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| Feral Cats |
| Information Sheet |

Feral cat (*Felis catus*)

## What is a feral cat?

The feral cat is the feral or wild population of the cat (*Felis catus*). Feral cats are unowned and live completely independently of humans with respect to food and shelter and without veterinary care. Feral cats survive and reproduce in self-perpetuating populations in the wild.

Feral cats are considered different to stray or semi-owned cats, which partly rely on humans for food and shelter (whether it is provided intentionally or not).

## How is a feral cat different to a domestic cat?

Domestic cats are owned and their care and needs are met by their owner. The government recognises that domestic cats are important companion animals for many Victorians and that responsible cat ownership brings many benefits. Ownership of domestic cats is unaffected by the feral cat declaration.

* 1. **What is the distribution of feral cats?**

Feral cats are widespread and can be found in all terrestrial habitats in Victoria. It is thought that there are up to 5.6 million feral cats in Australia[[1]](#endnote-1).

## What is the impact of feral cats on biodiversity?

In Victoria, feral cats have a significant impact on the state’s biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

Predation by feral cats is one of the most significant threats to the survival of Victoria’s at-risk native wildlife. 43 *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act) listed threatened species are at increased risk of extinction as a direct result of feral cats. Predation of native wildlife by cats is listed as a potentially threatening process under the FFG Act.

It is estimated that feral cats in Australia’s natural environments kill 466 million reptiles[[2]](#endnote-2) and 272 million birds[[3]](#endnote-3) every year.

**What are the other impacts of feral cats?**

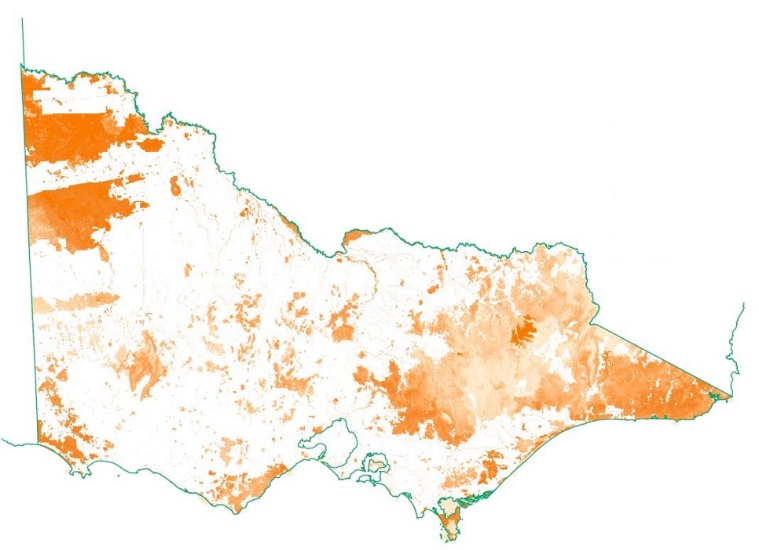
Feral cats have other ecological impacts on native wildlife aside from predation. The presence of feral cats in an ecosystem can lead to increased competition for food and habitat. This can lead to behaviour change in native species, putting them at increased risk from a range of threats.

Feral cats also carry and spread disease which can be transmitted to and affect other animals, including livestock and humans. One such disease is toxoplasmosis, which can cause a range of health issues, and can affect survival rates of offspring in infected livestock.

## What are the priority areas for feral cat control?

Strategic Management Prospects (SMP) is a conservation planning tool developed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to help biodiversity managers prioritise effort by identifying areas and actions with the greatest benefit to biodiversity. SMP has been used to identify the areas of Victoria where biodiversity would most benefit from feral cat control. Figure 1 illustrates that most of the Crown land estate, would benefit from feral cat management.

Further information on SMP can be found on the [DELWP website](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/natureprint).

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**Figure 1**: *The relative biodiversity benefit per unit cost of feral cat control on Crown land as identified by the Strategic Management Prospects project. Darker orange areas represent greater biodiversity benefit.*

*Credit: DELWP Strategic Management Prospects 2018*

## Declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal in Victoria

The Victorian Government has declared the feral cat as an established pest animal on specified Crown land under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.* This will enable Crown land managers to more effectively control feral cats on specified Crown land giving at-risk wildlife and threatened species the best chance of survival.

The feral cat declaration is part of a national commitment to the management of feral cats and is a very important milestone in the protection of Victoria’s biodiversity.

**Some critically endangered Victorian species we are protecting by managing feral cats**



**Figure 2:** *Clockwise from top left: Mountain-pygmy Possum,* *Plains Wanderer, Helmeted Honeyeater.*

*Credit: Zoos Victoria*

## Further Information

For further information on the management of feral cats, including the declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal in Victoria please visit the [DELWP website](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/invasive-plants-and-animals/feral-cats).

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1. Legge, S. *et al.* (2017). Enumerating a continental-scale threat: how many feral cats are in Australia? *Biological Conservation*, 206, pp.293-303. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Woinarski, J. C. Z., *et al*. (2018). How many reptiles are killed by cats in Australia? *Wildlife Research*, 45, pp. 247-266. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Woinarski, J. C. Z., *et al.* (2017). How many birds are killed by cats in Australia? *Biological Conservation*, 214, pp. 76-87. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)