

Legal responsibility

The main governing legislation is the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (Vic), Part 8: Noxious weeds and pest animals. The Act creates categories of prohibited, controlled and regulated animals. These include foxes, rabbits, feral pigs, feral goats and wild dogs. The Act also sets out offences relates to importing, keeping, trading in or releasing pest animals.

The Wildlife Act 1975 (Vic) creates various offences relating to wildlife, makes it an offence for dogs or cats to attack wildlife, and also regulates hunting of deer.

Under the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1996 (Vic) all cat owners in Victoria are legally required to register cats aged over six months with Council annually.



The impact of pest animals on threatened species is dramatic and we are likely to lose many of our small mammal species such as the Smoky Mouse.



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Yarra Ranges Council

Action Sheet **8**
Pest animals

Related materials

Guidelines
Yarra Ranges Council Flora & Fauna Plan 2012: Sustaining biodiversity for current and future generations Yarra Ranges Council Environment Department

- Websites**
- www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au
 - www.dse.vic.gov.au
 - www.dpi.vic.gov.au
 - www.environment.gov.au
- **Invasive Species**
- http://vro.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/pest_animals
 - <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/plants-and-animals/invasive-species>
- **Brochures**
Wandering Cats - Cat Curfew - available at Yarra Ranges Council Community Links

Photo acknowledgements: Peter Menkhorst



Pest animals

1
Broad-scale
Habitat

2
Property
Habitat

3
Urban
Backyards

4
Waterways
& Wetlands

5
Fire

6
Threatened
Species

7
Weeds

8
Pest
Animals

Pest animals

This Action sheet covers management of pest animals that damage the Yarra Ranges' ecology of native vegetation and wildlife. Pests include large animals such as deer, smaller mammals such as cats, foxes, and rabbits, and birds such as Indian mynahs.

Council's goal is to maintain Yarra Ranges flora and fauna assets, which are important and very fragile. Pest animals are a direct and significant threat, destroying vegetation and killing or competing with native animals for food and shelter. Indirectly, pests also consume the resources of Council and community as we work to control them and offset the damage they cause.

Control actions need to be coordinated in this endeavour.

Because pest animals range across landscapes rather than within Council boundaries, good environmental stewardship in the Yarra Ranges makes a contribution that extends beyond our region. Raising awareness of the problem caused by pest animals more widely helps to maximise the impact of individual efforts.



Ecological principle: threatened ecosystems and species

Protect threatened species and their habitats as well as threatened ecosystems from further decline.

The ecological principle of protecting **threatened ecosystems** and species applies across all landholdings. The primary focus is on retaining and encouraging existing native vegetation and animals across the municipality (**see Action sheet 2**).

Ecological principle: ecology of modified landscapes

High disturbance activities adjacent to remnant vegetation will impact upon the health and function of the remnant.

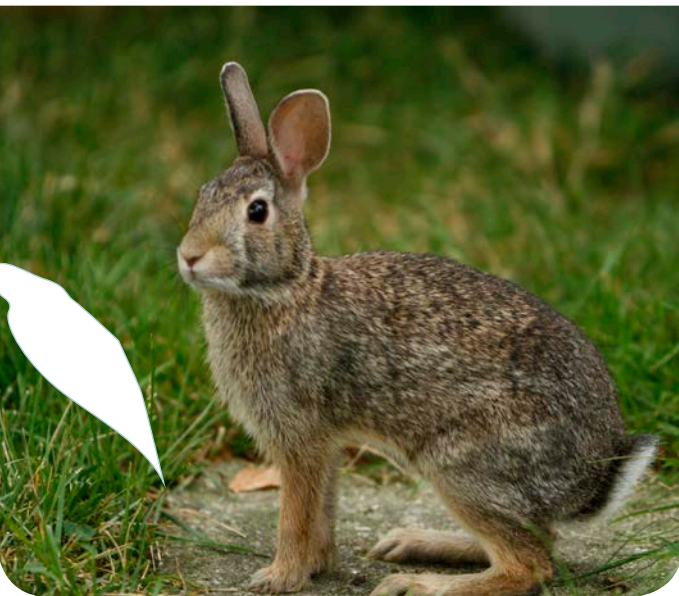
Active management of native flora and fauna has two aspects: encouraging the indigenous species we want to preserve, and discouraging those that make their survival more difficult. The ecological principle relating to **Ecology of modified landscapes** directs attention to the damage done to patches of native vegetation by pest animals. They seriously threaten biodiversity because they change and destroy habitats and ecosystems, and the disturbance they create encourages the spread of weeds (**Action sheet 6**).

