



Regional NRM Strategy for the Wheatbelt Launched!

Feral cats threatening our precious fauna

Reducing methane emissions from livestock

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Australian Government

2014 was a momentous year for Wheatbelt NRM. We celebrated 20 years of continued Landcare and sustainable management of our natural resources, we moved into our own premises in the centre of Northam, and achieved an abundance of on-ground work to enhance the environment, while increasing productivity within the Wheatbelt region.

Most significantly perhaps of these achievements is, the publishing of our new regional Strategy. More can be read about this in the following article, but we would like to thank the input of the Wheatbelt NRM Board and staff, particularly Dr Elizabeth Kington for her work in researching collating and writing this important strategy. Another significant accomplishment in 2014 was our performance against our Strategic Plan target, namely:

By 2015 3,500 (10%) members of the Wheatbelt community will be actively improving the environment of the Wheatbelt through our regionally-focused, multi-disciplinary, high quality strategies and programs.

With a total of 4,220 members of the community actively involved in NRM after two years, we have exceeded our aim and proved the growth, strength and acceptance of the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management strategies by communities across the Wheatbelt.

In 2014, we also farewelled our longest serving board member Ian Hall. We sincerely thank Ian for his generous contribution, wisdom and support of Wheatbelt NRM these past 10 years. The team wishes you well in your new endeavours. Thanks also to our talented, next-generation director Genevieve Whisson for her invaluable contributions.

The baton has been passed on to two very experienced and capable members who now join our board. Simon Whitehouse and Bruce Wittbar bring considerable knowledge to the Board in governance, financial management, government liaison and strategic planning. Bruce has previously held the position of Independent Chair of the Audit Committee and has a broad understanding of the role and functions of natural resource management. Simon has had a long involvement with natural resource management at varying levels and brings considerable experience in government and the agricultural industry.

Biodiversity

During the past year the Biodiversity team has provided support for the community to engage in NRM on ground; increasing the functional connectivity across the region and improving security for priority assets around the region. As part of this program 1,125 people have volunteered in the Red Card for Rabbits and Foxes on-ground activities, resulting in 4538 foxes, 394 cats and 4,842 rabbits being removed from the landscape. Thirty-six community projects have so far been successful in the first round of Bushcare grants and over 55,000 free bodiverse seedlings have gone out into the region, engaging more than 400 people in revegetation activities.

Sustainable Agriculture

The Sustainable Agriculture team has spent 2014 busy establishing 20 trial and demonstration sites with farmers and industry to showcase innovation in sustainable cropping, grazing and agroforestry systems. They have worked with farmers and industry to improve soil health and nutrient use efficiencies, and to develop awareness of carbon farming methods and opportunities. Eight workshops or field days were run showcasing the latest knowledge in sustainable land management. And a new report synthesising our knowledge of the biodiversity benefits of agroforestry systems has been drafted.

Sustainable Communities

During 2014, the Sustainable Communities team built the capacity of the Aboriginal community in NRM. They worked with community to fulfil their local project aspirations through small grants, and the Elders Advisory Group to Wheatbelt NRM consolidated their strategic direction and involvement in NRM programs. The Communications team have implemented a new website for the organisation and increased our social media profile.

To our community and those who care for their land, may the season be bounteous and may all your lives be filled with happiness over the holiday season. Drive safely and take care. We look forward to catching up with you come 2015.

Season's greetings,

The Wheatbelt NRM Team

“With a total of 4220 members of the community actively involved in NRM after 2 years, we have exceeded our aim”

The state of the Avon River Basin



Healthy natural resources underpin our quality of life and industry; they support our environment and community, and their management is fundamental for current and future generations.

The recently launched Wheatbelt Regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) Strategy (top right) guides understanding and priorities for the management of natural resources in the Avon River Basin.

The Strategy enables and guides NRM investment within the region. It reflects community values to meet our vision for:

'A healthy environment that has a viable agricultural industry and retains a strong sense of place'

The Avon River basin lies at the heart of an International Biodiversity Hotspot and contains a rich diversity of natural ecosystems and landscapes. The region is also home to 44,000 residents and supports an economy underpinned by extensive agricultural interests. It is both a social and an ecological system.

