



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Feral Cats

Introduction

Feral cats were declared a pest animal in Western Australia on 14th of June 2019 under section 22(2) of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (BAM Act). This provides a mechanism which allows the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) to manage feral cats on DBCA reserves and in high priority ecological assets for the protection of threatened native animals.

It will also enable other government agencies, Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBG) and Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups, alongside community groups and land managers to minimise the impact of feral cats on native fauna.

In Western Australia there are 36 mammals, 22 birds, and 11 species that have been identified as vulnerable to feral cats, but a wide range of other native animals are also adversely affected. Even native carnivores such as the chuditch are vulnerable to feral cats—they prey upon them when they are young, and compete with adult chuditches for food sources.

Feral cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 27 mammal species Australia wide, and currently endanger 147 other Australian mammals, bird, reptiles and frogs. They have been rated as an extreme threat category for Australian wildlife. In addition, they transmit toxoplasmosis to humans, domestic stock and wildlife.

Cats in Australia are all the same species, *Felis catus*. However cats are grouped nationally into three categories: Feral, stray and domestic. These categories are not necessarily discrete, with a cat potentially moving from domestic to stray, and then stray to feral, or visa versa. Generally though feral cats have experienced no socialisation with humans for several generations. It is important to note that only FERAL cats are declared in WA.

The categories are distinguished by location, behaviour and dependence on humans.

Categories of Cats in WA

Domestic cats: fully socialised, may be owned by an individual, household, business or corporation. Most or all of their needs are supplied by their owner. Sometimes they may sleep outside or wander. They are required to be microchipped and registered under the Cat Act. They are dependent upon their owners for care food and shelter.

Stray cats: found in and around towns, cities and rural properties. Live in the wild as they have become lost or abandoned. Now fend for themselves. May depend on some things provided by humans, but are not owned or registered under the Cat Act. They may be the offspring of pet cats but haven't socialised with people. May scavenge food and shelter under houses, but their interactions with people tend to be temporary and casual.

Feral cats: live and reproduce in the wild and survive by hunting or scavenging. Found all over WA in all types of habitats, such as forests, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and arid areas. They are not microchipped or registered with a local authority under the Cat Act. They are independent of people, and are unlikely to ever display socialised behaviour or be willingly in the presence of humans. Feral cats are predominantly solitary and nocturnal. They spend most of the ay in the safety of shelters such as burrows of made by other animals, hollow logs or rockpiles. They are carnivores, eating small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects.



Controlling Feral Cats

A combination of techniques may be required to manage feral cats, as they are usually found in low densities over large home ranges, with the additional challenge of being cautious and suspicious.

Under the Animal Welfare Act (2002) control of feral cats must be undertaken in a manner considered usual and reasonable for killing a cat, and all reasonable care must be taken to ensure that no other animals are harmed. Even though they are a declared pest it is still an OFFENCE to be cruel or cause feral cats unnecessary harm. Techniques that are considered acceptable for the control of feral cats include:

1. Exclusion Fencing: used to protect areas of high conservation value. Allows the eradication within of pest animals. Excludes other animals. A high cost control method. Poses little risk to domestic cats.
2. Baiting: the WA State Government developed Eradicat, which uses the toxin 1080. It is not available to the public. It is used to control feral cats by DBCA. Theoretically can pose danger to domestic cats, but they should not be in the areas where Eradicat are being used (DBCA managed lands).
3. Trapping: use of cage or box traps. Not so useful for broadscale management, but can be effective in capturing individual feral cats. Also, if captured, non-target species are usually able to be released without injury.
4. Shooting: a labour intensive form of management. Not effective for broadscale management of feral cats. Can be effective in managing individual or localised cat numbers in the short term. Does pose a risk to domestic cats not wearing a collar. All firearms must comply with relevant legislation and regulations. The most humane shot is considered to be to the head. Shooting should only be carried out by licenced and qualified shooters.

More information on feral cats can be found on the Pest Smart website at: <https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/feral-cat/>



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