

Utopia Trip – April 2013

On Sunday the 14th of April, the fourth trip to Utopia for the Canberra Mob for Indigenous Dog Health began. The team consisted of Louellen Anderson, Helen Purdam, Libby Adamson, Karina Harding, Veiss Harvey and David Bond. We were joined by Jan Allen, Eileen Fletcher and Eddie Bobongie from AMRRIC and Brian Radovic, Mal Mc Grath, James Bonny and Graham from the Barkley Shire. We had some help from the local workers Llewellyn and Martin. We were again assisted by the staff from Urapuntja Health Clinic; in particular Linda, Colin and Seton. The trip was managed by Alison Taylor.



The first day of the trip went according to plan. We picked up various members of the team along the way. We did our shopping in Alice Springs then headed out along the Stuart Highway. Other than one stop to climb to the top of a rocky outcrop, we made good time to Utopia. It was great to arrive and find Brian and his team waiting for us. We unpacked our gear and started to set up all our gear in a room at the Urapuntja Clinic.

On Monday morning, we were all keen and on the job by 8am. Seton accompanied us to Atheley where Freddy Jones was again welcoming. Many of his dogs had been desexed before and all of them treated with ivermectin multiple times. They generally looked really healthy and it was great to recognize some of the dogs from even the first trip 18 months earlier. We proceeded to Rocket Range where we have always been really welcome. It was striking that the only dogs that needed desexing were significantly lower in body condition score than all the ones that had been done before.



We did some ground work on the first day in to making a trip to Anterrengey where we have never been allowed to desex any dogs before. It is quite a long drive so we wanted to make sure there would be some acceptance of us before heading out there. Fortunately, Llewellyn works for the Urapuntja Clinic and Anterrengey is his home community. He was able to phone his father in the community and get permission for us to go out and start to do some work out there. This was really exciting as we had come across some resistance out there before and we knew there were lots of dogs that could benefit from our attention. The first trip out there was really successful and we came back with about 18 dogs. We spoke to Albert who is the TO (traditional owner) who was happy for us to take many of his dogs. We brought back 2 litters of puppies with us whilst we desexed their mums. We were interested to come across a pig living out there and being very much a part of the family. We were also fortunate enough to see some of the carvings that Llewellyn's father (TC) had in his house. They included boomerangs, a ceremony bowl and a wooden shield.

We were able to follow up with a second trip to Anterrengey the following day and came back with another truck load of dogs. All the dogs from the previous day were doing well



We were really pleased to be welcomed back by Lena at Arlparra. She was very quick to offer up her dogs that had not yet been desexed. She also encouraged the other mob in her camp to have their dogs done as well. We had Martin working with us around Arlparra which was great. We did some of his dogs as well. There was at least one camp and one house at Arlparra that we did not get a chance to take any dogs from for a few reasons but we discussed that fact that we would be back in 6 months and would come and start with these dogs then. It was nice to have people making noises about the fact that we had missed them and their dogs and they wanted to be included in the program.

We were able to do some maintenance desexing at Kurrajong, Soapy Bore and Soakage. We made a couple of trips out to Mosquito Bore and finally found Donny Onion at home. We treated all the dogs out there with ivermectin and found that there were only 2 dogs that were not desexed and agreed to go back out there next time to do them and any others that have come along in the mean time. It was a pleasure to visit Violet's house where the dogs looked fantastic

and she was pleased to inform us that they had all been desexed and were the same dogs that they had last year.

Earlier in the week, Brian and Alison made a trip down to see Dennis Kunoth, the CEO of the Urapuntja Council who had offered to facilitate a clinic being set up down near Camel Camp. We found a verandah of a shed that would be suitable to set up on and Dennis was happy for us to run a power lead to his power supply and to use some of his water. We were able to get a water cart from the council and a shade cloth for the sunny end from the clinic.

So, on Wednesday night we packed up the clinic at Urapuntja Health in to a trailer and on Thursday morning we drove down to our new clinic on a verandah between Three Bores and Camel Camp.



