

Any Sign of Ferals?



Feral animals are animals that have been introduced from other areas, usually other countries, that have established populations in the wild.

Feral animals have a devastating effect on our farmland, farm animals, native species and natural environments. Their impact can be extremely damaging because they have the ability to adapt quickly to different conditions, breed rapidly (reproduce), compete for food (including our crops), carry diseases and they often live in areas that make it hard to remove them. Feral animals, like cane toads, can also be toxic to native animals that might mistake them for their normal food and prey on them, causing the native animal to die.

Some feral animals that cause large problems in Australia are foxes, feral goats, feral pigs, feral cats, feral dogs, rabbits, deer, European carp, cane toads, feral mice and rats, camels, common starling, red-eared slider turtle and the Indian myna.



Photos (L-R): Ed Dunens and Invasive Animals CRC

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Feral animal impacts

The problem with feral animals is that they have a HUGE impact on the landscape and with our native and domestic animals. Here is a list of some of their impacts.

Predation – Australia has a large number of small native mammals, birds and reptiles that are particularly susceptible to being preyed upon by feral animals. They can also cause large problems in agriculture by preying on young or vulnerable livestock.

Competition – they compete with native species and farm animals for food, or damage and degrade food sources.

Disease – they can be carriers of disease and parasites that our native or farm animals are susceptible too. As they are wild animals, they quickly spread problems throughout our bushland and farming landscapes. Even humans can be vulnerable to disease and parasites spread by feral animals.

Poisonous – some can be highly poisonous, causing death to those animals that might prey on them.

Invasive plants – they are also responsible for spreading weeds throughout the landscape.

Destroying sensitive habitats – they can dig up the soil, eat and damage plants and foul waterways that damages our natural environments.

Damage infrastructure – they can damage objects like fences, gates, watering points machinery and other infrastructure of farms.

What can be done?

Dealing with feral animals can be tricky! There are so many feral animals and many require specific methods of control. Here is a list of some of the methods being used.

- Trapping
- Poisoning
- Aerial and ground shooting
- Den (home) destruction (pictured)
- Exclusion fencing
- Guard animals to protect livestock.

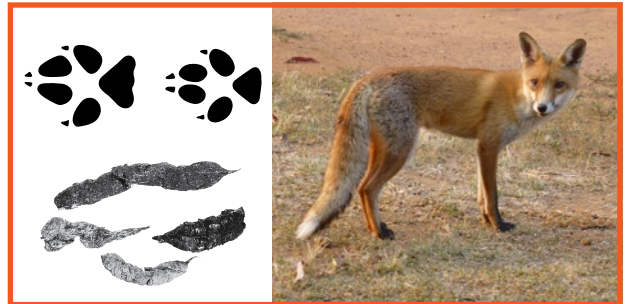


Photo: Enviro-Stories
Bernie Star: A local environmental star

SOME TRUE FERALS

European Red Fox

Foxes will scavenge on anything from fruit, to carrion (dead animals) and rubbish, but they prefer eating small animals. They also prey on lambs, poultry, calves and other domestic farm animals. Foxes spread skin conditions (mange) and other diseases, as well as transporting weed seeds.



Feral Cats

Feral cats are the main cause for several native species including small mammals, birds and reptiles becoming critically endangered or going extinct. Feral cats are also a major health risk to livestock, native animals and humans because they carry diseases.



Feral Goats

Feral goats compete with livestock for grazing resources, contribute to land degradation (soil erosion), compete with native species for vegetation and can spread diseases to livestock.



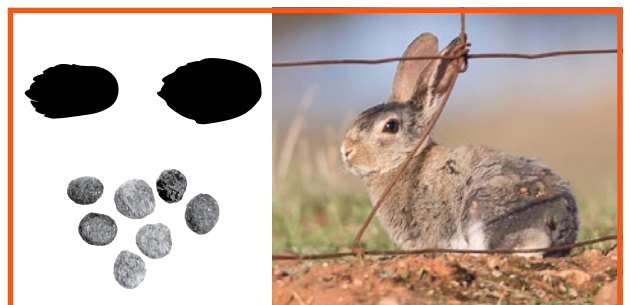
Feral Pigs

Feral pigs eat both plants and animals, including crops, turtle and bird's eggs and newborn lambs. Feral pigs cause a lot of damage by wallowing, defecating, digging, up-rooting, trampling and eating plants and damaging fences. They also carry about 20 different exotic diseases.



