

Feral fallow deer (*Dama dama*)

Fact sheet



Overview

Deer were introduced into Australia from Europe and Asia in the 19th century as game animals. Today, six species of deer occupy many areas throughout Australia; Fallow, Red, Chital, Hog, Rusa and Sambar. Within the Hills and Fleurieu region, escaped Fallow Deer have become widely distributed and are increasingly being reported, often in large numbers. When deer establish in the wild they are referred to as feral deer.

Under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* deer are a 'declared' animal. This classification means that farmed deer must be securely confined and permanently identified with an ear-tag. This including deer kept as pets or for other aesthetic reasons.

Escaped deer are considered feral deer if the farmer doesn't collect the deer within seven days of being notified of their presences outside the farm. All feral deer must be controlled by landowners using a humane control method.

Description

A Fallow Deer is similar in size to a large domestic goat, and weighs between 50 kg to 110 kg. The coat varies widely in colour, but the most common are fawn or black, with large white spots. It also has distinctive white markings on the tail and buttocks. Its tail is raised over its back if the animal is disturbed. Mature males have multi-pointed, palm-like antlers that look very different to those of other species.

Biology

In Australia, Fallow Deer occupy rainforests, eucalypt forests, grass lands and farmlands. Their preferred food is grass but they also eat the leaves of shrubs and trees, herbs, bark and some fruit. When present in large numbers, deer congregate in herds. In autumn, bucks (males) call for does (females) from their rutting (breeding) areas. To establish the rutting area, bucks trample down the vegetation and urinate to spread their scent, hoping to attract females to mate. If mating is successful one fawn is born per doe in spring or summer.

Impacts

Environmental

- modification of bushland through trampling, grazing and ring-barking vegetation
- soil erosion and compaction in areas of high use such as trails, pastures and creeklines
- weed dispersal
- fouling of waterholes
- spread of plant diseases such as *Phytophthora cinnamomi*
- disturbing native fauna by destroying habitat.

Social

- increased levels of risk to the public and non-target species through illegal hunting
- vehicle collisions / road safety
- destruction of gardens and recreational parks.

Primary production

- competition with stock for pasture
- spread of disease, for example johnes disease and bovine tuberculosis
- ring-barking trees and destroying saplings, particularly during the rut
- trampling and grazing of agricultural crops
- destruction of vineyards
- soil compaction
- damage to fences.

What to do

Prevent escapes

The best management technique for all farmed deer species is to prevent their escape from deer farms into the natural environment. Farmed deer must be contained within deer proof fences, following the minimum specifications outlined in the Declared Animal Policy – Feral Deer.

It is the legal responsibility of the landowner to ensure that deer are contained, all deer over 12 months are fitted with an ear-tag and the herd is registered with the Property Identification Code.

Early detection

Any sightings of feral deer should be reported to the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board where landowners can also obtain advice about control measures. It is strongly encouraged that feral deer sightings are reported at feralscan.org.au/deerscan

Coordinated management

As with any pest species, feral deer do not respect property boundaries. It is illegal to knowingly keep feral deer. Effective management on one property may be undermined by deer wandering in from adjoining properties.

For this reason managing feral deer is best achieved as a joint exercise, with positive collaboration between all land managers in the local area.

Removal

There is no single approach to deer control and any program should be designed after proper consideration of local circumstances.

In general, removal measures can include humane destruction (eg shooting) or trapping. However, animal welfare issues must be considered in any decision relating to removal methods.

Monitoring

Keeping records of the number of deer that are sighted and controlled on your property will provide very useful information on population sizes, distribution trends, deer density and effects of control programs. This information is also of benefit to the region in designing control programs into the future.

Declarations

The following sections of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* apply to Deer in the Hills and Fleurieu region:

S189 Cannot wilfully or negligently release a declared animal into a control area.

S191 (1) Land Owner must comply with instructions to keep a declared animal in captivity.

S 192 (3) Landowner must take prescribed measures for the control of the animal on their land.

Also check out [Declared animal policy: Feral deer](https://pir.sa.gov.au) (pir.sa.gov.au)



Further information

Further information is available through the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board.

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