



2023

FERAL PIG FOCUS

Protecting the Scott Coastal Plain



Lower Blackwood Catchment
Land Conservation District Committee



natural resource
management program



Project Overview

Feral Pig Focus - Protecting the Scott Coastal Plain is a 3-year State National Resource Management (State NRM) funded project that is supporting the Lower Blackwood Vertebrate Pest Management Group (LBVPMG) to work collaboratively with landholders, the plantation industry, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation & Attractions (DBCA), the Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development (DPIRD), Traditional Owners and local government to undertake priority feral pig control work to protect the Scott Coastal Plain.



Goals

The goals of this project are:

- To implement a multi-year, strategic and collaborative feral pig control program, including monitoring and evaluation, in the Scott Coastal Plain
- To prevent the spread of feral pigs into the Scott National Park (located at the western end of the Scott Coastal Plain)
- To build capacity in Lower Blackwood landholders to monitor and control feral pigs on their properties
- To raise awareness in the Lower Blackwood community of the issues and impacts of feral pigs

Outcomes

The outcomes of this project are:

- 2 x on-ground field officers and 1 x project officer implementing a three-year, strategic and collaborative feral pig control program, including monitoring and evaluation, in the Scott Coastal Plain. This includes a six-month trapping program each project year.
- Feral pigs controlled over the Scott Coastal Plain
- Demonstrating the effectiveness of the Hoggone Bait boxes in the Scott Coastal Plain
- Establishing feral pig monitoring sites in the Scott Coastal Plain and collecting population and distribution data
- Developing and extending Feral Pig Focus Resources
- Continued use and development of the FeralScan mapping tool to map all feral pig control, sightings and damage

Why the Scott Coastal Plain?

As well as being an important and productive Agricultural area, the Scott Coastal Plain is home to 10 species of threatened flora, 52 species of priority flora, along with the the Scott River Ironstone Threatened Ecological Community. There are 26 fauna species listed as threatened, priority or under protection in the Scott Coastal Plain including the Australasian Bittern (Endangered), the Forest Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo (Vulnerable) and the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo (Endangered).

This project will address the impact of feral pigs on the eastern and central Scott Coastal Plain and work to prevent their encroachment into the western Scott Coastal Plain, in particular the Scott National Park.

The Blackwood River (Lower Reaches) and Tributaries System and the Gingilup-Jasper wetland system are both nationally important wetlands. Native vegetation in the Gingilup Nature Reserve is in excellent condition providing habitat for a diversity of fauna and supporting a number of species of declared rare flora (DRF). On the western side is the Scott National Park which includes a large number of Priority Species and DRF. A large proportion of the Scott National Park is considered to be in pristine condition with no or little evidence of pig populations.

Culturally, the whole of the Blackwood River system (including the Scott River) is a registered Aboriginal heritage site. Therefore, it's imperative that not only

the current feral pig population in the Scott Coastal Plain be controlled, but they also be prevented from encroaching upon the Scott National Park.

The LBVPMG have been operational since 2009, and through the group's control and monitoring work, the LBVPMG have identified the key area of concern is the Scott Coastal Plain which has significant pig populations impacting on areas of high conservation and cultural values.

This project has seen the upscaling of the LBVPMG's current program to work collaboratively to implement a program to not only control the pig population currently harbouring in the region, but also to prevent funnelling of the pig population into the Scott National Park, which to date has not been significantly impacted by feral pig numbers.



2023 Control Season Results

16th November 2022 - 7th July 2023

The 2023 control season activities included trapping and on ground control operations conducted by two field officers from the LBVPMG. This included tracking and ultimately control of feral pigs across the Scott Coastal Plain.

The Scott Coastal Plain can become extremely wet in the winter months in many places, which has an impact on feral pig control activities, with wet conditions limiting access for the field officers to key trapping locations. As a consequence, the project has been designed so that in the drier months of the year a 6-month trapping season will be implemented for each of the project years. The field officers will continue to respond to landholder callouts where access permits during the winter season.

425 pigs
removed this season

800 over the
project so far

Control Results

A total of 425 (204 adult) pigs have been removed from the Scott Coastal Plain in the second control season through a combination of trapping, detection dogs and on ground shooting techniques by the LBVPMG field officers.

Over 800 pigs have been removed over the course of the project. Trapping efforts were able to be more widespread this year, with successful trapping in the western central and eastern precincts of the project area.



Unexpected Challenges

A large-scale event in the area during the control season meant a large volume of unauthorised activity in the Scott Coastal Plain was present for a period of time

This caused numerous disruptions to the field officers pig control activity, including pig movement patterns changing, traps being disturbed, and pig mobs becoming trap shy due to increased human activity.