The strategy has used 'resilience thinking' to tell us which parts of this system are most at risk

of crossing a 'Threshold of Potential Concern', from which it is difficult to pull the system back. It tells us what we need to adapt to because a part of the system is in a transformed state. It looks at the 'big' drivers that move our system towards or away from the threshold and identifies appropriate intervention. (See opposite table)

Three distinct examples of these big issues for the Avon River Basin are dryland salinity, river eutrophication and local species extinction. We permanently changed our landscape when we cleared the bush for broad-scale agriculture. Dryland salinity, river changes and the loss of native wildlife were inevitable vicissitudes, and our landscape is still experiencing this transition today.

Natural resource management challenges are simply too great for anything less than a whole-of-community, whole-of-landscape response; we will all need to work together to ensure our resource base does not pass 'tipping points'. Success will depend on the development and delivery of priority projects and it is at the local scale that decision-making occurs for action on-the-ground.

The Avon River Basin community has a strong connection with this diverse and beautiful region. The sense of place and belonging of the local community underlies its strength of character and the resolve required to overcome the range of challenges it currently faces.

Identifying Thresholds of Potential Concern (TPC)

Identifying big resource issues is important because they are fundamental to the underlying structure and function of the region. The top seven resource issues were identified using a resilience assessment, based on their capacity to impact; values, derived benefits, goods and services, and sense-of-place. What controls the development of these big issues? This is usually a fast or slow moving 'controlling variable' - the 'system indicator'. How close are we to reaching major tipping points, that is... what is the 'threshold' amount of the controlling variable that causes the big issue to 'tip' over to a fundamentally new state? What are the 'big' drivers that move the system towards or away from the threshold and what are the appropriate points of intervention? It should be noted that individual resource issues do not function in isolation, but as part of a complex interlinked system.

This Report Card is 'LIVE' and will change according to our growing understanding of how the system is changing.

Theme	Big resource issue	Key Controlling Variable (slow or fast moving) System Indicator	Thresholds of Potential Concern (TPC) causing fundamental system change	Where are we now	The 'big' drivers (controls) that move the system towards or away from a threshold	Points of Intervention and associated management actions
Soil Health	Species viability (abundance & richness)	Cleared land	< 30 - 40% bush land ¹	30% (range 6% to 99%)	land clearing climate change	Sub-regions where bushland < 30% is enhanced and protected Sub-regions where > 30% remaining bushland is improved, protected and managed
		Fragmentation	Intact bushland patch size < 10ha ²	(see sub-regional map)	over grazing feral & weed invasions fire frequency climate change land clearing	Bushland patch size < 10ha is buffered and reconnected Bushland patch size where > 10ha remaining is improved, protected and managed
Ecosystem Health	Soil productivity	Organic carbon	<1% soil organic carbon ¹	0.4 - 1%	land use land clearing	Promote soil testing and increase land cover in sub-regions < 1% soil organic carbon
		Acidity	50% ² top-soils <pH 5.5 ¹	80%	fertiliser use efficiency lime application	Promote soil testing and lime application in sub-regions where > 50% soils pH 5.5
Aquatic Health	River function (Avon River and major tributary)	Sedimentation	>30% ² waterways degraded	30%	waterway and riparian management	Sub-regions > 30% streams degraded are fenced and re-vegetated Sub-regions < 30% streams degraded are managed and enhanced
		Eutrophication	The Avon River > 0.06mg/L ¹ total phosphorus (TP) &/or > 1mg/L ¹ total nitrogen (TN)	(see sub-regional map)	fertiliser use efficiency climate	Encourage improved fertiliser use efficiency in sub-regions with > threshold Total Phosphorus or Total Nitrogen levels
		Acidity	Waterways pH < 6.5 ¹	(see sub-regional map)	deep drainage	Encourage retrofit of local dam disposal of saline discharge in sub-regions with pH < 6.5
Community Health	Agriculture industry viability	Farm financial viability	(surrogate) >25% ² farmers with a >3:1 debt to income ratio ²	10-15%	input costs market price climate government policy management decisions	Develop alternative, viable industry in sub-regions where > 25% farmers approaching a 3:1 debt to income ratio
	Community viability	Population trend	<70% ³ of residents and farmers within 50km of towns of > 600 people ² population change > 0% ²	74% 2% (range -9 - 10%)	farm amalgamation employment high school aging community government policy	Work with partners to promote lifestyle and support land use planning in sub-regions where < 70% population resides within 50km of towns of > 600 people (or < 0% population change)
Whole of System Health	System viability	Salinity	>10% landscape saline ³	4%	climate land use (perennial vegetation) land clearing	Re-vegetate and adapt to saline land in sub-regions where < 10% saline Promote re-vegetation to protect local assets in sub-regions where > 10% saline
	Catchment water availability	Drying catchment	(surrogate) catchment run-off threshold < 0 ²	-2	climate change land clearing	Protect strategically important environmental flows and adapt to climate change impacts in sub-regions where the catchment run-off threshold is < 0



'The sense of place and belonging of the local community underlies the strength of character and resolve required to overcome the range of challenges it currently faces.'

