Australian Government
Parks Australia

Fact Sheet
Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park

INTRODUCED SPECIES

Through joint management in the park, *Aṉangu* and Parks Australia hope to minimise the adverse effects of introduced animals on the natural and cultural values of the park.

What is an introduced animal?

Introduced animals are species that have arrived from different countries or regions and established wild populations, often causing many problems in their new environment. They are recognised as the major factor in the extinction of native species in Central Australia. Currently 40 per cent of native species in Central Australia are either extinct or locally extinct.

What introduced animals do we have in the park?

Introduced species in the park are mice, rabbits, foxes, camels, dogs and cats. Each of these animals has its own way of impacting on the environment within the park. You will notice from the list that some animals are predators, and some are prey species. These animals interact within the natural food chain. Both introduced predator and prey species need to be controlled to protect the natural environment.

Who is responsible?

Human beings are responsible for the introduction of all non-indigenous species into Australia, and so we are responsible for humanely solving the problems they have caused. Most introduced species were imported into Australia deliberately, as they served some purpose to people. Dogs and cats were introduced as domestic pets, foxes and rabbits were introduced to provide us with game for recreational hunting, and camels were introduced to provide transport. The mice are an exception to this general rule having probably stowed away in imported food stock.

What impact do they have?

Here in the park, camels cause significant damage to waterholes and soaks. As desert specialists, camels make the most of scarce water and a thirsty camel can drink up to 200 litres of water in three minutes. Water is very sacred to *Aṉangu* – without water nothing can survive, so by polluting and draining waterholes, camels pose a significant threat to some of the most culturally significant areas within the park.

Rabbits and camels are herbivores – they eat vegetation which holds soil together. Bare soil is more susceptible to wind and water erosion. We have very ancient and fragile soils here in the Central Desert, and it does not take a big shift in soil use patterns to create significant changes in the overall soil structure. Trees and shrubs are also targeted by both these grazing animals. Rabbits eat the roots of some plants, ringbark trees in drought conditions and also enjoy sapling trees and shrubs. Many of our species require fire for regeneration, and so rarely have the chance to regenerate.

Foxes and cats are carnivores - they hunt a large number of smaller animals in the park, with a direct and devastating impact on native populations.




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Feral animals use of plants and water means native animals must compete for resources. The effects of competition are more severely felt during a drought when native animal populations may already be reduced to a bare minimum. This increased competition further threatens rare species in the park.

Aṉangu perspective

Aṉangu have a different way of looking at introduced animals than non-Indigenous Australians. *Aṉangu* were hunting cats before the first European explorers visited Central Australia and have adopted introduced species into their lifestyles. An example is the use of rabbits as a food source. *Aṉangu* are aware of the threats that foxes, cats and camels pose to native species and fully support their control within the park.

What is being done in the park?

With no fences around our park, the most effective way of controlling introduced species is by working in partnership with our neighbours across the region. Our partners include Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife, the Central Land Council and private landholders.

Camels - Opinions among *Aṉangu* regarding culls to manage camel numbers is divided. The park has closely consulted with traditional owners and guidelines are now established for the ground culling of camels particularly in the *mala* paddock area (where camels can damage the fences) and the public road network (due to the risk of traffic accidents).

Cats - Feral cats are the biggest threat to native animals in our park. Cats are trapped in winter, when food is least available in the park and cats are hungrier. The 16 permanent traps have large wire mesh enclosures with two dual entry traps in the base. Cats can see straight through and are therefore more willing to enter. Traps are baited with dead rabbits. Rangers check the traps every second day during winter.

Rabbits - Control around Kata Tjuṯa began in 1989 and has been highly successful in reducing numbers. In other areas of the park, rabbit control is still an ongoing challenge. A healthy rabbit population will increase the populations of foxes and cats as they are a favoured food for these species. Rabbits are also an ongoing challenge in the *mala* paddock as they successfully out-compete *mala* for food and other resources.

Foxes - This highly elusive species is a difficult challenge for parks staff. Foxes are readily seen on monitoring cameras, but are difficult to control. While several methods have been trialled without success, we are hopeful that a new trap system will be effective.

Dogs - Usually confined to the areas around *Muṯitjulu* waterhole. Dogs from the local community make their way there to find rabbits or other food. We actively work with the *Muṯitjulu* community to discourage community dogs from roaming through the park.

Introduced plants

Since Europeans first came to Central Australia, 34 species of plants have been introduced to the park. The most invasive weed is buffel grass, a perennial tussock grass, native to Africa, India and Asia. First introduced in the 1870s for erosion control and pastoral purposes, it has since spread widely across most land types. In the 1970s, before the park was declared, buffel grass was introduced around the base of Uluṟu to reduce erosion from four wheel drive vehicles. It now thrives in this area. Buffel grass chokes out native grasses, destroying habitat for our native animals and provides fuel for wildfires. Current management consists of removing buffel grass by hand - a resource-intensive process. In 2012, rangers began trialling other methods of control, including different burning and herbicide combinations. This trial is now being assessed as part of our long-term buffel management plan. Buffel grass is now recognised as a threat under environmental legislation.