

May 2017

# Threats to the Bali Heritage Dog

(Commonly Known as Anjing Kampung or village dog)

**By Janice Girardi**  
**Bali Animal Welfare Association - Yayasan BAWA**

## **Background**

Today, many factors threaten the survival of the indigenous Bali dog. Pure Bali dogs have been living on the island virtually unaltered for thousands of years, making them one of the oldest dogs in the world. Pure Bali dogs are highly important to Balinese culture, the island's history and international science. Today, the Bali dog faces many threats to its survival. These threats include, but are not limited to:

- lack of care
- the popularity of non-native breed dogs
- casual inbreeding with imported dogs
- rabies and mass culling due to a fear of rabies
- sterilization
- the dog meat trade
- weak or nonexistent animal welfare laws.

Observations indicate only an estimated 23% of Bali's dog population consists of pure Bali dogs. Balinese people, government, and animal welfare organizations must act now and do all that is possible to save the Bali dog, or it will be lost forever.

## *Genetic Studies*

One of the oldest dogs in the world, the indigenous Bali dog's DNA provides scientists with extremely valuable information, including critical insights into the evolution of the domestic dog and early human and dog migrations. Between 2000 and 2003, Dr. Niels Pederson, from the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at the University of California, Davis, and colleagues tested the DNA of indigenous Bali dogs (Irion et al.). According to Dr. Pederson: "The true pure breeds are these indigenous Bali dogs. Their lineage goes all the way back to the first proto-dog that evolved from the wolves. Their genes are highly valuable for further research as they are a window on the ancestral dog" (Blair).

Bali has two unique indigenous dogs, the common Bali Dog and the highland Kintamani, which probably evolved as a sub-type of the Bali dog.<sup>1</sup> According to Dr. Pederson's research, "a viable and diverse population of dogs existed on the island of Bali prior to its geographic isolation approximately 12,000 years ago and has been little influenced by domesticated European dogs since that time" (Irion et al.).

Not only is the Bali dog highly important to science, Bali dogs play an important role in daily life on the island, where they have longstanding cultural and religious significance. Common Bali dogs are widely recognized as being loyal, pack oriented, smart, independent and trainable with strong homing instincts, making them great pets and guard dogs.

### **Threats to the Bali Dog**

The common thread to all threats facing the Bali dog is that the Bali dog is greatly undervalued. If the Bali dog was properly valued, many of the threats bringing it near extinction would diminish or vanish.

#### *Low Awareness*

In Bali, many people lack the education and awareness needed to properly take care of their dogs. Even if people love their dogs, they don't always understand how to care for them or can't afford to. Dogs are often mistreated due to misconceptions and fear. Awareness of animal welfare is low, and people are often cruel to dogs either deliberately or inadvertently. Dogs frequently have to fend for themselves. They are thrown away or drowned. They are often not fed or given fresh water and proper medical attention.

#### *Cycle Of Intolerance*

The treatment of many dogs in Bali may be described as a cycle of intolerance. It often starts with people not taking care of their dogs, forcing dogs to fend for themselves, which can cause problems for humans. For example, a hungry dog may kill a chicken for food, upsetting the chicken's owner who then hits or punishes the dog. In return the dog becomes fearful of the human and often fear-aggressive. Fearful of punishment, a dog may defend itself by biting the human, causing the human to develop intolerance for dogs and ambivalence to suffering and cruelty.

Caging and chaining of dogs, which fits into the cycle of intolerance, is a serious animal welfare concern. Dogs are not meant to live in cages or on restrictive chains. Bali dogs need exercise and socialization with humans or other dogs, preferably both. When chained or caged they become fear-aggressive, ill and injured. The stress

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper does not include discussion of the Kintamani dog which has gained in popularity in past decades, although it is still threatened due to culling and inbreeding practices that weaken the Kintamani dog.

of caging and chaining lowers a dog's immune system, resulting in the dog getting sick, and then getting thrown away, exemplifying the cycle of intolerance.

### *Development Impact*

Bali dogs were traditionally able to live fairly independent lives. People did not supply their dogs with fresh water or more than a bit of rice, so the dogs foraged for food and water, and it was safe and easy to do so. Historically, Bali dogs played a key role in the ecosystem of the island, consuming organic waste. Population growth and urban sprawl have diminished the supply of food and fresh water. Now, when Bali dogs eat waste filled with inorganic material, especially plastic, it endangers their health. Dog poisoners, dog meat catchers, and government culling teams make life on the streets much more hazardous, threatening dogs' ability to survive. Dogs are now often injured in roadside accidents and the owner often can't afford to pay for treatment. The dog is thrown away and often suffers greatly or dies.

### *Waning Genetic Integrity*

The genetic integrity of the Bali dog was protected for millennia by its isolation. According to Dr. Lawrence Blair, "In 1926... an outbreak of rabies on neighboring islands caused Bali to pass a law forbidding the arrival of outside dogs. The purity of the bloodline was retained for a further 78 years until 2004, when the law was revoked" (Blair). The Bali dog's unique DNA is now under severe threat from casual inbreeding with imported dogs. Once the Bali dog's genetic integrity is lost, it can never be regained.

When breed dogs appeared in Bali they became hugely popular, and have become a fashionable status symbol; Bali dogs have no perceived value.

Breed dogs often aren't sterilised because of their puppies' high economic value. Non-native breed dogs are now breeding with Bali dogs. A recent survey conducted by the Bali Animal Welfare Association (BAWA) concluded that of Bali's dog population approximately 23% are pure Bali dogs, while 45% are breed dogs and the remaining 32% are mixed breeds.

