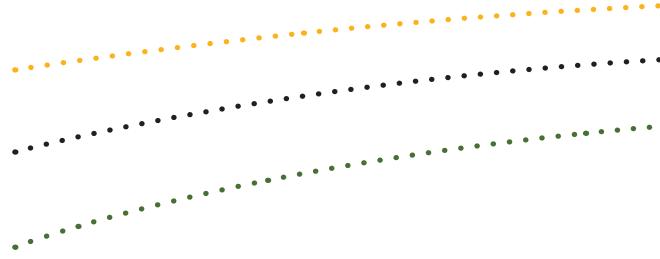




Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities



# FERAL DEER

Deer were introduced into Australia from Europe in the 19th century as game animals. Today, they occupy many areas throughout Australia and cause a variety of environmental problems. Current management techniques rely heavily on shooting and containment. However, as deer populations expand, new control methods may need to be investigated.

## History

Deer are indigenous to all continents except Australia and Antarctica. Originally introduced in the 19th century from Europe and Asia as game animals by European settlers, Australia is now home to six species of deer; fallow, red, chital, hog, rusa and sambar. While deer continue to be farmed for venison, the wild populations are causing significant environmental damage.

The number of wild deer populations has been expanding in recent years. In 1995, only four populations of red deer were known in Australia but by 2007, 65 red deer populations had been identified. Similar increases are occurring in other deer species populations. Deer populations now exist in many regions across Australia.

## Ecology

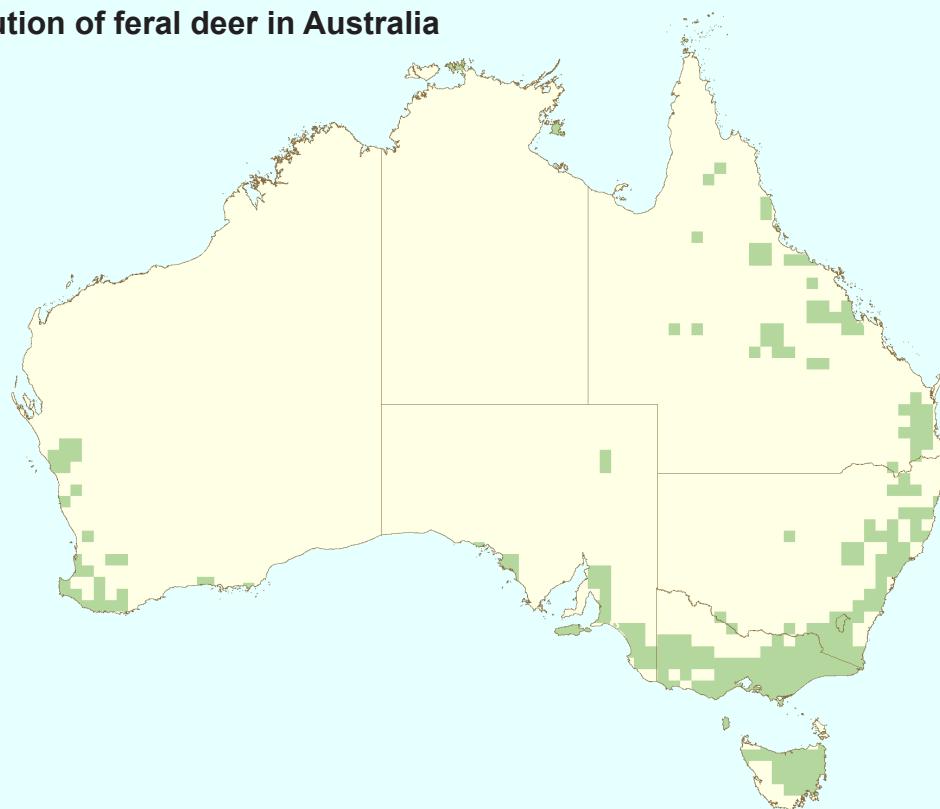
Deer live predominantly in grassy forests. The habitats they occupy in Australia include rainforests, eucalypt forests and farmlands. Their preferred food is grass but they also eat the leaves of shrubs, trees and herbs, bark and some fruit.

The male deer have antlers and all deer have scent glands above their eyes which they use to mark territory. This is done by rubbing this area against trees and saplings.

The social behaviours of deer are variable. Sometimes they live in herds with up to 30 deer and other times live as individuals. Deer mate during autumn with usually a single fawn born eight to nine months later.



## Distribution of feral deer in Australia



**Sources:** National Land & Water Resources Audit (2008) Assessing invasive animals in Australia 2008, NLWRA, Canberra/SEWPAC (2010) Feral animals on offshore islands database located at <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/ferals/islands/>

## Impact

Where deer density is high, diversity and abundance of plant species is lower. Saplings are commonly destroyed by deer as they rub against them, trample or eat them. Weeds may flourish in areas where deer are not adequately controlled. Deer also assist the spread of weeds into new areas.

Deer compete with kangaroos and wallabies for food and generally add to grazing pressure.

As hooved mammals, deer can act as carriers of disease that affect livestock such as cattle and horses. They also contribute to erosion and degrade the water quality in creek and river systems.



## Control

Control measures for deer have not been extensively investigated as priority has been given to other pest species in Australia.

One control approach is prevention of the escape of farmed deer so that they do not create new wild populations or bolster existing wild populations. This approach places responsibility and accountability on farmers to ensure that their stock is securely enclosed at all times.

Another common control measure is shooting. This may be necessary if herds cannot be easily trapped and transported to a secure, enclosed area or when shooting of a small, isolated population will prevent that population growing in size or distribution. Shooting is carried out by recreational hunters and sometimes by professional marksmen.

Where deer populations are well established, containment within defined boundaries may be the most efficient control approach.

## Further information

For further information, contact:

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Photo credits in order: Feral deer stag (Daryl Panther), Feral deer hind (Daryl Panther), Red deer (Michelle McAuley & SEWPaC)

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