Nevertheless, the local community requires assistance in maintaining its own health and that of the landscape on which it relies.

To achieve significant and lasting NRM outcomes in the future, while building on the success of previous investment and planning, the following fundamentals will need to be in place:

A Shared Vision – allowing everybody to work together to achieve common goals and aspirations.

Technical Capacity – a solid scientific understanding of what needs to be done to achieve goals and objectives.

Human Capacity – the skills and people-power required to achieve the shared vision(s) through applying scientific knowledge and appropriate land management practice.

Capital Investment – the financial capacity to implement changes essential to achieving the stated goals and objectives.

Natural resource management interventions do not happen if there is no shared vision for what we need to do and why. We need to be technically confident that a management intervention will have the outcome we intend.

We also need the financial capacity to afford it. And most management interventions require human capacity to make it happen on-the-ground. On top of this, we must ensure that enforcing changes to increase resilience in one part of the system does not reduce its resilience in another.



For information on the NRM Strategy
Please contact Dr Elizabeth Kington at Wheatbelt NRM on 9670 3132 or email: ekington@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

Activate tree planting - a personal perspective

By Pierre Elkington AKA Jeff



They sounded good. It sounded like something I needed. This one had a purpose, not just a hedonistic bass thumping homage to youth and freedom in a randomly designated spot in the outback but this one had a purpose.

Let me set the scene: my ex-girlfriend was pregnant, due anytime now, and as you may or may not have gathered, I was in need of a little distraction. I was getting excited about the prospect of camping out, doing something useful and meeting all kinds of interesting people.

Aside from seeing escaped goats on the highway and having to stop off to print out new tickets, the trip went down without much of a hitch. We arrived at the property late, skidded down a dirt track and were ushered into a covered area where we were inducted into the safety and protocols of the tree planting equipment we would be using that day.

The first thing that struck me was the warmth of the people. These may have been strangers, but with a common bond and united by a purpose, they greeted each other with smiles, friendly hugs and hellos. I have no problem interacting with people in general, but found this level of warmth and trust uncharacteristically disarming. This didn't feel like people I hadn't met before. This felt like home, meeting a long lost family.

The sky looked angry and threatened to unleash its heavy, watery burden at any moment. We were divided into groups, given equipment and seedlings to plant and set off to plant native trees which would encourage rainfall, stop soil erosion and generally heal this overmanaged section of the Wheatbelt.

I mingled with new faces to fully immerse myself in the experience. As the heavens opened up and unleashed a downpour of biblical proportions, spirits stayed surprisingly up-beat. Everyone continued to work, laugh and talk even though they were getting soaked to the skin.

The first endeavour was over and a mass of drenched, squelching feet slowly made their way back to camp for a feed and to prepare for the elements once more with dried clothes and stomachs filled.

There was a buzz in the air – an energy I cannot quite describe – and after a short break to rest and dry off we went back into the last of the afternoon showers. We finished planting the last of the trees then headed off back to camp, following the distant thump of music that had begun.

I met and talked to so many interesting people that night – skydivers, musicians, entrepreneurs, activists young and old. There was no hierarchy in this place, only an implied respect for those who were organising the event. Conversation flowed freely and another delicious meal was served. I met the cooks – fascinating young people who inspired me with their hopes and dreams and their general attitude about life.

Sometimes I am anxious about the future in the hands of the next generations. How will they cope in the world that lies before them? But this night helped me put aside these fears.

The icing on the cake for me however was the phone call I received after packing up the equipment and tents ... I had a daughter, seven pounds of perfection, in good health and waiting to meet me. This day will forever be engrained in my thoughts as one of the most memorable times of my life.

Pierre Elkington AKA Jeff

If you have a farm and have tree planting planned for 2015, Avongro can help you with a crew to get the work done.

