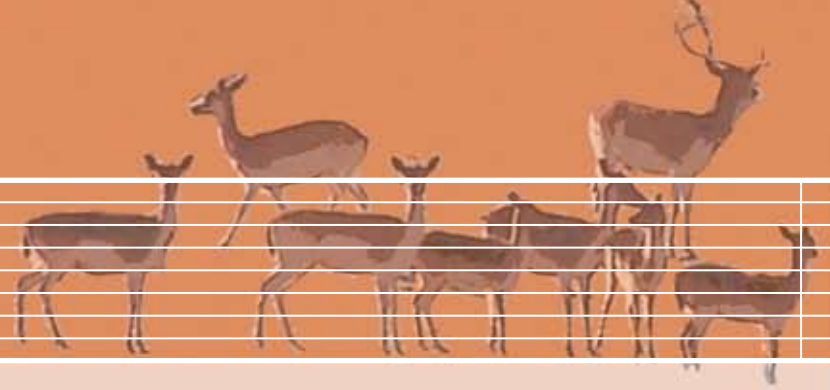
Molonglo Catchment Group

Pest Animal Fact Sheet



Deer

Impacts

The grazing habits and environmental degradation caused by deer are considered so severe that they have been listed as a key threatening process in NSW. A key threatening process is defined as something that "threatens or may threaten the survival, abundance or evolutionary development of a native species or ecological community" (DECC).

Deer will graze and browse young plants, disturb soil and damage the bark of trees by rubbing their antlers on tree trunks, particularly in autumn. Deer activity can impede natural and planned revegetation and can often result in the establishment of weeds. This occurs as a result of deer browsing young plants and damaging the ground cover with their hooves. Consequently the reduction in ground cover can often lead to a decline in soil stability, water quality, habitat for ground dwelling animals, foraging habitat and reduced biodiversity.

The average daily intake of one deer can be up to the equivalent of five sheep. Therefore grazing by deer also has a heavy impact on valuable grazing land where they compete with livestock for limited resources. Deer will also damage crops and can be a vector for weeds and diseases.

Distribution

Deer are found throughout Australia, except Western Australia and the Northern Territory, with NSW and the ACT having red, rusa, chital, hog, sambar and fallow deer in patchy locations of mainly open forest and grassy woodland.

Fallow deer are the most common species of deer in the catchment. A large population is known to exist in the Bungendore to Tarago vicinity. This population has been known to disperse into the Tallaganda National Park.

Occasional sightings of deer have been recorded throughout the catchment. Identifying the density of deer within the catchment is difficult due to their mobile and transitory nature. Sightings are most common in the southern portion of the catchment. A local herd of approximately 300 head have been reported in the Burra area.

Case Study

A local landholder from just outside the catchment near Kowen Forest is frustrated by the presence of fallow deer on his property. With numbers of deer ranging into the thousands on properties not far from the catchment boundaries, it was just a matter of time before they encroached on local landowners, and caused the scale of problems usually only attributed to pest animals such as rabbits. "I can see why deer are being labelled as the next major pest animal to cause destruction in Australia, it's pretty clear that we are going to have a major problem on our hands". In a recent attempt to rehabilitate a creek running through his property, he has undergone an extensive weed removal and native revegetation project, however the deer have eaten the tubestock and destabilised the river banks with their hooves, allowing for reinfestation from blackberries, willows and other weeds.

Brian Boyle,Invasive Animals CRC

Male deer

Description

There are six species of deer in Australia; fallow, red, hog, chital, rusa and sambar and they have been identified as the most important emerging pest animal threat in NSW. Most deer are nocturnal or semi-nocturnal, sheltering by day in forests or woodlands and emerging to graze from late afternoon to early morning in native grassland, improved pasture, crop or other agricultural land. Midday deer movements are not uncommon.

Deer can feed on a combination of shrub, understorey and grass species depending on availability and consume a wide variety of native plant species.

Red deer favour undulating grazing country interspersed with numerous water courses to steeply wooded hills; whilst sambar, rusa, chital and fallow prefer more open forest, woodland and grassland. Hog deer prefer coastal scrub, swampy woodland and river flats.

Fallow deer are the most common species in the Molonglo catchment and occur as solitary males or in herds of 30 or more, dominated by a single female.

Fallow deer are seasonal breeders, predominantly in April, with females breeding from approximately 16 months old. During breeding season bulls become territorial. Gestation period is 8-9 months with a single offspring produced; twins are known to occur but only rarely.

Courtesy Invasive Animals CRC

Wild deer at Jessie's Riding Academy, NSW

What can be done?

There are a number of options for deer control on your property. A good place to start is to contact your local Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA) or Parks, Conservation and Lands (PCL) branch. The LHPA or PCL can provide you with advice and assistance on control measures. It is important to undertake pest animal control in a humane manner, minimising pain and suffering to the animals involved whilst being aware of your legal obligations. Before conducting any control measures ensure you are aware of your legal obligations and any ethical issues by contacting the relevant authorities. When planning a control strategy, be sure to engage your neighbours as their assistance will be essential for success of any control program.

Control Methods:

- Shooting – target species specific. Effective in more open country and for the removal of small numbers. Too much harassment may prompt deer to relocate to a new site. Very attractive species to recreational hunters. Deer have 'game status' in NSW and as a result significant restrictions apply to hunting them, restrictions on hunting seasons and methods of hunting are enforced. For full details of restrictions applying to hunting deer visit www.gamecouncil.nsw.gov.au or contact the Game Council of NSW;
- Trapping – this can be successful in areas of limited water supply where the trap is set up around the water source or with the use of attractants. Long term effectiveness is uncertain as deer can become wary of traps. This can also be expensive to establish due to the size and standard of fence required. Traps need to be checked and cleared regularly;
- Fencing – expensive and time consuming, requiring regular maintenance to ensure protection. Typically used as protection for high value crops and ecosystems.

Poisoning deer is not approved in NSW due to low success rates and high risks of non target species damage. Consider a control program that tackles all your pest animal issues as the reduction in one species may lead to an increase presence of another. Pest animal control is also a part of controlling your weeds as these species often create the opportunity for weed establishment or act as a vector for the weeds. It may be useful to consult the Molonglo Catchment Group's weed information pack to identify the weeds pest species are bringing on to your land.

What YOU can do

The Molonglo Catchment Group is always interested to hear from you regarding any pest animal activity in your area. If possible, record the GPS coordinates of the location of a sighting. If this is not possible, a description of the location will suffice. Other than direct observations of deer some indications of their presence include:

- Droppings: Deer droppings can be easily confused with those of sheep and goats. They are single or clumps of rounded, oval or cylindrical pellets. They consist of fairly fine plant material and have a strong grassy odour when fresh. They are found where the animals have been moving and feeding.
- Tracks: Similar to sheep but are more elongated and parallel. If you are walking along a dirt road, keep an eye out as these areas are a great place to spot animal tracks.
- Foraging signs: This includes soil scuffing, bark rubbing and browsing damage to smaller plants.

Your help will enable the MCG to build up a picture of the distribution of this destructive species in our catchment.

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Livestock Health and Pest Authority
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Cooma Office: (02) 6452 1122
Braidwood Office: (02) 4842 2536
Web: www.LHPA.org.au/pest-control

Parks Conservation and Lands
Phone: 13 22 81

Game Council NSW
Phone: (02) 6360 5100
Web: www.gamecouncil.nsw.gov.au

Brian Boyle, Invasive Animals CRC

Buck and does

D Panther, courtesy Invasive Animals CRC

Male deer