



Feral cat

Feral cats are a pest in Taranaki and the Taranaki Regional Council promotes the voluntary control of them to reduce the threat to agriculture and the environment.

FERAL CATS IN NEW ZEALAND

Cats were first introduced to New Zealand by European explorers in 1769 and feral (wild) cats are now distributed throughout New Zealand. Some cats are fully feral, but others may visit human settlements for food and shelter.

Feral cats live in a wide range of habitats, including sand dunes, pasture, tussock, scrub, exotic plantations and native forest, from sea level to 3,000 metres.

They have inhabited at least 31 offshore islands, ranging from less than 5 hectares to large biologically important reserves. On at least 14 of these, feral cats have died out or have been eradicated.

DESCRIPTION

Feral cats are cats living independently of people, or breeding in the wild. They are solitary and predominantly nocturnal animals. They include abandoned domestic cats or cats that have strayed from their owners.

Small mammals, particularly rabbits and rodents, are their main prey but they have been known to prey on live juvenile and dead adult possums in forest habitats, and occasionally on hedgehogs, stoats and carrion.

Feral cats will also prey on native birds, lizards, skinks and frogs, particularly when their main food source, such as rabbits, is limited. They may also prey on fish and insects such as spiders and cicadas.

Generally the home range of a feral cat is around 150 – 200 hectares, but it can be affected by changes in the abundance of prey. One study found that three adult cats ranged up to 9.2 km from their previously well-defined home range, when rabbit numbers were reduced by 99%.

IMPACT ON ECOLOGICAL VALUES

Both domestic and feral cats can have a significant impact on native birds, reptiles and invertebrates, particularly in natural areas such as forests, shrubland, wetlands and dunelands.

Their impact on rare and endangered species can be serious, especially on offshore islands. They have been blamed for the local extinction of saddlebacks from Little Barrier, Cuvier and Stephens Islands in the late 1800s. And in the 45 years that cats lived on Herekopare Island they exterminated the populations of yellow crowned parakeets, robins and fern birds.

IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE

Feral cats carry many parasites and both feral and farm cats can transmit *Toxoplasma Gondii* to sheep.

In New Zealand, the most common infection is bovine tuberculosis which can be transferred to cattle. In an area with TB-infected cattle, a study found that 1 in 50 cats had gross lesions typical of TB.

In Taranaki, no feral cats have been found with TB lesions.

ANIMAL PEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

There is no rule requiring control of feral cats on a property but their voluntary control is promoted.

Releasing, abandoning or helping to maintain any cat in the wild is banned.

CONTROL OF FERAL CATS

Shooting or cage traps can be used to control feral cats. Animals caught in traps must be killed humanely or taken to your local SPCA.

For further advice or information about pest animal management contact:

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