Contact Rosanne Scott on 0458 015 361.

<http://www.avongro.com.au/>

The safer way to bait feral rabbits with 1080 oat baits

Rabbit feeding stations have been designed as a safe and efficient way of feeding poisoned bait to pest rabbits.

Key benefits

- Save money by protecting baits from the weather. Reduces perishing and increases the life and freshness of bait.
- Save time setting up Baiting Programs and Rabbit Reduction Strategies.
- Easily monitor the uptake of baits and success of your baiting program.
- Protection – reduces the impact on non-target animals such as pets, livestock and birds.
- Easy to secure to posts or ground.



Why use a bait station for rabbit control?

If a bait station is used, you can put out sufficient baits to ensure all rabbits that feed from the station have a lethal dose available to them. You will also reduce the risk of non-target species (e.g. dogs and birds) eating the bait.

This model is also still the most efficient bait station for protection of bait from rain.

Rabbits are very wary animals and it is not a natural act for them to feed out of a partly enclosed space. However, since the bait station is made of translucent plastic which lets light in, the rabbits seem less concerned about putting their heads inside the feeding area. The bait station's generous entrance also means that the rabbits aren't putting their heads into a very constricted space.

Rabbits have small home ranges and won't travel far to find food. Bait stations need to be placed near where you find signs of rabbits, such as scratchings, diggings and manure. Often on farmland you will find that signs of rabbit are concentrated along fencelines, so fence posts

make convenient objects to attach stations to. Place stations along fence line every 20-30m (except where there is no sign). Attach each station to a post with the base of the station 50- 150mm above ground level. Place 1080 rabbit bait (usually available from your agricultural products supplier) into the station.

If you have any questions please contact Wheatbelt NRM on 08 9670 3100 or email info@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

Wheatbelt NRM will soon be selling these bait stations to community for \$30 per unit.

Please make contact with us if you would like to place an order.



For information on feral control

Please contact Jacquie Lucas at Wheatbelt NRM on 9670 3113 or email jlucas@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

1 night in Pingelly 1 cat could eat:



The stomach contents of a feral cat at Arid Recovery, Roxby Downs, South Australia were analysed and John Read from Ecological Horizons found:

- 24 painted dragons (*Ctenophorus pictus*)
- 3 bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*)
- 3 striped skinks (*Ctenotus schomburgkii*)
- 2 earless dragons (*Tympanocryptis sp.*)
- 1 mouse (*Mus domesticus*)
- 1 zebra finch (*Taeniopygia guttata*)

1 Red-tailed phascogale (*Phascogale calura*)



1 Western pygmy possum (*Cercartetus concinnus*)



1 Red-capped robin (*Petroica goodenovii*)



1 Western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minor*)



1 centipede



2 grasshoppers



2 South-western Orange-tailed Sliders (*Lerista distinguenda*)



3 Western Stone Geckoes (*Diplodactylus granariensis granariensis*)



5 Shrubland morethia skinks (*Morethia obscura*)



6 Ornate Dragons (*Ctenophorus ornatus*)

Feral cats threatening our precious fauna

What can you do?

- If you have a pet cat keep it indoors
- Set cage traps for feral cats and humanely euthanase any you catch
- Go night shooting to control feral animals – including cats
- Talk to your neighbours about any feral cat control you have planned and coordinate your activities to increase the impact you have on the feral cat population in your area

Do you know where your cat is?

In suburbia, pet cats often travel 500m from home in any direction. Doesn't sound like far? 500m in one direction could easily include 25 properties in a straightline. Make a 500m radius circle around a typical suburban property and your cat could easily be found in any of 300 neighbouring backyards.

Farm cats generally do not face the same restrictions as suburban cats, and may roam and hunt across several kilometres.

Feral cats in farm or bushland areas will also travel across several kilometres in the search of food. The distance a feral cat travels will be dependent upon resources in the surrounding area. In areas with fewer resources feral cats can cover 10km², or 1000ha in the hunt for food, with males typically travelling significantly further than females.

