

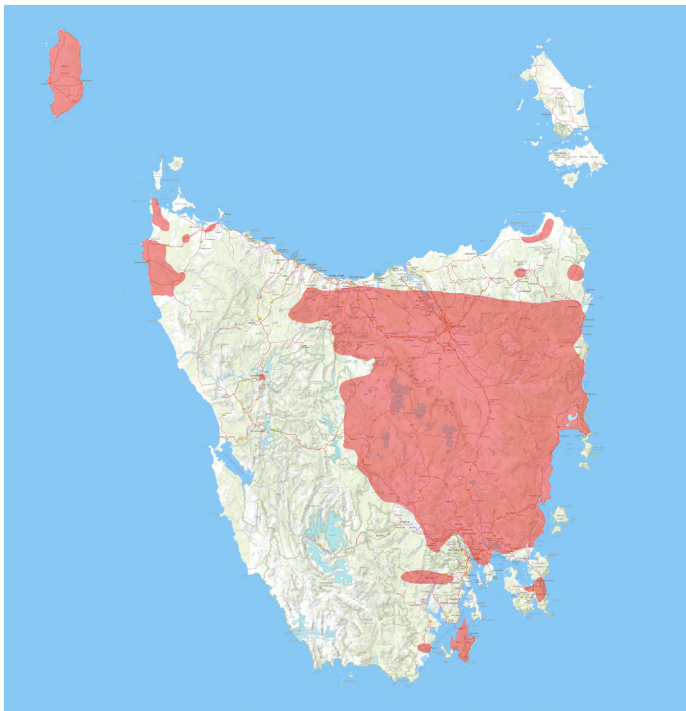
Deer in Tasmania

There is one species of feral deer in Tasmania, the fallow deer. They were brought to Tasmania in 1836 as a hunting resource but over time, the population has established and spread across Tasmania.

How many deer are in Tasmania?

Tasmania's feral deer population has increased forty-fold since the 1980s. The best available data suggests there could be up to 100,000 deer across 27% of Tasmania. **That number could grow to more than 1 million feral deer by 2050!**

These feral deer have spread beyond the Midlands and are now found in some of our most pristine wilderness areas including the World Heritage Area, Bruny Island, Freycinet, Ben Lomond, even in the Tarkine.



Estimated current deer range

Why do we care if there are a million feral deer in Tasmania?

Deer, along with all other hard-hooved animals, are not native to Tasmania. This means that Tasmania's ecosystem did not evolve to withstand the browsing, trampling, and antler-rubbing behaviours of deer. Deer are far larger and heavier than native Tasmanian animals and have no native predators. Deer eat and rub young trees, often killing them and preventing the regeneration of forests.

Deer target the new green growth after fires, hindering post-burn regrowth and preventing regeneration. In fire-sensitive ecosystems with slow-growing plants, like in the World Heritage Area, even just a few deer can prevent post-fire regeneration and potentially change the entire ecosystem.



Deer can damage soil and ground vegetation. Miena. Photo: N. Anderson

In addition to the damage they cause to our native environment, feral deer have large and costly impacts on agriculture and forestry. The features that make landscapes suitable for farming are the same features that attract deer. Deer cause problems for farms and forestry because they eat crops, kill young trees, and damage infrastructure. Feral deer are already costing just the agricultural industry up to \$80 million a year!



Deer damage and kill young trees. Central Highlands. Photo: T. Guy

Feral deer are a danger on the road. Male fallow deer can weigh up to 100kg. Hitting an animal that large at 110 kph will result in major car damage and at worst, a fatal accident. We are already seeing more deer-car collisions in some areas of Tasmania.



Photo: C Bartlett

Feral deer are having negative impacts on much of the Tasmanian community. These impacts are only going to get worse as the feral deer population continues to grow and spread.

What can be done to prevent these negative impacts?

To protect Tasmania and mitigate the damage caused by feral deer, the small isolated populations around Tasmania, including those in sensitive environments such as Tasmania's world heritage areas and national parks, need to be urgently removed. Larger populations in the Midlands need to be reduced.

It takes a massive and concerted removal effort to reduce and/or eliminate deer populations. Just to stop the population from growing, more deer need to be removed than are being born each year. **For fallow deer, this means over 35% but likely more than 50% of the population needs to be removed each year for consecutive years.**

Achieving population reduction requires carefully planned, coordinated, and intensive programs that use all the available management tools. An important tool for the removal of large numbers of deer, especially in rugged terrain, is aerial shooting using thermal imaging. This is one of the most humane and effective ways available to control deer populations.



Thermal imaging improves the efficiency and welfare outcomes of aerial culling. Photo: Heli Survey

Why can't recreational hunting take care of the deer population?

Tasmania's feral deer problem is too big for recreational hunting alone to solve. While recreational hunting can be part of a successful management program, as a stand-alone tool, recreational hunting can't remove enough deer to cause meaningful declines across the landscape.

Recreational hunting is not very effective at removing large numbers of deer. Hunters are slower at finding deer because they are on foot and hunting during the day, when deer aren't very active. While some are, not all recreational hunters are highly skilled so they likely won't kill each deer they find.

Hunters often seek meat, trophies, and quality experiences, goals that differ from those of management, which means hunters are not always contributing towards the goal of reducing the population.

Even when all access and seasonal restrictions are lifted, recreational hunting is just not able to remove the number of deer required to reduce or eliminate the population.

What can I do to help protect Tasmania from the negative impacts of deer?

If you see a feral deer or signs of deer activity and damage, report it!

Reporting feral deer sightings and evidence of damage is key to understanding the population, where to focus management, and where to notify communities to be aware of deer and their impacts.

Here are two platforms in which you can report when you see a deer or find their footprints or scats:

feralscan.org.au

inaturalist.org