

Invasive pest animals

Invasive animals are a major threat to biodiversity and agriculture. They can cause long-term damage to ecosystems and have resulted in dramatic extinction rates of species across Australia.

This factsheet provides an overview of the responsibilities and importance for property owners to manage invasive animals. It outlines important control principles that will save you money and time.

What are invasive pest animals?

Invasive pest animals are non-native species that threaten our ecosystems or agriculture, and are, or have the potential to become established in the environment. Their introduction is through deliberate or accidental release, escape from captivity, and accidental or illegal importation. Foxes, rabbits, cats, deer, and wild dogs are the most common invasive species in the Mount Alexander region.

Why are they an issue?

The problems caused by invasive animals vary and include:

- competing with native wildlife for food and habitat
- preying on wildlife and stock
- intensifying grazing pressure on pastures, crops and native plants
- spreading weeds
- significant erosion and waterway damage
- directly or indirectly damaging human life.

Why manage invasive animals?

Invasive animals prey on native wildlife and displace native animals by competing for shelter, nest sites, food and water resources.



*Rabbits can remove all vegetation if not controlled
Credit: Rabbit Free Australia (RFA)*

Invasive animals cause agricultural losses through predation on livestock, grazing pressure on crops and pastures, spreading weeds and contributing to erosion. Management measures can be expensive and divert resources away from agricultural production.

Legal responsibility on your land

The *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP) defines which animals are declared as pest animals in Victoria.

Established pest animals such as foxes, rabbits, deer, feral dogs and feral cats, are established in the wild in Victoria and are a serious threat to agriculture, the environment or community health in Victoria. Landowners have a responsibility to take all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, these animals on their land.

Restricted pest animals are not established in the wild in Victoria, however they are, or have the potential to become a serious threat. The importation, keeping, breeding and trading of these animals without a permit is illegal and penalties apply.

Management Principles

The most effective way to control invasive animals is by using a variety of different techniques. This is called *integrated management*.

Before commencing a management program, talk with your neighbours to coordinate your control measures to achieve better results. Best practice is to form a detailed integrated management plan that encompasses:

- **Monitoring** allows you to determine areas of invasive animal activity, animal density, provides baseline data
- **Implementation** control measures you can use at various stages of the species' lifecycle
- **Prevention** control measures you can use to prevent impacts and/or re-invasion
- **Evaluation and follow-up** look at whether management actions have worked, what can be changed to make it more effective, what follow up is required.

Common invasive pest animals

Foxes and rabbits are two of the more common invasive animals you may see on your property.

Rabbit facts

- Rabbits are territorial. Adventurous rabbits feed further from the warren; shy rabbits feed closer to the warren.
- Rabbits are prolific breeders. Two rabbits can breed to over 180 rabbits in just 18 months under ideal conditions.
- Rabbits are stimulated to breed by the presence of green growth. They will strip paddocks to dust as numbers increase.
- Survival of young is substantially increased when rabbits have safe harbour, especially breeding burrows and warrens.
- The destruction of warrens (made up of burrows) is the key to achieving long-term rabbit control.

Rabbit control options

There are many options for controlling rabbits, and usually an integrated approach involving multiple methods concurrently is most effective. However, many techniques require specialist contractors and equipment. We find that an effective way for landholders to get started on their own is to use Pindone oats with bait stations as part of their plan. Pindone is used as a safer alternative to sodium fluoroacetate (1080) and can be improved further by using well designed bait stations (see Connecting Country's website for a video on bait station construction).

The order in which control measures are implemented as part of your integrated management plan is important to maximise effectiveness:

1. Allow biological control/natural mortality to reduce numbers. You will need to use monitoring methods (such as spotlight counting) to monitor numbers.
2. Use a bait station to reduce numbers prior to warren ripping if numbers are still high. Baiting can only be conducted in certain landscapes.



Warren ripping is effective in the long-term. Credit: RFA

3. Remove harbour (e.g., thickets of gorse or blackberry) and destroy warrens (i.e. ripping with machinery).
4. Follow up with fumigation and further warren destruction of any missed burrows.
5. Be persistent, remain vigilant and monitor regularly.

Fox facts

- Working with neighbours to conduct works over the same season ensures your efforts have maximum impact.
- Fox densities are higher in urban areas than rural areas.
- Foxes are very mobile and can travel up to 10km per night.
- Fox populations are resilient to conventional methods of control. Rapid re-invasion of areas often occurs after control measures are implemented.

Fox control options

The following control measures may be suitable for foxes on your property:

- harbour removal (e.g. thickets of gorse and blackberry)
- den fumigation and ripping
- property hygiene (e.g. avoid leaving out easily accessible food sources)
- exclusion fencing
- guardian animals
- shooting (only in rural areas)
- 1080 baiting (only in rural areas)

See the [Agriculture Victoria](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au) website for control method details for all established invasive animals.

Monitoring

Monitoring populations of invasive animals will enable you to evaluate success or otherwise of your management actions and to identify when further action is required. The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and Feral Scan apps are useful tools to access and share local information on invasive animal sightings and populations.

More information

Note: this factsheet is modified from content from the Agriculture Victoria website and Rabbit Free Australia.

There an enormous amount of literature, brochures, factsheets and information about most of the invasive species across the Mount Alexander region and how to manage them. For further information please call us on (03) 5472 1594 or visit the weed control section on our website: www.connectingcountry.org.au.