Cats threatening sheep

Feral cats are not only responsible for the deaths of an estimated 75 million native animals a day

“Feral cats are ... responsible for the deaths of an estimated 75 million native animals a day in Australia”

in Australia but farmers in Tasmania have found that cats have also been spreading fatal diseases to livestock. Between 80 and 90% of feral cats in Tasmania are infected by toxoplasmosis which can cause abortion in both sheep and native animals. One farmer in Tasmania lost 500 lambs in one year to what he believes is the parasite toxoplasmosis spread by cats. When pregnant ewes are infected with toxoplasmosis they will often miscarry, resulting in lost productivity. Toxoplasmosis is only one of many diseases that feral cats can carry and spread to native wildlife, stock and domesticated pets.

Biological cat control

There are several biological control options that keep cat numbers in check. Until recently cat numbers in Tasmania were restricted by the Tasmanian devil. Since the Tasmanian devil population has dropped due to the spread of a communicable facial tumor, cat numbers have been increasing in Tasmania.

In Victoria the government is considering the possibility of reintroducing Tasmanian devils to the mainland in a carefully monitored trial in the

hope that they might control cat numbers in the region. This has not yet been approved and may not go ahead.

Foxes and dingoes are also believed to control cat numbers, however with many areas excluding dingoes and focussing on fox control, feral cat populations have been left to grow out of control.

References and further reading:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-02/farmers-environmentalists-team-up-to-fight-feral-cat-threat/5839920>

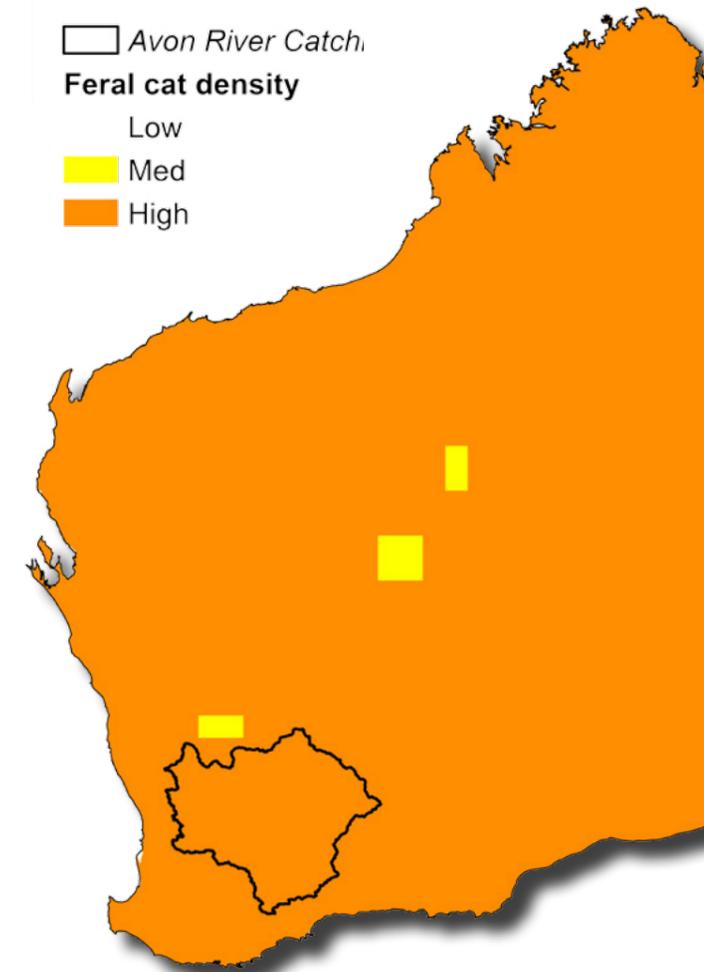
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/feral-cats-re-write-the-australian-story/5802204>

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/articles/abortion.html>

<http://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Eyles-Mulvaney-Background-Paper-Responsible-Pet-Ownership-and-the-Protection-of-Wildlife-2014.pdf>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-13/greg-hunt-feral-cat-native-animals-fact-check/5858282>

<http://www.knowyourcat.info/info/territory.htm>





Euro

Macropus robustus

Identification

The euro was one of three kangaroo species collected by Captain Cook's expedition in 1770. Euros have a distinctive bare, black muzzle and range in colour from red-brown to grey. As a result, they are sometimes confused with red kangaroos. In some parts of their range, the fur is thick and shaggy. Euros lack the facial markings of red kangaroos and stand with their shoulders thrown back, elbows tucked in by their sides and their wrists raised. Males are twice the weight of females and are a darker colour. When disturbed, the euro utters a coughing cch-sound, and will also hiss.

