

Feral goat

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Goat history in Australia

Goats arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. As they were small and hardy, ate a range of plants and provided milk and meat, they were convenient livestock for early European settlers. More recently, goats have been used to keep plantation forests and inland pastoral land free of weeds. Feral herds developed as these domestic goats escaped, were abandoned or deliberately released.

Feral goats now occur across 28 per cent of Australia. There are at least 2.6 million feral goats across the country, but numbers fluctuate enormously with drought, management programs and high fertility, so it is very difficult to accurately assess them. Populations of feral goats are highest across the ranges landscapes of the SA Arid Lands region.

What is their impact?

Feral goats have a major impact on native vegetation through soil damage and overgrazing of native herbs, grasses, shrubs

and trees. This grazing can cause erosion and prevent regeneration. They foul waterholes and can introduce weeds through seeds carried in their droppings. During droughts, feral goats can compete with native animals and domestic stock for food, water and shelter.

They may threaten some Yellow-footed rock-wallaby populations by competing for rock shelters, food and water, leaving the wallabies exposed to a greater risk of predation by foxes and wedge-tailed eagles.

What are your responsibilities?

As a landholder of private or public land, it is your responsibility to control feral goats on your land. An acceptable level of control is to be determined by the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board.

All captured feral goats must be either destroyed on the property, sent for slaughter, or re-domesticated on land where domestic goats are permitted. Captured feral goats may be held on the property where they were captured for a maximum of six weeks. This gives the landholder an opportunity to capture more

and make transporting them to an abattoir or depot cost-efficient. At the end of the six week period, they must be removed or destroyed.

Under section 187(2) of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*, the keeping of domestic goats is prohibited in the Flinders Ranges Planning Area without a permit.



A permit to keep goats may be issued by your local Landscape Board, to anyone needing to keep goats for medical reasons, and to landholders in the Flinders Ranges Planning Area who owned domestic goats before 1 July 1987, subject to compliance with identification and fencing requirements.

What is being done?

Control of feral goats is a complex issue. While they are a major environmental and agricultural pest, they also have some commercial value and are used as a game species by recreational hunters. Feral goat populations tend to recover well from culling and, except on islands, eradication is not possible. To protect the environment, control is best focused on areas that contain threatened native plants, animals and ecological communities.

In arid and semi-arid country, feral goats are sometimes mustered for slaughter, and young females may be sold as breeding stock for mohair flocks. In inaccessible areas, shooting from helicopters is the most humane and efficient method of removing small numbers of feral goats.

A technique known as the 'Judas goat' method can be used to locate

small herds. A feral goat is caught, fitted with a radio collar and released to join a herd. Signals from the radio reveal the location of the herd.

Ecology

Where dingoes and wild dogs are present, feral goats generally do poorly. However, they are often found in sheep-grazing areas, where dingoes and wild dogs have been removed or heavily controlled by pastoralists.

Feral goats live in herds and, although males and females live separately for much of the year, they share about one kilometre square under good conditions, but a larger area when food or water is scarce. The two groups only mix together during the breeding season in autumn and winter, with females becoming sexually mature in their first year. Feral goats can breed twice a year, with twins and triplets common.



Feral goats have a varied diet; leaves, twigs, bark, flowers, fruit and roots. They will eat most plant types in pastoral regions and often consume vegetation that is avoided by sheep or cattle.

Any sightings of feral goats should be reported to Feral Scan www.feralscan.org.au to ensure all feral goat activity is mapped in the region.

More information

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