Rabbits

Rabbits cause land degradation both in native bush areas and on farms, from digging warrens. They compete with both native animals and livestock for food resources. Rabbits can damage crops and native grasslands and prevent revegetation by eating seedlings and ring-barking trees.



PEST DETECTIVE

Scene of the crime

Amy and Rory Pond own a small farm that backs onto the Manning River Estuary in the Mid-coast region of NSW. They are very proud farmers that realise the advantages of protecting the natural resources on their property. As well as managing their soil, water and air resources they have an interest in helping the native wildlife. In particular, Amy loves that they have a number of breeding pairs of Eastern Curlew's that roost in amongst the salt marsh down by the estuaries edge. They have put a lot of work into managing their farm by preserving and rehabilitating vegetation, planting wildlife corridors and controlling feral animals to attract the Eastern Curlews to their farm.

Unfortunately Amy has noticed that some of their farm's Eastern Curlew's have disappeared. There seems to be something hunting them and they cannot figure out what. To save the rest of them they have decided to call you, the Pest Detective, to help them solve "The mystery of the disappearing Eastern Curlews".

The Victims

The Pond's have identified the victims as being Eastern Curlews. A good Pest Detective always learns as much as they can about the victim. Use the internet or your library to answer the following.

1. What type of creature is an Eastern Curlew?
2. What is the scientific name for the Eastern Curlew?
3. What is the conservation status of the Eastern Curlew in both NSW and Australia wide?
(Hint: type "Eastern Curlew conservation status" into your search engine)
4. Describe the features of an Eastern Curlew. Examples can include size, colour, call and where it lives.

NSW:

AUS:

The Clues

A number of clues have been found that may help you solve the puzzle of the missing Eastern Curlews.

Clue 1: Feathers tell a story

Rory discovered numerous feathers on the mudflats where the birds were known to feed. What does this suggest about our missing Eastern Curlews?

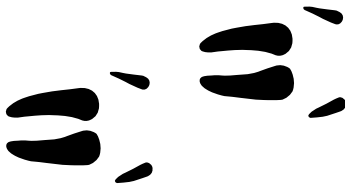
A good Pest Detective will always have an idea of what could have caused the damage. List any animals that you think could have been to blame.



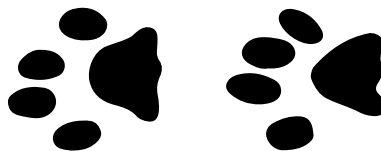
Clue 2: Footprints in the mud

Amy has searched the area where the feathers were discovered. She noticed there were three different types of animal footprints in the mud close by.

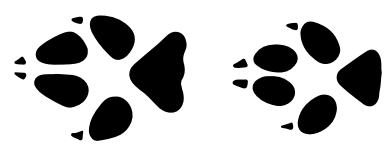
A



B



C



Use the feral animal information from the fact sheet to identify the three animals that have been in the area.

A

B

C

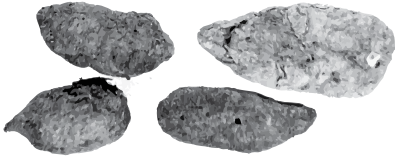
Were these animals on your list from Clue 1?

If they were, which ones?

Clue 3: Identifying the suspects

Now that you have limited your suspects down to three animals, you can cross check those animals against some scats (faeces or poo) that were found near the scene of the crime. Once again, use the feral animal information from the fact sheet to identify the two animals that have been in the area.

A



B



A

B

Clue 4: But which feral animal was it?

A number of animal hairs were found mixed in amongst the piles of feathers. They are very hard for you to identify as they are covered in dirt, blood and other materials. Luckily, as a good Pest Detective, you have your trusty microscope with you.

Hair Sample



You have taken a photo of the hair and now need to go to the FBI forensic website to determine what animals they came from.

bitly.com/fbi-hair HINT: Check your hair against Figure 130 and Figure 138.

It's decision time. Who have you identified as the guilty feral animal?

What's next?

You have helped Amy and Rory protect the Eastern Curlew's on their farm by identifying the feral animal that was causing problems. But did you know that the Eastern Curlew is the largest migratory shorebird in the world. They undertake an epic migration from Australia to northern China and Russia to breed, a flight of 12,000 kilometres.

You can learn more about this amazing bird and how you can help it by reading the fact sheet:

www.ils.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1118562/EASTERN-CURLEW.pdf

Local Land Services also encourages landholders to join coordinated group control programs. To find out more about group control programs in your area, contact Local Land Services on 1300 795 299 or look up your local office.

www.ils.nsw.gov.au/regions/hunter