



► What are 'Mammalian Predators'?

'Mammalian Predators' is the reference given generally to introduced predators, most commonly recognised as Red Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Feral Cats (*Felis catus*)

► Does the Winton Wetlands Reserve have a problem with Mammalian Predators?

Due to its relative proximity to two community landfill sites and nearby stock piles of unused railway sleepers, (potential population sources for feral cats) the Winton Wetlands Reserve is currently home to populations of foxes and cats.

Problematic since their introduction to the Australian mainland, predation by feral cats and foxes has been implicated in the widespread decline and extinction of many native wildlife species. Foxes also have a significant impact on adjoining farmland, particularly during lambing season.

Characterised by thick ground vegetation, the Winton Wetlands can provide ideal habitat for both feral cats and foxes.

Through the development of a Mammalian Predator Management Plan, the Committee of Management aims to outline the most efficient and effective strategies to control feral cats and foxes at the Winton Wetlands in an effort to protect the sites native wildlife and assist to manage their impact on adjoining private land.

► What is the scope of the Mammalian Predator Management Plan?

The scope of the Mammalian Predator Management Plan was to outline the most efficient and effective strategies to control foxes and feral cats at Winton

Wetlands, including detailed recommendations on the optimal timing, intensity and duration of each strategy.

Recommendations were also sought on monitoring the effectiveness of the management efforts at reducing the abundance of foxes and cats at Winton Wetlands, and to determine the response of native wildlife populations to the predator control program.

The plan also examines options to reduce the impact of mammalian predators throughout the broader landscape beyond the Winton Wetlands.

► The draft Mammalian Predator Management Plan comprises five main sections, what are they?

Section 1: includes a brief overview of the ecology of foxes and cats as relevant to their control, summarises their impact in Australia, provides examples of successful management programs that have led to improved conservation outcomes and highlights the importance of a holistic approach to pest management.

Section 2: details the recommended management practices for mammalian predators at Winton Wetlands, feral cats and foxes are addressed separately, with practical instructions for control strategies provided for both species.

Section 3: covers methods for monitoring the abundance of foxes and feral cats at Winton Wetlands, while

Section 4: describes options for measuring the response of native wildlife to the predator control program.

Section 5: provides a brief conclusion.

Nb. Sections 2, 3 and 4 include management action plans listing key activities to be undertaken.

► **Why does the Mammalian Predator Management Plan consider both foxes and feral cats?**

It is important to appreciate that the impact of foxes and cats appears to be interactive. For example, researchers have shown that following reductions in fox populations, feral cats have increased in abundance and modified their habitat use and diet.

It is also important to consider the potential response of other interacting pest species that foxes and cats may incorporate in their diet. It has been shown that following reductions in fox abundance, rabbit populations may increase significantly. Similarly, rodent numbers may increase following a reduction in cat populations.

Monitoring and managing multiple pest species is inherently difficult, but a holistic approach to pest management has been identified as being vital at the Winton Wetlands ecosystem, given the number of pest species present and the complex relationships between these species.

► **What methods of control are being recommended for predator management?**

Foxes:

- In Victoria, foxes are declared as established pest animals under the Catchment and Land Protection Act (1994).
- Many techniques can be used to manage foxes in rural landscapes, including poison baiting, ground shooting, guard animals, trapping, den fumigation, exclusion fencing and battues. The most commonly used and effective techniques applicable are poison baiting, battues, den fumigation and trapping. Other techniques such as guard animals and exclusion fencing are considered impractical at the Winton Wetlands.

Feral cats:

Control of feral cats is more difficult with a limited number of techniques available.

- **Battues** (ground shooting) - Shooting is used widely in wildlife management and it is often employed in combination with trapping for feral cat management. The humaneness of ground shooting is almost entirely dependent on the skill and judgement of the shooter, and if it is conducted appropriately ground shooting is one of the most humane methods of destroying feral cats.

- **Trapping** - Other than ground shooting, trapping is the only other practical cat control method currently suitable for use at the Winton Wetlands. Although trapping cats is time and labour intensive it is one of the most commonly used techniques available, largely due to the lack of practical alternative techniques. Until such time as more efficient methods are available, cage trapping must form a major component of the cat control effort at Winton Wetlands. Trapping must be performed with cage traps, as the use of leg-hold traps for feral cats is not permitted in Victoria.

► **Upon implementation, what outcomes can we expect from the Mammalian Predator Management Plan?**

The methods outlined are currently considered the most appropriate means for controlling foxes and feral cats at the Winton Wetlands. By implementing each of these techniques in an integrated manner, the Winton Wetlands will be able to maximise the efficacy of predator control throughout the reserve and enhance the potential benefits to native wildlife. The intensity with which each control method is applied will ultimately depend on labour and/or resource constraints.

► **How and when will the Mammalian Predator Management Plan be implemented?**

Following public consultation and consideration of public comments by the Committee of Management, the Winton Wetlands will develop a program to implement action plans outlined on pages 23, 52, 64 and 83.

► **How will we know if the Mammalian Predator Management Plan is working?**

Monitoring is a vital component of any ongoing predator control program as it indicates whether the management efforts are working or require modification. There are two aspects of monitoring in pest control programs; 'operational monitoring' which includes measuring change in pest populations after management actions, and 'performance monitoring' (also known as 'outcome monitoring') which measures the effect of the management actions at protecting native biodiversity.

Monitoring fox and cat populations at the Winton Wetlands will inform future management decisions and help improve the effectiveness of predator control. In the absence of monitoring, the only information gained will be anecdotal which provides little value in demonstrating and/or justifying the value of a large-scale pest control program.

