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# Feral cat research



## Feral cats kill millions of native animals every night

and are found across Australia. At this point in time, there is no effective mechanism for eradicating cats at a landscape level.


However, AWC is at the forefront of efforts to reduce the impact of cats. **We are conducting the largest feral cat research program in Australia's history.**

## Feral cat crisis

Feral cats occur right across the continent in every

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habitat type including deserts, forests and grasslands. While they appear to prefer small mammals, they also eat birds, reptiles and amphibians.

Each feral cat kills between 5-30 animals per day.



A conservative estimate puts the total population of feral cats at approximately 4 million. This means feral cats are killing millions of native animals killed per day.

Unfortunately, techniques such as baiting, trapping and shooting - which allow islands and fenced areas to be laboriously cleared of feral cats - are not currently effective at a landscape scale. Cats are difficult to locate and extremely wary, which makes trapping and shooting resource-intensive and impracticable. In addition, the removal of cats from one area is offset by immigration from adjacent areas. Baiting is also currently limited in effectiveness (cats do not readily take bait as they are live prey specialists; and baiting can have a significant impact on native species). Finally, the introduction of diseases (biological control) does not represent a viable option at this stage: for example, many of the diseases are already in the wild cat population

The only successful feral cat



eradication programs in Australia have been carried out on islands or within mainland areas surrounded by a

feral-proof fence. Given that the complete eradication of cats at a landscape level is not currently feasible, AWC has developed a practical strategy designed to minimise their impacts and facilitate the development of a long-term solution.

## AWC's feral cat control strategies

- We protect ground cover by **controlling feral herbivores and delivering effective fire management** – this limits the impact of feral cats by ensuring native animals have more cover and easier access to food.
- We **protect dingo populations** because dingoes influence the behaviour of feral cats by harassing and sometimes killing them.
- We manage more **feral cat and fox-free areas** on mainland Australia than any other organisation:
  - [Scotia](#), in western NSW, contains a feral predator-free area of 8,000 hectares. This is the largest fox and cat-free area on mainland Australia.
  - [Yookamurra](#), in South Australia, is 1,100 hectares.
  - [Karakamia](#), in Western Australia, is 250 hectares.
  - [Mt Gibson](#) in Western Australia, is 7,800 hectares.
  - [Newhaven](#) (under construction) in the Northern Territory will contain a feral predator-free area of 65,000 hectares. This will be the planet's largest feral eradication project.
- We are undertaking **Australia's largest feral cat research program** in an attempt to unlock the secret to eradicating feral cats.

## Research

In order to reduce the impacts of cats, we need to know more about them – about



their ecology and behaviour and about the way they interact with fire and feral herbivores. Our cat research has a very practical focus. It is designed to inform the development of land management strategies that reduce the impact of cats on our wildlife as well as inform the development of a long-term solution which will enable the control (and ideally the eradication) of feral cats.

Our research is focused at



Mornington and Marion Downs in the Kimberley, where nearly 50 feral cats have been collared with GPS tracking devices, some for almost two years, as part of a PhD undertaken by Hugh McGregor. No research program in Australia has ever radio-collared this many cats. The tracking is providing an in-depth understanding of their ecology and impacts. AWC expanded this ground-breaking research in 2015 to Piccaninny Plains on Cape York Peninsula and collared a further 17 feral cats.

Reports on the research can be found here:

[Landscape Management of Fire and Grazing Regimes](#)

[Alters the Fine-Scale Habitat Utilisation by Feral Cats](#)

Hugh W. McGregor , Sarah Legge, Menna E. Jones,

[Extraterritorial hunting expeditions to intense fire scars  
by feral cats](#)

Hugh W. McGregor, Sarah Legge, Menna E. Jones &  
Christopher N. Johnson

The key to this research has been the ability to capture live cats in order to fit the radio-collar. AWC has specially-trained feral cat-detector dogs at Mornington - Sally, Brangul and Mullega. They have been trained to detect and follow the scent of a feral cat and, after locating the cat, chase it up a tree. Once the cat is up a tree, we use a dart rifle to deliver a small amount of sedative before catching the cat as it falls into a trampoline.

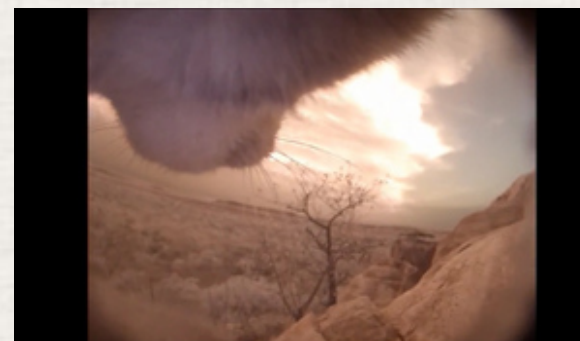
This research is part of an integrated AWC program which includes measuring cat densities (we have developed the largest and most advanced monitoring program to more accurately measure cat densities using camera traps to identify individuals), analysing cat diet, and examining the relationship between cats, feral herbivores and fire, as well as the role of other predators (dingoes and foxes).

## Related Field Updates



**Sanctuary Newhaven  
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**Australian Wildlife  
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**Sanctuary Mornington-Marion  
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2017

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Australia's surprise boon for

## **Hunting Cats**

"Australian Wildfires Provide Surprise Boon for Hunting Cats"  
- LiveScience.com, 17 May 2016

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AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

Phone: +61 8 9380 9633 | Fax: +61 8 9380 9631 | Email: [info@australianwildlife.org](mailto:info@australianwildlife.org)  
| PO Box 8070 Subiaco East Western Australia 6008

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