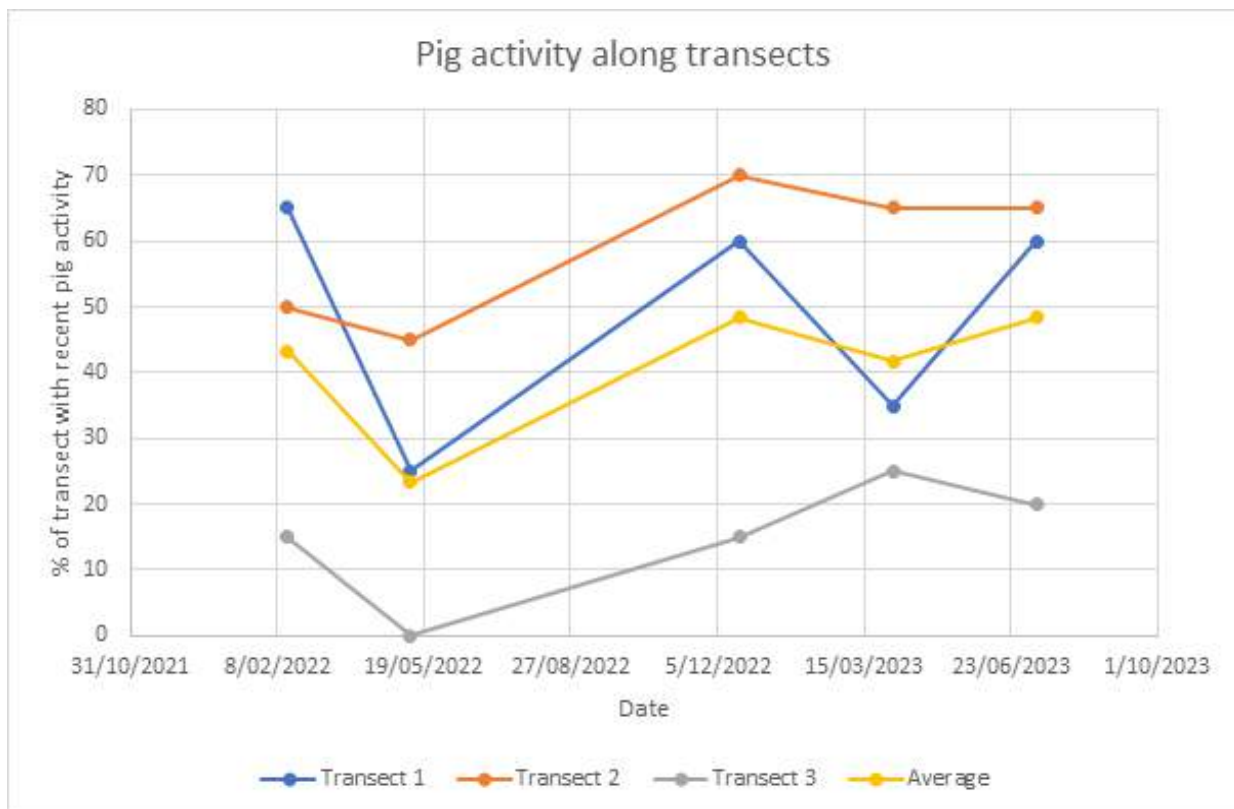
Monitoring Program

Monitoring has continued to detect changes in pig activity or population numbers. The use of fixed monitoring cameras and quarterly visual inspections of strategic transects (Pig Activity Transects and Camera Trapping) has been invaluable to begin to quantify the impacts of feral pigs in the Scott Coastal Plain, and estimate the level of impact control actions are having on feral pigs numbers or activity.

Landholder interviews have been conducted to gather information relating to pig activity and an understanding of public awareness. The ongoing examination of the monitoring data and information gathered from the community and landholders enables the field officers to effectively target, prioritise, and review the areas they focus on. This results in resources being used more efficiently, with overall feral pig impacts minimised.

Pig Activity Transects

This involves three 10 km transects on roads throughout the survey area which are surveyed by vehicle every three months, weather permitting. At every 500m interval on the transect, any fresh pig digs, tracks or other signs of activity on the roadside are recorded to determine the percentage of the transect where feral pig activity has been observed.



Pig activity has not meaningfully decreased over time, though the variations may potentially be due to seasonal and/or natural sampling variations. The periods where pig activity did decrease overall coincides with the trapping seasons, and these declines could be a short-term response to trapping. The first increase in activity was aligned with the 6 month non-trapping period.

