

Lake Eyre Basin

Information Sheet



Pest Animals

Number IS03

The majority of Australia's pest animals are either domestic animals gone feral (horses, goats, donkeys, water-buffalo, camels, cats, dogs, pigs, pigeons) or those introduced for the control of pests (canetoads, mosquito-fish) or for recreation (rabbits, foxes). Many of these animals thrive in the Australian environment where they have few natural predators and little disease.

Australia's pest animals also include sparrows, starlings, mynahs, deer, black rats, house mice, goldfish, and European carp. Native species such as dingoes, native rats and fruit-bats can be pests in specific areas.

The major animal pests in the Lake Eyre Basin are cats, foxes, camels, pigs, horses, donkeys, goats, wild dogs, canetoads, and rabbits. These animals can have a significant impact on the environment and economy of the Lake Eyre Basin. They compete with, and prey on, native fauna and livestock, carry disease and parasites, damage habitat, and add to total grazing pressure. Consequently, they also have a detrimental effect on people's incomes and lifestyle and ultimately impact on land sustainability.



Photo courtesy Qld Dept Natural Resources and Mines

Control

While eradication of feral animals from a small area is feasible, it is not possible over an area the size of the Lake Eyre Basin. Reduction and control are the options available to minimise impacts on the environment and the rural economy.



Photo by Angus Emmott

Specialised fencing has limited success in excluding pests such as dingoes, wild dogs and rabbits from grazing country and is much more expensive than domestic livestock fencing to erect and maintain.

Horses, camels, and goats are harvested by mustering and trapping when numbers are high and there is an economic return

for the activity. Feral pigs are harvested by trapping and shooting.

A variety of conventional cage traps, soft-catch traps, and yards are used. These are usually placed around waterholes to catch animals as they come to drink, but have limited success. Trapping is labour intensive as traps require daily checks.

Species-specific poison baits of sodium fluoroacetate (1080) are used for foxes, dogs, and pigs. This poison occurs naturally in about 35 species of Australian plants and native animals are generally less susceptible than introduced ones. This is often the only cost-effective way of protecting endangered flora and fauna as well as pastoral production.

Shooting is used to manage feral horses, donkeys, camels, pigs and goats. Like other control methods, this must be performed in accordance with the animal welfare requirements for each State and Territory.

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Pest Animals of the Lake Eyre Basin

Biological controls such as introduced predators, parasites, disease-carrying bacteria, and viruses are also employed (the introduction of rabbit calicivirus to the Simpson Desert has resulted in one of the most remarkable ecological recoveries of recent history). Immunocontraception is being developed so rabbits and foxes produce fewer young. It will be used in conjunction with conventional techniques to control damage by these pest species.

Successful feral animal management is a whole-of-community task requiring strategic programs established with the support of councils and governments and being carried out on the ground by groups or individuals. The Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group addresses feral animal management through interaction and participation with state and national pest management programs.



Major pest animals of the Lake Eyre Basin

Animal	Distribution	Characteristics	Effect	Control
Rabbit (<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>)	Widespread	Breeds quickly, eats anything	Denudes landscape, out-competes endangered wildlife, adds to total grazing pressure	Poison, trap, shoot, biological
Horse (<i>Equus caballus</i>)	Remote areas	Large, mobile, effective grazer	Out-competes native wildlife, damages habitat, adds to total grazing pressure	Muster, trap, shoot
Camel (<i>Camelus dromedarius</i>)	Widespread in arid areas	Large, mobile, effective browser, well-suited to dry environment	Out-competes native wildlife, impacts threatened flora, adds to total grazing pressure	Muster, trap, shoot
Pig (<i>Sus scrofa</i>)	North-east to central, mainly riparian areas	Roots up ground, breeds quickly, carries disease, omnivorous	Roots up floodplains, damages aquatic and commercial plants and animals, can pass disease to livestock	Trap, shoot, poison
Cat (<i>Felis catus</i>)	Widespread	Skilled hunter	Preys on small marsupials, reptiles and birds	Poison, trap, shoot, biological
Fox (<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>)	Widespread	Skilled hunter	Preys on small marsupials, reptiles and birds, preys on lambs	Poison, trap, shoot, biological
Goat (<i>Capra hircus</i>)	Ranges and scrub	Non-selective browser	Out-competes native wildlife, impacts threatened flora, adds to total grazing pressure	Muster, trap, shoot
Donkey (<i>Equus asinus</i>)	Remote ranges and scrub	Large, mobile, effective grazer	Out-competes native wildlife, damages habitat	Trap, shoot, poison
Canetoad (<i>Bufo marinus</i>)	Far north-east	Hardy amphibian with toxin glands	Displaces native amphibians, toxin kills native predators	None
Wild dog (<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>)	Widespread	Skilled hunter	Preys on domestic livestock	Poison, trap, shoot
Starling (<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>)	Fringes predominantly	Efficient breeder	Displaces native birds	Poison, trap, shoot