

Pest and weed management in NSW national parks

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Pictured above: Bitou bush on dunes near Shellharbour on the NSW south coast. Photo, A Swirepik/CSIRO

Foreword

Introduced pest animals and weeds are a national problem.

There are at least 30 species of pest animals around Australia, and more than 500 weed species. They are widespread and found on all land tenures – public and private.

Pest animals and weeds damage agriculture and harm our environment. Controlling them is a common area of concern for farmers and conservationists alike. For example, foxes and wild dogs prey on our native animals **and** birds and they cause stock losses for farmers.

For these reasons, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), now a part of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), has massively increased funding for control programs in our national parks. For example, between 1994 and 2005, expenditure to better control pest animals and weeds has increased from \$1 million to \$18 million. High levels of funding will be continued in the coming years.

- What kinds of pest animals and weeds are found in our national parks?
- What damage do they do?
- How did they get there?
- What is the National Parks and Wildlife Service doing about it?
- How successful are we?
- What does the future hold?

Q What kinds of pest animals and weeds are found in our national parks?

Australia has at least 30 species of introduced animals that are considered to be pests, with fewer than a third of these found in NSW. Foxes, wild dogs, pigs, rabbits, goats and cats occur across the state, while deer, horses and cattle are found in only a handful of national parks.

There are also more than 500 weed species across all land tenures in NSW. Some of the most invasive are bitou bush, lantana, blackberry, privet and St John's wort.

Q What damage do they do?

Pest animals and weeds damage both our agricultural industries and the environment. They cost the Australian economy around \$5 billion every year.

They damage native ecosystems, heavily reduce biodiversity and have contributed to the extinction of numerous native plants and animals. Introduced species can also carry diseases harmful to humans, wildlife and livestock. Some feral animals – especially wild dogs and foxes – also attack and kill sheep and cattle, threatening farmers' livelihoods.

Q How did they get there?

Australia's introduced plants and animals date from the very first days of European settlement in the late 1700s. Ever since, they have been brought from other countries and released into the Australian environment, sometimes with the best of intentions, sometimes not.

Pest animals and weeds like foxes, bitou bush, blackberry, rabbits, pigs, cane toads and goats and countless other pest animals and weeds **all** came from other countries.

And when our first national parks were formally created in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the pest animals and weeds were already well established. Those who say our national parks breed pest animals are wrong.

Unthinking people are still illegally dumping thousands of unwanted cats and dogs in the bush every year. Many of them end up in our national parks. Pig shooters illegally hunting in parks sometimes intentionally release dogs or pigs. What they don't care about is what happens next. After just a few years in

the wild, these released animals become **feral** cats, **wild** dogs and **feral** pigs – killing our wildlife and savaging livestock on neighbouring farms.

Q What is the National Parks and Wildlife Service doing about it?

Since 1994, the area of national park has grown by 60% to nearly 6.5 million hectares. Over the same time, funding for pest and weed control programs has grown by a massive 1700%, and now stands at a record \$18 million. This is being used to run about 1500 individual and targeted control programs in NSW national parks. To name just a few, programs are in place to fight:

- wild dogs in southern NSW and the Northern Tablelands
- foxes in Sydney's suburbs, the Blue Mountains, coastal areas and western NSW
- bitou bush along our coastline
- blackberry in Kosciuszko
- feral pigs, rabbits and goats in western NSW and tableland areas
- deer in Sydney's southern national parks and the Illawarra.

We also work closely with park neighbours, the Department of Primary Industries, local councils, rural lands protection boards and regional pest advisory committees to coordinate programs. And whenever a new national park is created, new plans to fight pest animals and weeds are put in place.

CASE STUDIES

Oolambeyan National Park

Whenever a **new** national park is created, **new** programs to fight pest animals and weeds are put in place.

For example, the new Oolambeyan National Park, south-east of Hay, was once a famous merino stud. The historic homestead overlooks the surrounding woodlands and open grassland plains. The grasslands are home to threatened birds such as the bush stone curlew, superb parrot and plains-wanderer.

Following its declaration as a national park in 2002, 4000 rabbit warrens were ripped up. Poison baits were laid to kill rabbits and foxes, and the large boxthorn bushes were destroyed.

