.

The reasons, the authors say, lie in the complexity of relationships within the hunting pack, a social structure easily disrupted by outside interference. "Ironically, it is just those qualities of loyalty, intelligence and social sensitivity that have made pack-hunting dogs so successful in their domesticated forms," said Professor Rogers, pointing out that all domestic dogs are now known to be descendants of wolves. "They were perfectly equipped to move into human society."

Spirit of the Wild Dog asks us to preserve their spirit of freedom in the wild while acknowledging our enormous debt to them.

Media contact: Professor Lesley Rogers, School of Biological, Biomedical and Molecular Sciences, UNE, Armidale (02) 6773 3969, Professor Gisela Kaplan, School of Biological, Biomedical and Molecular Sciences, UNE, Armidale (02) 6775 3113, or Jim Scanlan, Public Relations, UNE, Armidale (02) 6773 3049.

A [photograph](#) of Professor Lesley Rogers (left) and Professor Gisela Kaplan, with their dogs Ryka and Errol (and the new book).