While it is inconclusive at this stage, the data shows that continued management, control and community awareness of feral pigs in the SCP is critical, as without these, pig populations in the area would only increase.

Monitoring Program

Camera Trapping

A total of 9 cameras have been installed, 3 across each of the sentinel sites, on pig pads, gaps in fences, or other key 'choke points'. The aim is to record capture rates over time as the number of unique sightings per 100 trap nights. Since the start of the program over 100,000 photos have been analysed from over 3,500 trap nights. Trap nights are defined as one camera monitoring one 24 hour period.

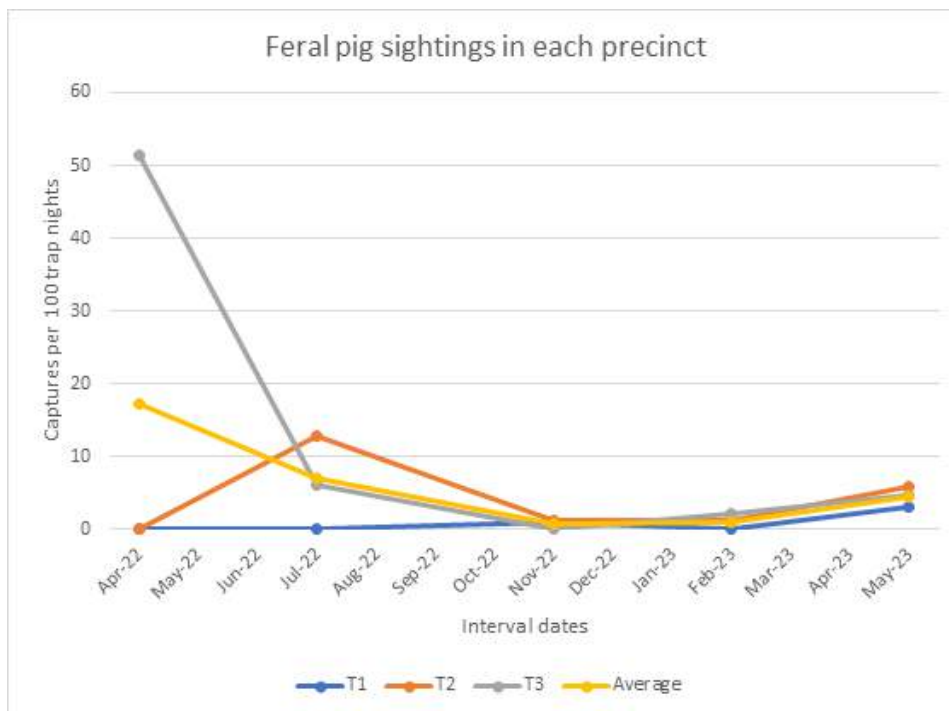
Invasive species captured on camera included pigs, foxes, cats, rabbits, and even deer. Given the number of foxes and cats seen on the camera footage, these species have been included in the analysis from July 2022 onwards.

There has been an overall decline in feral pig activity in the camera monitoring areas, apart from a slight increase in the last monitoring interval. This recent increase is in line with anecdotal evidence of increased community sightings and the presence of pig diggings or activity signs in the SCP. Cat and fox numbers have remained relatively constant, with fox sightings reliably higher than all other feral animal sightings.



Monitoring Program

It should be noted that active trapping was conducted near one of the cameras in precinct 3 (T3) in the first camera trapping interval. This has potentially skewed the initial sighting numbers. Since then, all three transects have remained similar, and there has been fairly consistent activity over time with a minor increase in activity over the last interval which corresponds with data from the Pig Activity Transects.



This seasons control numbers along with preliminary analysis of the monitoring data indicate that while control activity is effective at a local scale there is no significant change in detectible pig activity in the Scott Coastal Plain.