Habitat and distribution

Euros are found in a wide variety of habitats, but usually occur near areas of rocky ridges and overhangs or deep valleys where the animals can shelter from the heat of the day. They emerge in the evening to feed. Euros are found over most of Australia except the extreme south and Cape York. They are usually solitary animals with a fairly small home range. The density of animals seems to be affected by the availability of food, shelter and water rather than territorial requirements. Competition with other grazing animals can have an impact of the numbers of euros in an area.

Diet

This species grazes on grasses and shrubs on the slopes and plains within its home range. It is well adapted to arid Australian conditions and can survive and breed on a low protein diet with little or no free water, provided that it can eat leaves of fleshy shrubs.

Reproduction

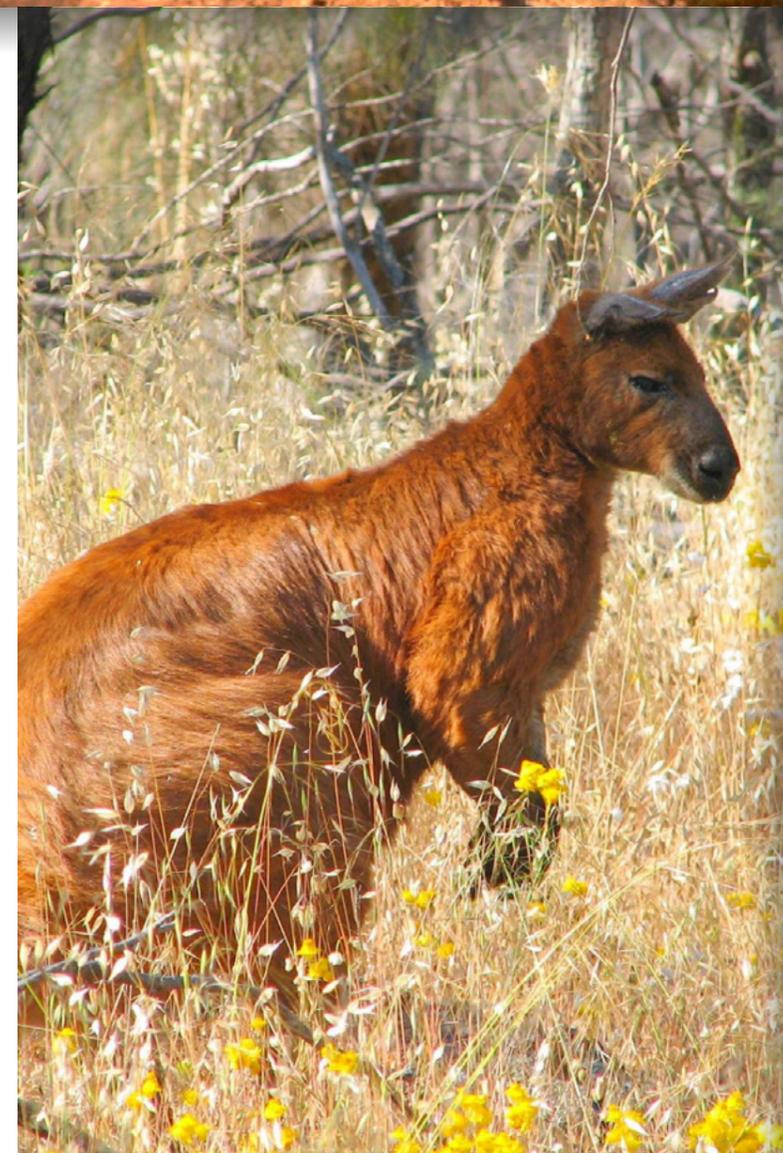
Euros become sexually mature between 18 months and two years of age. Breeding may take place at any time of year except during extended drought. Females become receptive immediately after giving birth and have embryonic diapause (they can store a fertilised ovum for future implantation). Gestation is 34 days and pouch life 244 days.

Threats

Euros remain common throughout their range, but may suffer from competition for food with livestock and goats.

Management actions

Euros are a protected species, however where large numbers occur and cause damage to crops or conservation lands, permits are sometimes issued to control the numbers following consultation with the Department of Parks and Wildlife Western Australia.



