

# Volunteers remove feral pigs from Merredin reserve

**A FERAL pig eradication program in a Merredin reserve has been a continued success thanks to the help of Peel Hunting and Conservation volunteers.**

DEC Wheatbelt Wildlife Officer Chris Phoebe said feral pigs had been an ongoing problem in the area, escaping from a private property east of Merredin, mating in the adjacent nature reserve and even wandering into town.

After looking into the problem, Chris and a local shire ranger found the pigs to be in very poor condition and alerted the RSPCA, which promptly took charge of the animals and determined the best course of

action was to humanely kill them.

"I was the only DEC officer with a gun license at the time and after going out a few times to shoot the feral pigs I soon realised that this was going to be a big job," Chris said.

"The danger involved in dealing with feral pigs is a very real one, with some of the animals coming up to waist height – they are very clever and good at evading people."

Chris contacted the President of the Peel Hunting and Conservation Inc, Merv Scully, who was more than happy to help rid the area of the feral animals.

"They couldn't get up here fast enough and after speaking with the property owners to get full access to the surrounding area, they got straight onto the task of hunting," Chris said.

The Peel Hunting and Conservation Inc members are well trained and carry out practical conservation work by targeting pest animals that are impacting on native flora and fauna.

After a lot of reconnaissance and effort over several months the group was successful in ridding the area of the animals and continue to check up on reserves in the area every few months.

"The assistance of the group has been invaluable. They have a strong interest in the conservation of native flora and fauna and were very experienced and professional," Chris said.

"Since then I have happily passed their details onto a contact in Merredin for help with feral cats and onto colleagues in Kalgoorlie should they ever need a similar service."

"Groups like the Peel Hunting and Conservation Inc provide quality services that assist DEC in various conservation activities and are to be commended on their dedicated service."

## Infrared camera technology targets pigs

**DEC has trialled infrared camera technology on a fixed wing aircraft to detect feral pigs in natural bushland in the Warren Region.**

DEC Invasive Species Principal Coordinator John Asher said Paul Rampant of Fire Management Services sourced the infrared camera and provided technical information for the trial.

He said the camera was then fitted to a plane normally used for aerial fox baiting.

"We fitted the camera and flew over 16 feral pig traps between Pemberton and Walpole," John said.

"Unfortunately, someone had tampered with the traps so they were empty but the camera did pick up several animals near the traps that we believe were pigs."

"We could also clearly make out cows on the imaging sensor that were captured while flying over a paddock prior to the survey."

John said the trial was the first step in assessing the effectiveness of using such technology to determine the

numbers of feral animals in a particular region.

He said much more needed to be done to refine the camera's use.

"For example we need to get temperature readings from different animals so we can work out what animal is what, based on its temperate output," he said.

"We also need to experiment with flying at different altitudes, using different focal lengths on the camera and capturing infrared images at different times of the year, when surrounding temperatures differ."

John said the technology also had the potential to detect other feral animals such as camels and deer.

He hoped it could eventually be used during standard fox baiting flights to gather important data on feral animal numbers while keeping costs to a minimum.

"There's lots of potential but there's also a lot more work required to refine the camera's use," he said.

"We'll be looking at collaborating with different groups and sourcing funding to continue the trials and,

hopefully, to use the camera in pest animal survey work."

While similar technology has been used in helicopters, this trial is believed to be the first to use infrared cameras on a fixed wing aircraft.

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