It was amazing how quickly we could set up another clinic. Everyone worked together brilliantly. We made our first trip in to Camel Camp and found that the dogs were generally in a much poorer condition than many of the other communities. There was more obviously a scabies problem and many of the dogs had diarrhea. We did find that many of the dogs that had been previously desexed were still there and were generally in better condition than their undesexed comrades. People were generally very receptive to what we were trying to do and some places where we had faced some resistance previously were more encouraging.

The Dickson's house in the middle of Camel Camp had long been a problem due to the aggressive nature of the dogs and the apparent unwillingness of the owners to help. Magically, a team comprised of Jan, James and Grahame were able to come up with a method of first communicating with the right people and then organizing for them to help us. Over two days, all the dogs except one were sedated with the minimum of fuss and subsequently treated with ivermectin and desexed. The health clinic were particularly happy with this outcome, as were we given that we have been working away to achieve this outcome for a while.

From this clinic we serviced Apungalindum, Boundary Bore and Three Bores and desexed dogs from all these communities. We treated most of the remainder with ivermectin. We were only able to treat the dogs at Thommyhawk with ivermectin as we were never able to catch the right people at home to discuss desexing with them. They are apparently a very transient community and it is difficult to catch the dogs and the people at home at the same time. There were at least 10 dogs there though including a pregnant bitch so it will be worth persisting with this community in the future.

Homestead community is still abandoned but Martin pointed out that there was one dog there so we stopped and treated it with ivermectin too. It was noted firstly how lucky he was to have a whole house to himself and then we realized that in fact he had a whole community to himself!!



We were fortunate to have Eileen with us running an education program for the children. She did 2 science lessons with the older children based around culturing bacteria/fungus on petri dishes then looking at them down a microscope. Alison assisted with the second lesson to allow for some continuity of the education program each year. There was also discussion about caring for your dogs and hygiene associated with the dogs. Eileen also visited the younger children in their schools to talk about caring for your dog and to do a few

activities with them. It was fantastic in the days after this when we turned up at some of the houses and the children were able to translate and explain what we were saying to their parents/grandparents and just to recognize us and understand why we were around.



We diligently, mostly thanks to David, recorded each surgery and the statistics are summarized below

April 12	arlp arra	Athley	Bon dB	Ca mel C	Kurra	Rocket	Soakage	Soapy	3 B	Urapuntja	Anter	Apung	Total
Females	9	2	4	12	0	2	4	2	2	0	15	1	53
Males	11	5	3	14	1	7	8	7	3	2	15	1	77
Total	20	7	7	26	1	9	12	9	5	2	30	2	130
Age Av	1.15	1	0.9	1.8	0.6	1.25	1	1.2	1.9	0.6	1.6	2	1.25
Sarc Av	0.2	0	0	1.5	1	0.9	0	0.6	0	0	0.4	0	0.38
BCS	2.5	2.8	2.2	1.7	1.5	1.8	2.6	2.5	2.2	3	1.8	2.75	2.27

We also did a few random procedures:

- 4 vaccinations
- 1 cat castration (cryptorchid)
- 3 microchips
- 1 exploratory laparotomy
- 2 nail clips

It was a great trip and we are very grateful to everyone that contributed to its success. We have a few ideas for next time including moving the clinic to Boundary Bore where there are still a fair few dogs to do. We will also look in to the possibility of working in Ampilawatja concurrently with Utopia.

This program is obviously making a difference to the dogs of Utopia and the ongoing cooperation of the Barkley Shire, AMRRIC, Urapuntja Health and the Canberra Mob is paramount in making these advancements permanent and sustainable.

There are some statistics coming out of the Urapuntja Health Clinic's data system which would strongly suggest that the work that we are doing is having a significant effect on human health. For instance, the incidence of human skin sores has reduced by 76% in the last 12 months, as has the need for dispensing skin preparations of any kind.

The sun came up as we were packing up on the last day and we headed back to Alice Springs satisfied with the job that we had done.....

