



.....

NON-FICTION

The dingo debate:
origins, behaviour and
conservation
edited by BRADLEY
SMITH

CSIRO Publishing (2015)

.....

ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH THE DINGO and who has also watched the yellow street dogs common across Asia may well believe they have seen the dingo's closest relation. But Bradley Smith wants you to understand that dingoes are different.

In this exhaustive review of current scholarship on the Australian native dog he goes to lengths – the lay reader may think too many – to establish that the modern Asian dog, while similar in looks to the dingo, is firmly in the domestic dog species, *Canis familiaris*. By contrast the dingo, which did have its origins in a Southeast Asian wild dog, belongs with the wolves, coyotes and other wild canids in *Canis lupus*. There is still some argument about the exact taxonomy, but Bradley sets the stage for his close study of this beautiful animal, classification *Canis dingo*. It is a unique dog that, while not originating in Australia, is now very much a native.

And while his analysis may be exhaustive, he has good reason to make it, as the classification is crucial to much of the debate about these animals.

While undoubtedly a wild dog, the dingo

has been shaped by its interactions with human societies. It now holds a rather precarious position in modern Australia where it is at risk from habitat destruction, persecution and cross-breeding with domestic dogs, the last arguably the most acute threat.

The debate in question, while having many facets, is at heart about whether the dingo can live alongside us. (The chapter on dingoes as pets is fascinating. It is, apparently a rewarding experience, but not for the part-time owner. You are either part of the pack, or you are not!)

The big question is whether the dingo has a future. Long the bête noir of farmers, are these dogs incompatible with agriculture? Or should we encourage their reintroduction in areas where they have been eradicated to introduce a vital, near-native, apex predator to control the other introduced pests that are ravaging Australia's indigenous species?

— BILL CONDIE