



# Save the Murray

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## Introduced Fauna



The Murray-Darling Basin has a range of introduced animals. Some of these animals were introduced deliberately while others were accidental introductions. Animals such as sheep and cattle were introduced deliberately as domestic farm animals and although they are not native, they are controlled and not considered pests. Other animals such as carp and rabbits were introduced accidentally and without knowledge of their potential to quickly become unwanted pests. These animals are often referred to as 'feral' animals.

Introduced animals typically have few natural predators or diseases and high reproductive rates. Introduced animals impact on native species by predation, competition for food and shelter, destroying habitat, and by spreading diseases.

Introduced fish in the Murray-Darling Basin have had significant effects on native fish populations. Carp are the most abundant introduced animal in the Murray-Darling Basin. *See the Carp fact sheet and Alien fish fact sheet for more information.*

Some common introduced animals include;

### Cats

Cats are one of the greatest threats to small native animals and birds. Feral cats are bigger and more aggressive than domestic cats. The feral cat is found in most habitats across Australia. It has caused the extinction of some species on islands and is thought to have contributed to the disappearance of many ground-dwelling birds and mammals on the mainland. On islands, feral cat control is feasible, but elsewhere management is difficult due to the lack of effective and humane broadscale control techniques, and the presence of domestic cats.

### Foxes

Foxes were first introduced to be hunted as sport in the 1800's and have since spread across most of Australia. They have played a major role in the decline of a number of species of native animals and they also prey on newborn lambs. Foxes have few native predators in Australia to rival them. Along the River Murray, they prey on animals that live on the ground, especially rabbits and tortoises that breed on the riverbanks. When rabbit numbers are low due to factors such as drought, foxes prey on native animals and birds. Control of foxes relies heavily on conventional techniques such as shooting, poisoning and fencing. In the future, a combination of biological and conventional control methods may be able to reduce the damage foxes cause.

### Rabbits

Rabbits are very adaptable and breed quickly, which is why they are such damaging pests. Rabbits compete with livestock and native animals for food and water. They cause significant damage to the natural environment, degrade pasture and damage crops. Grazing down to ground level, they eat the shoots, roots and the seeds of plants so these plants can not re-shoot and die. This leaves



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## Introduced Fauna Continued

the soil vulnerable to erosion. Bare ground in turn encourages weeds to invade. The resulting decrease in the diversity of plants affects the native animals that depend on different species for food and shelter.

### **Goats and Pigs**

Goat and Pigs are pests along waterways, but less so than rabbits and foxes. Goats climb into low-branching trees and eat all the leaves as well as the bark, which often kills the trees, especially young ones. Pigs destroy habitat for native plants and animals and spread environmental weeds. Both animals have hard hooves that compact the soil and wear down plant cover more quickly than the soft-padded native animals.