

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Australia is a continent of contrasts with extreme weather patterns and many varied landscapes, ecosystems and animals. The dingo *Canis lupus dingo* is one of few Australian species to inhabit the entire mainland, because others are limited in their ability to adapt to the different environments. Unlike Australian marsupials, however, dingoes are a placental mammal and a canid, and canid species are landscape specialists. Following the introduction of the dingo to Australia 4000–5000 years ago, canids were the first terrestrial carnivore to be unsurpassed in world distribution. Like most large carnivores, dingoes sometimes come into conflict with humans and managing dingoes can often be controversial.

Large carnivorous species are probably the most revered in all of nature. In ancient human civilisations, some carnivores were seen as spiritual totems, such as the gray wolf *Canis lupus lupus* by American Indians, and the dingo by Australian Aborigines. In modern European civilisations, however, these two species in particular were portrayed in fables such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Wombat Stew* as murderous villains or as cunning impostors respectively. The fear that carnivores instil in their prey and in their competitors has created numerous defensive behaviours throughout