Euro

Macropus robustus

Family: Macropodidae

Conservation status: Not listed

Size (head and body length)

1107 – 1580 mm (males)

800 – 1100 mm (females)

Size (tail)

551 – 901 mm (males)

534 – 749 mm (females)

Weight

7.25 – 46.5 kg (males)

6.25 – 25 kg (females)

Habitat

Areas near rocky hills and overhangs for shelter adjacent to grassy slopes and plains.

Diet

Grass, fleshy leaves of shrubs. They can survive without free water if there is sufficient moisture in foliage.

Reproduction

Mature at 18 – 2 years. Young in pouch for 244 days.

Reducing methane emissions from livestock using productive, profitable grazing options

Methane is a natural by-product in ruminants due to the fermentation of feed during digestion. It is an energy loss to the system that can be reduced with the type of feed supplied to the animals. This is both good for the farming system, the animal and the environment.

The Enrich Project has shown that many shrubs can reduce the methane production of sheep; one worthy of mentioning is *Eremophila glabra* according to Professor Phil Vercoe of UWA.

“While it is a small plant it doesn’t need to be a large part of the animal’s diet to make a significant reduction in methane production.”

If pastures are more suited to the farming system than forage shrubs, then *Biserrula* is the pick of the pasture species for reducing methane emissions, by a very large margin. *Biserrula* is a persistent annual pasture legume that can work in a mixed farming system, with seed persisting for as many as three consecutive grain crops. *Biserrula* also provides an excellent source of biological nitrogen and can assist in weed management systems.

By improving the annual pastures species available to sheep and integrating these with a diverse range of forage shrubs, whole-of-farm profitability can be improved. This can be seen in the Enrich Project’s MIDAS modelling. Animal health can be improved by eating a range of feed that incorporates a variety of nutrients and the NRM benefits of growing perennials include reducing wind and water erosion, increasing biodiversity and improving soil condition.



Eremophila glabra Photos: A.P. Brown, M. Kealley, J.D. Start, M.J. Start & K.R. Thiel

While currently there is no CFI methodology approved for emissions avoidance in reducing methane emissions in sheep by feeding specific shrubs or pastures, there is an approved methodology for feeding nitrates to beef cattle that could be used as a complimentary methodology. But the benefits to farm productivity of adopting this system may actually be its downfall under the CFI as there is a risk that this practice will fail the additionality test and therefore be ineligible.

DAFWA have produced a fact sheet about managing sheep pastures to reduce methane production and its potential in carbon farming. For this, and other relevant carbon farming fact sheets see:

www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/carbonfarming

For information on forage shrubs

Please contact Jo Wheeler at Wheatbelt NRM on 9670 3121 or email:

jwheeler@wheatbeltnrm.org.au



Kambarang - Birak

The Noongar people recognised six seasons in their year, Bunuru, Djeran, Makuru, Djlba, Kambarang and Birak, and managed the boodja (land) accordingly. The climate of this country ranged from mild to temperate and was divided into these six seasons, during which land management practices and hunting and gathering patterns were guided.

Kambarang – October to November

rain decreasing

Birak – December to January

hot and dry with easterly winds during the day and south west sea breezes in the late afternoon

Wheatbelt NRM has had the pleasure of working with Northam Senior High School students in the creation of the annual Noongar Seasons NRM calendar.

The calendar captures the students' introduction to natural resource management and features their original artwork, photos, quotes and information. Four of the students also assisted with the graphic design.

To receive a copy of the calendar, please contact the Wheatbelt NRM Office on 9670 3100 or email info@wheatbeltnrm.org.au



Discover Sustainable Agricultural Trials in WA!

NRM WA has developed a new website – [AgTrialSites.com](http://www.agtrialsites.com) – to showcase trials happening across WA.

WEBSITE AIMS

- enhanced sharing of knowledge, systems and practices between regional natural resource management organisations
- increased collaboration and knowledge sharing with growers, production and landcare groups and the agricultural R&D industry.

WEBSITE FEATURES

- trial and demonstration sites from across WA
- covering a range of industries including viticulture, horticulture, intensive grazing, broadacre cropping/grazing, agroforestry and pastoral grazing
- a range of trial topics – from sandalwood to saltbush, compost to lime, dung beetle to bluegums – all with production and environmental benefits.
- more sites will be added soon!

FEEDBACK REQUESTED!

- This is a prototype website demonstrating the AgTrialSites concept and we welcome your feedback!
- Please send any comments via the 'Post Reply' box at <http://www.agtrialsites.com/about/>