Goals for habitat management

Goal 1
PROTECT

Goal 2
ENHANCE

Goal 3
RESTORE



Indian Mynahs are known to displace native birds, killing their nestlings, eggs and stopping the breeding patterns of native birds.



The stress placed on native animals by loss of habitat is made worse by predation (being hunted, e.g. by cats and foxes) and through competition for food and shelter.

These are some of the worst pests in the Yarra Ranges municipality.

Small predators The greatest damage to wildlife is caused by **cats and foxes**. Livestock is at greatest risk from **wild dogs**, which attack sheep and calves. A well fed but uncontrolled pet cat can kill 25 animals each year, on average, just through instinctive hunting. Feral cats kill to eat, and in Victoria collectively they consume more than 70 million birds, frogs, lizards and other creatures every year.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment calculates that there are nearly 1 million cats in Victoria, of which some 300,000 are strays in urban areas and approximately 200,000 are feral. Cats reduce wildlife populations by hunting and passing on diseases (cats carry Toxoplasmosis and have a bacteria-loaded bite that can also kill). Foxes are a significant threat to a range of native species because they have not co-evolved with each other and the native species have no effective defence or avoidance behavior for dealing with fox predation. Foxes will also feed on agricultural animals such as sheep (specifically young or new born lambs) and poultry.

They can also spread weeds such as blackberry by using them as a food source and then depositing the seeds elsewhere.

Deer Deer can cause problems for landowners as well as having a detrimental effect on conservation values by trampling delicate vegetation patches and destroying new growth by grazing.

Rabbits One of Australia's most destructive and troublesome pests, causing degradation of large areas of agricultural land and conservation areas. Rabbits compete with stock and wildlife for food, destroy vegetation, and modify soil structure in ways that can lead to erosion. The impact of these pests on the landscape affects agriculture as well as wildlife. (See 'Rabbits and their impact' on the Department of Sustainability and Environment's website.)

Birds Native birds have evolved in our landscape so that a stable, cooperative ecology can be sustained. Non-native birds such as the **Indian mynah** out-breed native birds and compete aggressively for nesting sites and food, starving out the local birds.



What you can do

Be aware of the problem. Don't encourage pest animals by feeding. Take responsibility for your own pet animals and farm animals, and don't permit them to stray. Manage pests using recommended control programs.

Actions

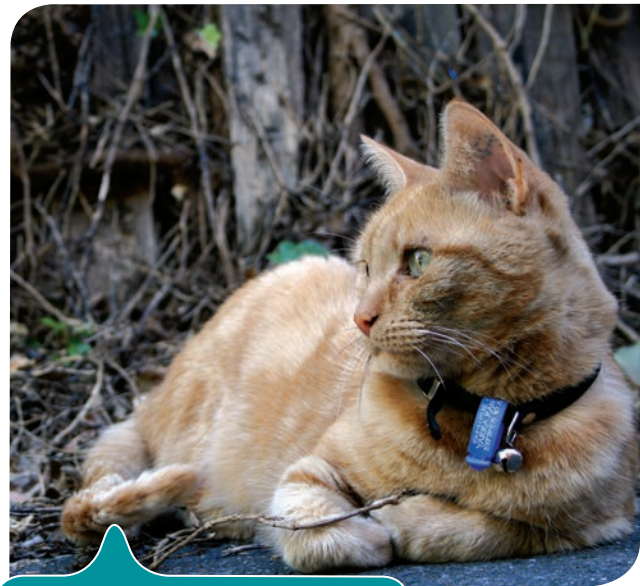
- If you are considering fencing, exclusion fences for cats and foxes should be at least 1800 mm high and have an overhang extending 600 mm to prevent animals climbing over. Electric wires are unnecessary.
- Weeds can harbour rabbits and foxes and should be controlled (**see Action sheets 7**).
- If you have a cat or dog, register it, desex it if it's not part of a breeding program and ensure it doesn't wander.
- Did you know Yarra Ranges has a cat curfew? Under the curfew, cat owners are required to keep their animals inside or in an enclosure, between the hours of 8 pm and 6 am, in an effort to prevent native wildlife, including possums and birds, from being attacked by cats.
- Larger-scale landholdings should plan their control activities through a sustained management program similar to the actions taken by Council on the land it is responsible for.

What Council will do

Council will provide educational materials, general and technical advice on how to control pests, and contact details for contractors who can help residents control pest animals.

Council owns and controls some 600 parcels of land and manages road reserves. On this land Council will:

- Take a landscape-wide approach to larger areas beyond the scale of single properties
- Systematically tackle priority areas and focus on the key threats
- Conduct targeted pest control programs
- Act to achieve community co-operation
- Coordinate cross-land management programs with private landowners.



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