



INVASIVE SPECIES

Australia has become home to many introduced plants and animals. Some of these have become invasive species. These are sometimes known as feral animals and weeds. Some were deliberately brought in - like farmed sheep and cattle, but others arrived accidentally or escaped into the wild. Because they didn't have any natural predators or diseases their populations grew out of control!

Weeds and ferals on the loose!

Invasive species have had devastating effects on our soil, native vegetation or wildlife. Feral animals like cats and foxes hunt and kill numerous native birds, mammals, reptiles and insects. They also compete with native animals for space, food and shelter. Weeds change the natural balance by smothering native plants or preventing them from growing back after clearing, fire or other disturbance.

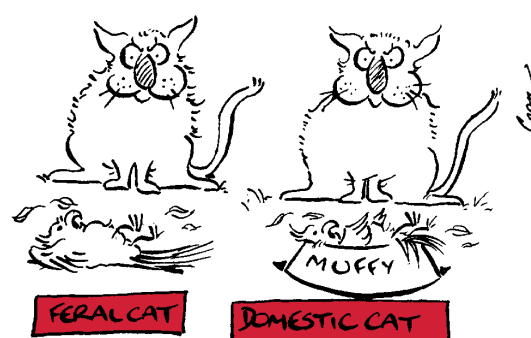
Native animals are put under increasing pressure when the native plants that are used for shelter, food and nesting are replaced by weeds. Lantana, found in many back yards, is a major threat to many species, including plants such as the endangered Hairy Quandong.

Introduced predators such as foxes and cats are a major factor in the disappearance of native animals such as the numbat from areas where they were originally found.

It is important to remember that not all introduced species become invasive - crops such as wheat are not invasive and are also economically important to Australia. Sometimes native species can become invasive too. If introduced where they don't belong they can grow out of control. Cootamundra wattle has become a problem in many regions, as has the Yabbie in parts of Tasmania where it did not originally occur.

It's not easy to stop the actions of invasive species, and years of careful planning and research are needed to do the job properly. Although there are control methods - like trapping, shooting, and poisoning for invasive animals, and weeding and spraying for invasive plants - they must be applied without further harming our native wildlife.

Some invasive species that are currently harming Australia's native plants and animals are:



RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

Australia's enormous rabbit population started from just over 20 rabbits released into the wild in Victoria in 1859. After 50 years they had spread as far as Queensland and Central Australia and by the 1950s they were in huge plague proportions. Rabbits are one of the most destructive feral animals in Australia.

Rabbits erode the soil by digging their burrows and eating lots of native vegetation that is usually food and shelter for native animals. Scientists have been able to introduce diseases such as myxomatosis and calicivirus to control rabbit populations. In many areas, the drop in rabbit numbers has allowed the recovery of native vegetation.

FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Foxes are another case where a few animals released in the wild quickly multiplied. It took less than 50 years for foxes to spread from Victoria into Western Australia! Foxes are very clever predators, surviving in many different kinds of habitat from the Snowy Mountains to the central deserts and even suburbia. Their fierce attacks on native animals have helped bring several small, native mammals close to extinction.

CAT (*Felis catus*)

The domestic cat is a lovely and affectionate pet - if it is well cared for and responsibly looked after. But the feral moggy is a completely different creature! Much larger, stronger and aggressive than a domestic cat, the feral cat is a marvellously efficient predator that definitely is NOT a pet! You don't need many feral cats to cause significant damage to native wildlife - just one animal was responsible for reducing an isolated colony of rock wallabies in tropical Queensland!

MOSQUITO FISH

(*Gambusia holbrooki*)

You might think that our creeks and streams are free of feral animals. But look closely and you might see a different story! Mosquito fish are tiny fish native to the USA. They were deliberately introduced to help control mosquito larvae in the ponds and streams of Sydney. But they soon spread throughout the waterways of southeastern Australia. Why have they spread so easily? One reason is that mosquito fish compete very aggressively with native fish for insect prey. In many streams, mosquito fish greatly outnumber the native fish.

WEEDS - The Bush Invaders

Weeds not only are a problem for our gardens and pastures - they also invade our bushland. Australia has no shortage of weeds. About 11 per cent of our 18,000 species of wild plants were introduced from other countries. Controlling all these weeds costs billions of dollars. But where do these bush invaders come from, and how do they get into our bush? What can you do about it?

Sadly, many bush invaders started as common garden plants. For example, Lantana, Bridal Creeper and Scotch Broom - all very serious bushland weeds - are popular garden plants which are still being planted in gardens today!

Some garden plants can naturally spread into bushland, producing thousands of seeds which are scattered far and wide by animals, wind or rain. For instance, the red berries produced by *Cotoneaster* bushes are eaten by birds. The seeds are passed in bird droppings, sometimes kilometres away from the parent bush.

Other plants get human help to invade. When garden waste is illegally dumped into the bush cuttings may grow and spread. Two examples of these types of weeds are ivy and blue periwinkle.



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What can you do?

- **Become a responsible pet owner. Is your pet dog or cat desexed and properly cared for? Learn what you can do to minimise any damage pets do to native wildlife. Remember, a pet is for life - think very carefully before you get a pet, and NEVER let them loose in the bush.**
- **Become a volunteer with your local Bushcare, Landcare or Friends group. Help to replace the invasive plants with native plants and repair any damage to the habitat caused by invasive animals.**
- **Learn which garden plants are serious weeds. If you visit your local nursery, ask for a list of garden thugs and alternative species, and make sure no bush invaders are planted in the garden.**
- **Take a trip out to the tip with Mum and Dad - garden waste should not go into the bush. Also make sure that garden waste is properly covered on the trip out to the tip - otherwise weeds might escape from the back of the trailer.**

For more information contact Environment Australia at:

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