

Atlas of Living Australia

South Australian User Support



Photographer: S. Kenny, Survey: 430, Year: 2006, Species: Dingo *Canis lupus dingo*

The [Atlas of Living Australia](#) (ALA) contains information on all the known species in Australia, aggregated from a wide range of data providers: museums, herbaria, community groups, government agencies, individuals and universities.

This information sheet aims to provide South Australian ALA users with some background information to allow them to make an informed decision on whether ALA suits their needs, and some simple instructions to complete the most common data requests. In addition to the instructions provided below the ALA has detailed help screens and several demonstration videos.

Some features of ALA are:

- species observation records for a defined area (see **Area search** below)
- observation records for a specified flora or fauna species
- records from a specific data set/source (see **Data set search** below)
- taxonomic synonyms
- customised data capture screens (see **Field data software** below)
- distribution mapping and analysis tools
- interesting and diverse online volunteer opportunities.

Data quality

Issues that ALA users need to be aware of are:

1. Some sensitive data have been spatially downgraded (mostly by 0.1° latitude/longitude; approx. 10 km)
2. Taxonomic assumptions have been made which may differ from those of the custodian or the official Census of South Australia Flora and Fauna. Refer to the Census for help or in some cases specialist interpretation may be required. It is useful to know that ALA provide the scientific name 'as supplied', as well as the ALA-interpretation 'match'.
3. Data sets are refreshed periodically and some may be more than a year old (refer to relevant metadata).
4. Some data sets are vetted via crowd sourcing (online community) rather than institutions. Each data set can be excluded or included depending on your needs (refer to following SA data section).
5. Users must filter the data to meet their needs (e.g. date range, subfossils, spatial reliability, source).

If data and outputs available through ALA do not meet your requirements you can discuss access to more suitable data with DEWBioDataSupport@sa.gov.au, direct with the data set custodians or via the following resources;

- Official Census of South Australia Flora and Fauna
- BDBSA – Data request procedure
- NatureMaps

Fauna and flora data held by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) Biological Databases of South Australia (BDBSA) can also be retrieved from the [NatureMaps](#) website. A comparison of Atlas of Living Australia and NatureMaps is included at the end of this factsheet.

SA data

Several South Australian data sets on ALA have been subject to intensive vetting by experts during joint projects between DEWNR and the custodians. These currently include:

1. [SA Flora \(BDBSA\)](#), DEWNR
2. [SA Fauna \(BDBSA\)](#), DEWNR
3. [State Herbarium of SA \(ADHERB\)](#), accessed via [Australia's Virtual Herbarium \(AVH\)](#)
4. [South Australian Museum](#), accessed via [OZCAM](#)
5. [Birdlife Australia, Birdata](#)

Many other data sets contain valuable SA data and can be included in searches as required.

All SA-species data on ALA are currently subject to denaturing in line with the [SA Environmentally Sensitive Data Register](#). Although some species on this register only require specific records to be denatured (e.g. nesting records), ALA currently applies a broad denaturing to all records for species on the register. Any species that are considered sensitive will have fields withheld and/or their coordinates denatured (generally rounded to 0.1° latitude/longitude –approx. 10 km).

BirdLife Australia also maintain a [Sensitive Species List](#) which is only applied to records from their data sets. They may withhold or denature data associated with sensitive species.

Field data software

ALA provides customised [Data Collection Tool](#) as an option for the electronic capture of field observations. Managed correctly, they may be useful project tools. Data generated within these portals is not automatically available within the main ALA search environment. DEW endorse projects that follow their *ALA Data Capture – Protocol* (available [internally](#) or through [DEW](#)).

Common data request – Area search

The procedure for downloading detailed species data for records within a [specified area](#) is:

1. Start from the ALA [home page](#) and select **Spatial Portal**
2. Zoom in to your area of interest using the **+** or **–** tool
3. From the **Add to Map** dropdown, select **Area**
4. Define the area by selecting a method:
 - a. Interact with the map
 - b. Searching
 - c. Preset areas
 - d. Import
 - e. Other

A useful option is *Method a: Interact with the map* > **Draw polygon**. This method is explained below.

5. Select **Draw polygon** and click the **Next** button:
 1. Name the new polygon layer (default is “My Polygon”)

2. Using the mouse, position the cursor at the first point to be digitized and click the left mouse button
3. Move the cursor to the second point/vertex and click the mouse button:
 - a. Repeat as required to define the area of interest
 - b. Double-click to end polygon selection (now coloured red)
 - c. If you need to redo the area select **Delete and redraw**
 - d. If area you require is represented correctly with Polygon select **Next**
6. From the **Quick links** box at the bottom of the map window, select **Download all records for "My Polygon"**
7. You will be prompted for a selection in three steps:

Step 1 – **Select areas** (your area should already be selected – if not select it)

Step 2 – **Select species** ("Include spatially-valid records" and "All species" should be selected - this is recommended)

Step 3 – **Select layers**

Ignore – Click **Next**

Refer to following **Downloading records** section below. NOTE: with more detailed instruction it is possible to display and filter on the record set before you download it.

