

JR FACT FILE



PEST ANIMALS



Image: Sand traps help let rangers the movements of pest species such as foxes.

AT A GLANCE

For millions of years Australia's native animals have adapted to life in Australia's natural environment, its natural food webs and habitats. However during the 1800s in an attempt to make Australia feel more like home, European settlers introduced a diverse range of fauna species (animals).

Some species, such as cats and foxes, were deliberately set free into the wild for recreation and in an attempt to control rabbit plagues. Goats were introduced into inland Victoria as a source of meat, wool and milk; many escaped and have become feral. Some animals and birds such as black rats and sparrows were introduced by mistake (many unknowingly stowed upon ships and airlines).

Since being introduced, a range of species including mammals, fish and birds have spread throughout mainland Australia including natural environments such as national and state parks.

Impact on Biodiversity:

Due to their ability to breed and spread rapidly many pest animals pose a serious threat to the health of our natural biodiversity. Not only do they compete with native animals for food, shelter and water, many pest animals also hunt and eat native animals. Ground-nesting birds and small to medium sized mammals, like bandicoots and potoroos, are particularly vulnerable from predation and competition from pest animals.

As well as directly impacting on native species, many introduced animals such as rabbits, feral goats and feral pigs have a significant impact on native vegetation preventing regeneration of native plants, spreading weeds and causing soil damage and erosion.

The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*):

The Red Fox was introduced into Victoria in the 1870s primarily for recreational hunting. Since being introduced the fox has become Australia's most threatening predator for native animals and is believed to have contributed towards the extinction of at least twenty native species.

The fox is an elusive and adaptive predator and despite ongoing attempts to control its spread it is now common throughout Victoria and mainland Australia.

Parks Victoria and Pest Animal Management:

It is important to recognise that pest animals move freely between public and private land therefore their control cannot be run by government alone, it is important to work with all levels of government as well as private land owners. Parks Victoria runs a number of projects to remove or control pest animals on public land, focusing on parks of highest value and under the greatest threat.

The Victorian Pest Management – A Framework for Action (VPMF), is the State Government policy for pest management in Victoria. It provides a basis for all pest managers to work together to develop and implement long-term, safe, effective and humane pest management processes that protects, enhances and restores Victoria's agricultural and biodiversity assets.

PEST ANIMALS

A well established pest animal management plan has been set up for Parks Victoria's parks with around 500,000 hectares of park land treated for pest animals each year. The main pest species targeted include foxes, rabbits, feral cats, pigs, goats and wild dogs.

Methods of controlling pest animal species include trapping, shooting, baiting and fencing.

The main method of controlling foxes is to lay 1080 fox baits. These are buried deep within specially constructed bait stations, which are positioned at intervals usually around 1km apart along forest tracks. The bait stations are checked and rebaited regularly to ensure that the pressure on the fox population is maintained. This method of fox baiting ensures that the chance of impact on wildlife other than foxes is extremely low.

By removing and controlling pest species native flora and fauna populations have been allowed to re-establish without fear of predation or competition for food and shelter. Removing pest species has also promoted the reintroduction and/or increase in threatened native fauna such as the Orange-bellied Parrot and Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby which was re-introduced into the Grampians in 2008.

How Can you Help Look After our Parks?

One of the best ways to look after our parks and encourage native animal rehabilitation is to join a "Friends" group or other volunteer organisation.

"Friends" Groups work with park rangers to plant trees, build tracks, erect fencing, and help parks in many other ways.

Want to Know More?

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

www.dse.vic.gov.au