Demand for breed dogs has encouraged the rise of factory-style breeding facilities, often known as puppy mills, and motivated unscrupulous breeders who put profit above the welfare of dogs. Animals kept for breeding often live in cramped and filthy cages without basic medical care. The breeding dogs are caged and bred over and over again. Once they are no longer profitable, they are simply discarded, left neglected in small cages or killed. When discarded, they often mate with pure Bali dogs, both threatening the Bali dog's unique bloodline and passing on life-threatening diseases, such as Parvo virus and Distemper.

Breed dogs are susceptible to genetic defects and diseases that Bali dogs are immune to because of their rich DNA, including skeletal and muscular disorders, dysplasia,

autoimmune disorders, and heart conditions. Breed dogs are also known to have many behavior problems that are usually not seen in Bali dogs.

### *Sterilization*

Balinese tend to not want to sterilize breed dogs because of their economic value; they are more willing to have their Bali dogs sterilized. While sterilization is important, it is paramount to implement sterilization practices that do not wipe out the Bali dog as an unintended consequence.

### *Export Ban*

Due to the rabies epidemic that began in 2008, a local regulation was ratified in 2009, making it illegal to export dogs from Bali. Even healthy vaccinated dogs are not allowed to be exported. While many individuals living in Java and overseas would like to adopt Bali dogs, this local regulation prevents the possibility of saving Bali dogs by establishing breeding populations outside of Bali.

### *Hundreds of Thousands Lost*

Mass culling mandated by the government due to a fear of the spread of rabies poses a serious threat to the survival of Bali dogs. Culling, proven internationally to be an ineffective method to control a rabies epidemic, has been a practice on the island for eight to nine years and has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of dogs, mostly Bali dogs. Widespread misinformation has led many to believe that only Bali dogs get rabies, which is simply not true; all unvaccinated dogs can get rabies. During mass culling, even healthy, vaccinated pets are often killed.

### *Dog Meat*

Bali's dog meat trade claims the lives of tens of thousands of Bali dogs every year. BAWA estimates that currently, almost 200 dogs a day are being killed for dog meat in Bali, over 70,000 a year. Over a five year study into the dog meat industry, BAWA uncovered 85 dog meat restaurants in Bali, and is sure there are more.

Half of the dogs entering the dog meat trade are pets, which illustrates how Bali dogs are seen as disposable. Around 45% of the dogs are sold or given to dog meat traders, 5% are bartered and the remaining 50% of dogs are stolen from streets and houses. Most of these dogs are healthy pure Bali dogs. The dog meat industry uses inhumane killing practices; 69% of the dogs are strangled, 13% are poisoned, 5% are shot, 2% are hung and beaten, and 11% are killed using other methods.

Most dog meat restaurants are located in South Bali in Canggu, Kerobokan, Kuta, and Jimbaran, where many customers are non-Balinese. Dog meat is also featured at church bazaars, parties, and holiday celebrations. Some dog meat from Bali is sent to nearby Flores for consumption. BAWA visited one restaurant in North Bali where

more than 50% of the customers were Balinese women who believed that dog meat was the healthiest and most inexpensive form of protein to feed their families. There are also superstitious beliefs surrounding dog meat, such as eating a black dog will cure asthma and that dog meat enhances libido.

The transportation of dogs and dog meat from one district to another in Bali violates the underenforced Provincial Regulation on rabies No 15 year 2009, yet 50% of dog meat restaurants buy their dogs from traders bringing them from other districts.

Handling and consuming dog meat poses threats to human health, including cholera, trichinosis, rabies (from handling uncooked nerve tissues, saliva and brains of an infected dog), and other illnesses.

Possible actions to eliminate the dog meat industry include, but are not limited to educating consumers of dog meat on alternative forms of protein; launching media campaigns on the health risks, myths, and misconceptions related to eating dog meat; closing dog meat restaurants as unregulated threats to human health, and enforcing laws against the crime of theft of property, which includes dogs.

Many of Indonesia's Asian neighbours have banned or are moving to ban, the slaughter of dogs and the consumption of dog meat, such advocacy is important for Indonesia as well. Animal welfare laws that focus on "livestock" (*hewan*, i.e. cattle, goats, pigs) should be updated to include dogs.

These actions require participation from individuals, local government, the health sector, animal welfare NGOs and law enforcement agencies. Stopping the dog meat trade will require diligent action and cooperation. Since the pure Bali dog is under threat of extinction, emphasizing and socializing the importance of these dogs is critical.

### *Conclusion*

A decade ago there were approximately 800,000 pure Bali dogs living on the island; today, a small fraction of this number remains (Irion, et al.). The common thread among all of the threats discussed above is that the Bali dog is not valued.

When the purity of the Bali dog's DNA is lost, it can never be regained. This will be a tragic loss for local culture and international science. The survival of the Bali dog is under serious threat, and as an ancient, living part of Bali's heritage, action must be taken immediately to save it.

***Janice Girardi, May 2017***

## Works Cited

Blair, Lawrence, presenter. *Bali – Island of the Dogs*. Directed by Dean Allan Tolhurst, Stormbird Media, 2011.

Irion, Dawn N, et al. "Genetic Variation Analysis of the Bali Street Dog Using Microsatellites." *BMC Genetics*, 8 Feb. 2005, <https://bmcgenet.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2156-6-6>.