

TOOLERN VALE

# Some paws for thought

## RESEARCHERS STUDY DINGOES

**Ami Humpage**

YOU may not be able to teach old dogs new tricks, but Yale University researchers know there is a lot to learn from dingoes.

The Dingo Discovery and Research Centre in Toolern Vale is the only place in the world where Dr Katherine McAuliffe and PhD student Angie Johnston could find enough pure dingoes in a stable population for them to study.

In collaboration with Central Queensland University's Dr Bradley Smith, the two psychology researchers are using 10 non-invasive tests to study the social cognition of the dingoes.

"We are trying to get the dingoes to think about their social settings with each other and with humans by solving puzzles, following leadership, exploration and memory recall," Dr McAuliffe said.

The same tests are being done with domestic dogs in the US. The researchers plan to compare the results to show the effects of

domestication on animals.

"We are looking at the choices the dingoes make when faced with scenarios, following leadership and examples, navigating their own space by hiding food and memory recall," Dr McAuliffe said.

Mrs Johnston, who is using this study for her PhD, said already more than half of the 12 dingoes in the test group had solved the puzzles, compared with a third of the dogs.

"There is nowhere else in the world where we could find a group like this; they really are special," Mrs Johnston said.

Dr Smith, who is writing a book about dingoes with the CSIRO, said the species were under-represented in the research world.

Centre director Lyn Watson said the world was interested in dingoes, which was a win for the species and Melton. "These people are coming here, staying here, spending money here and helping conserve the dingo species — it's a bonus for all of us," Mrs Watson said.



**Angie Johnston, Dr Bradley Smith and Dr Katherine McAuliffe are studying the behaviour of dingoes at the Dingo Discovery and Research Centre in Toolern Vale.** Picture: SARAH MATRAY