

## Goats

### Impacts

Competition and habitat degradation by goats is 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).

As goats are such intensive grazers and damaging browsers their presence is known to slow or prevent natural and planned revegetation. This behaviour has a range of impacts including damage to crops, livestock and the removal of foraging habitat for native species. Competition for resources by goats has been implicated as a threat to endangered species such as the brush-tailed rock wallaby. They also reduce groundcover which is imperative to prevent erosion. Male goats also paw at the ground which can have the same impact on ground cover as excessive grazing. This disturbance to groundcover can create an opportunity for invasive weeds to become established.

Goats are also known carriers of parasites and diseases that affect domestic livestock. Examples include footrot and Q fever. They are also a possible vector for new exotic disease outbreaks.

The negative impact of goats comes at a considerable cost to the environment and the Australian economy. The costs associated with goats include management and control programs, rehabilitation of degraded sites and increased costs to food production. The following table highlights the annual costs of managing goats in Australia.

Table 1: Cost of goats (Pest Animal Control CRC, 2004)

Cost Component	Control	Loss
Sheep Production Loss	-	\$1.85 million
Cattle Production Loss	-	\$2.39 million
Management Cost	\$2 million	-
Research Cost	\$1.5 million	-
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$3.5 million</b>	<b>\$4.23 million</b>

### Distribution

Goats are present throughout most of Australia. They are found in most areas of NSW with the largest populations occurring in the western parts of the state. Sightings of herds of up to 30 goats are common in parts of the Molonglo catchment. These herds are often observed using properties adjacent to National Parks and Nature Reserves to gain access to open farm land and rural residential areas. The species is known to occur south of the Googong Reservoir to within the Tinderry Nature Reserve.

### Case Study

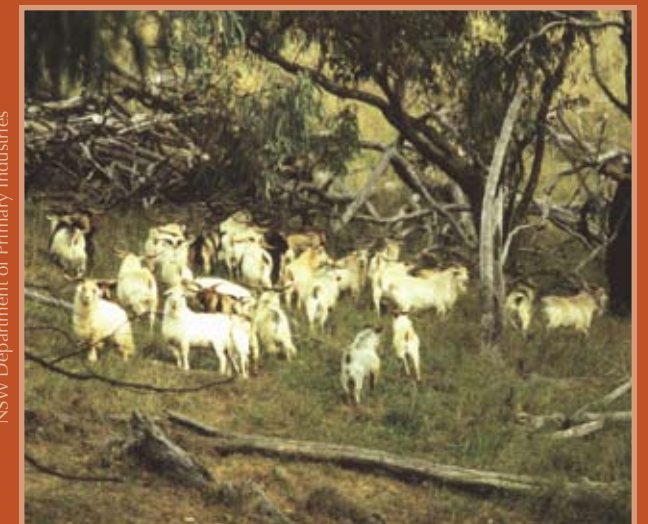
Claudia is used to seeing pest animals on her property, *Tinnenburra*, being surrounded by National Park on three sides, and having 7 km of Queanbeyan River frontage. Her property provides a thoroughfare for the many pest animals that reside in the national park, and then travel down to the more open farmland and peri urban areas. One of the more problematic species she encounters is goats, seeing herds of up to 30 at a time. Claudia said “I’ve tried to keep the goats out, but despite fencing off the property boundary, they continue to find ways in. They damage fences and have hindered my attempts to establish new pastures on my land”. This is just one example of a story that is becoming all too common in the Molonglo catchment.

### Description

Goats are most active during the day, in groups (herds) of varying numbers and structure. They have tracks and droppings very similar to sheep. Goats graze and browse on a wide range of plants and are able to forage on vegetation to a height of 2 metres. While they may be roughly the same size as sheep, a single goat can have an average daily intake equal to three sheep.

Goats’ preferred habitat is hilly to rocky country or flatter country that has a dense shrub cover with shelter, water and an abundance of food. Home ranges for goats vary greatly and are dependent on the availability of food and water and are not rigidly defined or defended.

Females are fertile from 6 months of age and gestate for 150 days with twins common. The mortality rate is high in juveniles to six months, however populations have the potential to double every 1.6 years.



NSW Department of Primary Industries

A herd of goats

### *What can be done?*

There are a number of options for goat 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:*

- Mustering – a coordinated activity for large populations that can be very effective. In some cases the costs of coordinating the muster can be offset to some degree from the sale of the animals;
- Shooting – target species specific. Effective in more open country and for the removal of a small number of goats, particularly when they are forced to visit water points. Too much harassment will prompt goats to relocate to a new site. Under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 a licence (R-Licence) issued by the Game Council of NSW is required to hunt goats on public land in NSW;
- Trapping – this can be successful in areas of limited water supply where the trap is set up around the water source, but can be expensive to establish due to the high standard of fence required. Traps need to be checked and cleared regularly;
- Fencing – tends to be expensive and time consuming, requiring regular maintenance to ensure protection. Goats are very inquisitive and will find weaknesses in fences and climb stays or adjacent timber to get over them. Usually used as protection for high value crops and ecosystems.

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 goats some indications of their presence include:

- Droppings: Can be easily confused with sheep and deer being 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 tend to be more splayed at tips. Dirt roads are a great resource when looking for animal tracks, keep your eyes peeled when you are taking a walk along them; and
- Groundcover damage: Soil scuffing 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.

#### *Molonglo Catchment Group*

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Web: [www.molonglocatchment.org.au](http://www.molonglocatchment.org.au)

#### *Livestock Health and Pest Authority*

(formerly Rural Lands Protection Board)

Cooma Office: (02) 6452 1122

Braidwood Office: (02) 4842 2536

Web: [www.LHPA.org.au/pest-control](http://www.LHPA.org.au/pest-control)

#### *Parks Conservation and Lands*

Phone: 13 22 81



*A wild goat*

NSW Department of Primary Industries



*Rangeland degradation due to goats and rabbits*

Dr. Robert Henzell, NSW Department of Primary Industries