Foxes

Foxes were first introduced into Victoria in 1871. They had reached NSW by 1893, WA by 1911 and are now widely distributed across Australia. At least 54 Australian bird and animal species have become extinct in Australia since 1788, and foxes are one of the main contributors. They continue to threaten many native species with extinction.

Plans are in place to help control foxes across all land tenures, including national parks. Intensive baiting in western NSW parks has seen populations of the endangered yellow-footed rock wallaby and malleefowl begin to recover. Fox control is also helping ensure the survival of the endangered little tern, pied oystercatcher

Q How successful are we?

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is running 1,500 pest animal and weed control programs involving up to 1,000 staff. These programs are working and, as a result, pest animal and weed problems are often less serious in national parks than they are across most other land in NSW.

The *NSW State of the Parks 2004* report also found that in more than 90% of parks across NSW, the problems caused by pest animals and weeds were either being reduced or were unchanged. In less than 10% of parks, problems were getting worse and this is where more resources will be allocated in the future.

Q What does the future hold?

By working cooperatively with other organisations and stakeholders, NPWS will be able to achieve wider-reaching and longer-lasting reductions in pest animal and weed populations. Largely through NPWS's close working relationship with the new Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IACRC) and the CRC for Australian Weed Management, much innovative work is being undertaken to develop smarter, more effective ways to fight pest animals and weeds. In December 2004, new resources were provided to the IACRC to fund research aimed at developing more effective control techniques that will complement the

Pictured top right: A wild dog in Wollemi National Park, photographed during DEC fauna surveys in 2005. Photo, H Achurch/DEC

Pictured bottom right: Bitou bush in flower. Photo, S Ruming



and brush-tailed rock wallaby. Even the endangered southern brown bandicoot and lyrebirds have returned to the northern suburbs of Sydney.

Wild dogs

When a domestic dog escapes into the bush or a pig dog is illegally let loose by a pig hunter, they become wild dogs. Often breeding with native dingoes, they are now found in many parts of NSW, especially southern NSW and the Northern Tablelands. They have major impacts on our important sheep and wool industry.

NPWS works with other government agencies and landholders to implement wild dog management plans.

These include lethal 1080 ground- and aerial-baiting programs (both inside and outside national parks), and extensive trapping and shooting.

There are early and encouraging signs of success. For example, employing more trappers and expanding baiting in the Brindabella–Wee Jasper area in southern NSW has reduced the loss of sheep by 75%. Aerial baiting in the Adaminaby–Yaouk area is also helping to reduce sheep losses. In some areas around Glen Innes stock losses are reported to have dropped 65%.

more traditional techniques as shooting, trapping and baiting pest animals. For example:

- Special chemical lures are being used to attract foxes and wild dogs to lethal 1080 baits, increasing the effectiveness of baiting programs.
- Trials are underway to develop baits targeting feral cats and feral pigs, leaving native wildlife unharmed.
- New strains of a biological control agent are being trialled in Kosciuszko National Park to better control the scourge of alpine reserves, blackberry.
- Certain species of insect are being released that target bitou bush, which will greatly assist in the battle to eradicate this invasive coastal weed.
- Work is being undertaken to develop an effective trapping system for Indian myna birds in city areas.



Pictured top right: Broom control alongside the Snowy River in Kosciuszko National Park in 2004. Photo, D Hipwell/DEC
Picture bottom right: Photo, G Robertson/DEC

CASE STUDY

Bitou bush

In 1908, bitou bush was introduced from South Africa to stabilise mined sand dunes. It's now invaded 900 kilometres of our coast and is considered one of the greatest threats to coastal national parks.

NPWS has put in place new plans, such as the draft Bitou Threat Abatement Plan, to help control this weed, up and down the NSW coast. NPWS staff have developed strong partnerships with volunteer groups such as Dunecare and Coastcare. A combination of aerial and ground spraying of

herbicides, biocontrol, hand removal, slashing and burning will, over time, have a positive impact. For example, many years of control in Crowdy Bay National Park has almost eradicated bitou bush from a headland, allowing native plant communities to re-establish.

New programs in dozens of new locations will now be put in place to effectively manage this weed.

For more information on pest animal and weed control in NSW national parks, please visit our website at www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au or contact DEC's Environment Line on 1300 361 967, 8.30 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday.

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