

Section 2.7: Pest Animals

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The introduction of rabbits, foxes and cats to Australia led to the irrevocable loss of native bird, reptile and marsupial species and threatens agricultural productivity. Australia has lost many of its unique animals, due to inappropriate land management practices and the impact of pest plants and animals. The [Threatened Species Recovery Hub](#) states that “Pet and feral cats together are killing over two billion reptiles, birds and mammals per year in Australia, and most of these animals are natives”. A recent article “One cat, one year, 110 native animals: lock up your pet, it’s a killing machine” shows the impact that pet cats are having on our native wildlife. In addition, a radio tracking study in Adelaide by several universities, including the University of SA, was launched in 2015 and the Cat Tracker project was designed to help cat owners make informed decisions about the management of their pet cats.

A natural ecosystem’s plants have co-evolved with its animals. Many plant species or whole communities of plants may rely on a specific animal for pollination or germination. The loss of one species always leads to the loss of others.

Commercial agricultural production is also a part of the ecosystem. For instance, excessive clearance has removed much of our native understorey habitat, causing the local extinction of many bird species. This, in turn, has led to a large increase in the insects these birds once controlled, damaging the very crops the land was cleared for.

The origins of pest animals in Australia range from deliberate introductions such as rabbit and foxes, through to farm escapees such as goats and deer. Kangaroo numbers in the landscape have also changed in response to vastly different land management regimes. The post-colonial landscape offers more available water-troughs, high-sugar introduced pastures, and less hunting by humans, all of which allow kangaroos to proliferate.

Pest animals in South Australia are considered pests either because of their hunting efficiency and impacts as predators on other animals, such as cats and foxes, or as herbivores that destroy crops and impact remnant and regenerating native vegetation such as rabbits, deer, goats and kangaroos. Vertebrate pests pose a serious cost-burden to agriculture, watercourses, the natural environment, and society in general.

Pest animals, known as “declared” species under the [Landscape South Australia Act 2019](#), formerly known as the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, can have significant impacts on industries and the environment. Pest animal species considered to be over abundant, which are typically grazing species damage native vegetation and can also cause erosion and foul up waterways. The pest animal species of the Mt Lofty Ranges region include feral goat, deer, rabbit, and even kangaroos which can cause over grazing to native vegetation and crops and pastures. These species can also threaten revegetated areas if plants are not adequately properly protected and put more pressure on native remnant areas impacted by fire when new growth and shoots emerge. Plant species highly sensitive to overgrazing, particularly after a bushfire event, which are at risk of extinction or decline, are orchid species.

The maintenance of a healthy and diverse ecosystem is beneficial to us all. Biodiversity is our basic natural resource. It follows that due care should be taken not to introduce exotic species that will undermine our unique ecology.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU AND YOUR CATCHMENT?

Pest animals reduce agricultural productivity by competing with livestock for feed or by direct predation.

Rabbits can be a significant cause of soil erosion (Seven rabbits graze as much as one sheep)

Rabbits, foxes, and cats can have a significant impact on native wildlife resulting in a decline in local biodiversity.

A [permit to destroy wildlife](#) or [harvesting permits](#) must be obtained to control [abundant species](#), such as kangaroos.

Pest grazing species can impact on areas that have been revegetated, inhibit post bushfire recovery of native vegetation, and threaten native plant species of conservation significance.

Pest animal species with hard hooves, such as deer and goats can cause creek bank degradation and erosion and pollute watercourses.

Various organisations such as [Landscape SA](#), [PIRSA](#) and local [Landcare SA](#) groups operate throughout the region and will provide advice or assist in the control of pest animals on your property.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

- Contact your local Landscape SA Officer: <https://landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/find-us> for a list of species and for important advice on controlling pest species or refer to several resources listed under Further Resources of this sheet.
- Seek the appropriate permits from the Department for Environment and Water to manage over abundant native species, such as kangaroos, the Little Corella, and lorikeets.
- Understand the requirements as a landholder under South Australia regulations and legislation in controlling pest animals' species.
- Work in cooperation with adjoining properties to control pest species such as fox, rabbit, cat, deer, and goat.
- Do not intentionally release 'pet' or 'farmed' animals that may later become pest animal species in the natural environment and a huge cost-burden to the community.

- Adhere to the [cat owner responsibilities](#) under the requirements of the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*. Contact your Local Government for current Cat By-laws within your council area.
- Report pest species to your local Landcare SA group or Landscape SA Board or office.
- If undertaking revegetation, be sure to factor in the cost of adequate plant guards such as 'Mallee mesh guards' or other recommended guards that can prevent grazing by kangaroos.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Natural Resource Centres:

[Adelaide Hills Natural Resource Centre – Norton Summit](#)
[Mount Pleasant Natural Resource Centre](#)
[Strathalbyn Natural Resource Centre](#)

Landscape SA documents & websites:

[Best practice land management guidelines for small grazing properties](#) (2017)

Bushfire recovery and biodiversity, [Factsheet](#), January 2015

Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*), [Factsheet](#), November 2015

Pest animals -

<https://landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/plants-and-animals/pest-plants-and-animals/pest-animals>

Other resources:

Abundant species -

<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/plant-s-and-animals/Abundant-species>

Atlas of Living Australia -

<https://www.ala.org.au/>

Coopers Farm Supplies of Mt Torrens or Mt Pleasant -

<https://www.coopersfarmsupplies.com.au/>

Feral Animals - <https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/ahc-resident/Pages/Feral-Animals.aspx#goat>

Other resources:

Kangaroo guidelines -

<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/licences-and-permits/wildlife-permits/laws-guidelines/kangaroo-guidelines>

Kangaroo conservation and management -

https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/plants-and-animals/Abundant_species/kangaroo-conservation-and-management

PIRSA - Established Pest Animals in South Australia -

https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/animal_pests_in_south_australia/established_pest_animals

South Australian Legislation -

<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/about-us/Legislation>

Trees For Life - <https://treesforlife.org.au/>

Upper River Torrens Landcare Group -

<http://www.torrenslandcare.org/>