



## **Farming Small Areas article – June 2011**

### **Pest animals don't only affect agriculture**

Pest animals in Australia cause an enormous amount of damage and therefore lost production to agriculture.

Recent studies have estimated that pest animals cost agriculture over \$720 million dollars a year in lost production alone. This figure is quite often quoted, but there is another side to the damage caused by pest animals. The damage they cause to the environment is often over looked but can also be extensive.

Since pest animals, such as rabbits, foxes and feral cats, arrived in Australia they have been responsible for the extinction of a number of small marsupials, mammals, birds and reptiles.

Foxes and feral cats continue to prey on small animals across most landscapes. Both species are excellent hunters and will survive on whatever food is available.

The fox and feral cat predate on ground dwelling animals. The cat also has the added advantage of being able to climb and can reach bird nests and lay on tree branches almost unseen until some prey animal comes along. Rabbit populations also assist by supplying a reliable food source to allow these predators to breed up and move into new areas.

Other pest animals that can have an impact on the environment include wild dogs, feral pigs, feral deer and feral goats. The wild dog predate on animals ranging from small animals such as echidnas through to large animals such as kangaroos. Feral pigs predate on small animals and eggs from ground nesting birds as well as disturbing the soil in wet areas which can lead to erosion and the invasion of weeds. Cloven hooved animals also can compact the soil and cause erosion in steep country by creating trails on the hillsides and reducing ground cover and the capacity of soils to hold rainfall.

Most pest animals can also spread diseases to other animals and sometimes even to humans. They can also spread weeds either through eating them or spreading the seeds in their coats/hair/fur.

So the next time you see a pest animal, think of the damage that animal could be causing and how much of a better place your environment would be without them.

Play your part by controlling pest animals at all times. Contact your local LHPA for advice on controlling pest animals.