Common data request – Data set search

To view metadata or download detailed species from a specified data source:

1. From [ALA home page](#) select **Search datasets**
2. In search box enter keywords to find data set/s (e.g. **BDBSA** for DEWNR's data), then click **Search**
3. Data sets matching search criteria will be listed:
 - a. Select **View records** link, or
 - b. Click on the name of the data set to show all metadata for this data set (this may contain important information about assumptions and currency of the data)
4. **View records** will take you to the Occurrence records list. 'Narrow your results' by scrolling through and selecting from the filters listed in the left hand column (e.g. Lifeform, IBRA, State, Date, Family). Generally you would refine the data set in order to make it a manageable size
5. Make sure you are in the **Records** tab (not Map or Charts) and click on the **Downloads** button.

Common data request – Download records

1. You must be logged in to ALA to download records. You will be prompted when downloading data to:
 - a. Choose download format and output file format, for more detail refer to: <https://support.ala.org.au/support/articles/6000196714-how-to-download-occurrence-records>
 - b. Select your industry or intended application of data from drop down list.
2. Some download screens may prompt for 'Download type' – if so select **Occurrence records**. Downloading *Occurrence records* instead of *species list* is recommended so that users can make informed decisions on which

records are suitable for their needs. The brief 'species list' will not include information such as EVENT DATE, SCIENTIFIC NAME (as supplied) and DATARESOURCE ID

3. Depending on download window, select:

- a. **Download All Records**, or
- b. **Start Download**

You will be asked to **Open**, **Save** or **Cancel** the zip file from biocache.ala.org.au. Saving is recommended.

NOTE: download time will vary depending on the size of your search area.

The downloaded zip file will contain three files:

1. **"My Area".csv** (named when commencing download): This file contains the species data and can be opened in Microsoft Excel, or imported into Microsoft Access.
NOTE: These programs can have limits on the record/row numbers they can display and may truncate.
2. **README.html** – with a web link to the field names for the downloaded data.
3. **citation.csv** – a list of the data sets, institutions, collections and organisations related to the data you have downloaded. This should open in MS Excel. Each source will include a UID (data provider code), NAME, and MORE INFORMATION fields which may have links to further details about the data source. These details may include important information such as how the data set is generated and managed, the date of the last ALA refresh, and details about any records that may have been withheld. The UID can be linked to the DATARESOURCE ID column in the species data file and will allow you to filter records for a particular source if needed.

Comparison of NatureMaps and Atlas of Living Australia data sets

Summary outputs held in DEW's BDBSA are available publicly through NatureMaps and the Atlas of Living Australia. NatureMaps is DEW's access point to maps and geographic information about South Australia's natural resources in an interactive online mapping format. A range of spatial data sets includes flora and fauna records, vegetation mapping, surface and ground water, soil, cadastral information and topographic data. The [NatureMaps website](#) provides comprehensive information on how to access and retrieve data from these spatial layers. The following comparison is provided to help users distinguish between the two options and to decide which one is most appropriate for their needs.

Attribute/function	NatureMaps	Atlas of Living Australia
Source of data	Biological Databases of South Australia maintained by DEWNR. One data set comprising flora and fauna records within South Australia. Refer Hyperlink for more details.	A collection of over 3000 data sets, aggregated from a range of sources, Australia-wide This includes the same BDBSA data set that is delivered through NatureMaps.
State Herbarium data	Yes, records of voucher specimens held in South Australian Herbarium only.	Yes, records from all State Herbaria.
Frequency of data updates	Weekly	The BDBSA data set is refreshed approximately every three months.
Associated GIS layers	Wide range of spatial layers relating specifically to South Australia including aerial photography imagery, topography, landscapes, soils, vegetation mapping.	Wide range of spatial layers at a National scale, relating mainly to climate variables, soil and vegetation. If included, South Australian spatial layers may not be as recent as those in NatureMaps.
Sensitive data	The location coordinates of sensitive records are rounded off to approximately 10 km accuracy. Records are displayed with a different symbol.	The location coordinates of sensitive records are rounded off to approximately 10 km accuracy. These records can be identified from the data generalisation field.

Attribute/function	NatureMaps	Atlas of Living Australia
Taxonomy	According to the official Census of South Australia Flora and Census of South Australian Vertebrates	ALA taxonomic interpretation, which may not match the South Australian census.
Search of species by area	Yes, user created area search done by drawing polygon OR by using selected criteria including IBRA subregion	Yes, user created area search done by drawing polygon OR by using selected criteria including IBRA subregion OR importing shapefiles
Search on species names	Yes	Yes
Maximum number of records downloadable	Limit of 10 000 records	No limit of downloadable files, but limit of 500 000 records that can be exported to Excel.

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For more information

Department for Environment and Water

Website:

<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/science/information-and-data/biological-databases-of-south-australia/information-sharing>

Email: DEWBioDataSupport@sa.gov.au