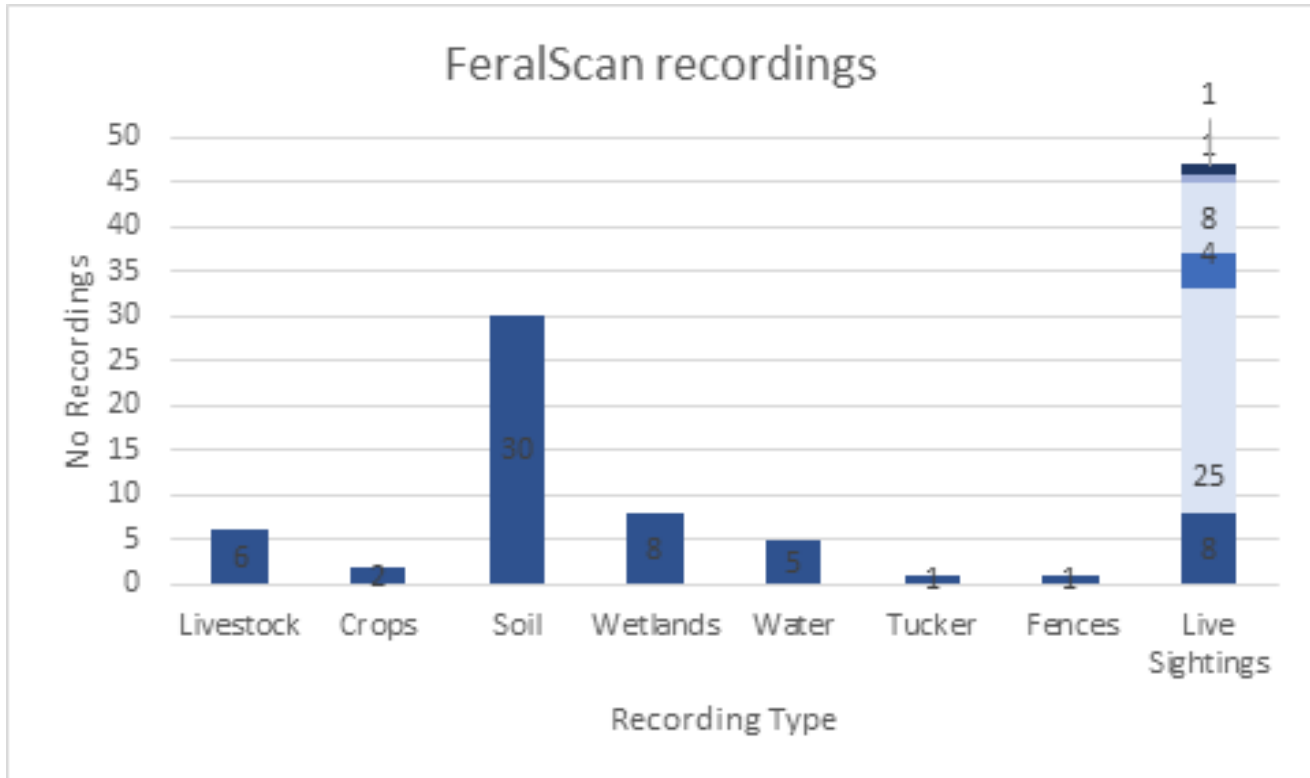
FeralPigScan

FeralPigScan (www.feralscan.org.au) is a free and secure resource for landholders, Landcare groups, pest control professionals, local government and biosecurity organisations to record information about feral pigs in their area. The LBVPMG have been using FeralPigScan to record pig activity sightings and pig control activities for several years now.



FeralPigScan records have tripled this year in the project area due to increased community engagement, with evidence of pig damage to soil being the most commonly reported type.

Monitoring Program



Positive Outcomes

Through the monitoring program, feral pigs in close proximity to a high value ecological site were able to be promptly detected. A coordinated effort between the LBVPMG and with cooperation from DBCA resulted in the activity being effectively controlled before serious environmental damage could occur. This demonstrates the value of the ongoing monitoring program in its ability to protect high value ecological areas including the Scott National Park - a major goal of the program.

Landholder engagement increased in the last control season due to ongoing communication and public awareness raising of the issues present in the Scott Coastal Plain. The steady on-ground activity of the field officers and their response to call outs has resulted in the development of a strong rapport with local landholders.

Community awareness has increased through ongoing communications from the Lower Blackwood LCDC. Wider interest from surrounding landholders has been astounding, showing the extent of pig activity in the southwest, and the lack of coordinated resources to adequately address feral pig activity at a regional level. This demonstrates the importance of longer-term programs that enable a more continuous, coordinated and strategic approach to feral pig management.

Next Steps

The next trapping season is expected to commence in January 2024.

- Until the commencement of the next trapping season, the LBVPMG Field Officers will be focusing their control efforts on the accessible fringe areas of the Scott Coastal Plain where there is increasing reports of pig activity.
- We will continue to conduct landholder surveys to collect further information on pig sightings, pig impacts on land use, pig control activities and hunting.
- We are planning to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the Hoggone bait boxes this trapping season to determine their efficacy, and to provide more information to landholders on the use of Hoggone in the southwest.
- The publication of a podcast and the preparation of a project showcase will be completed over the coming months, which will form part of the Feral Pig Focus Resource Toolkit.
- As more community-based information has been gathered, a gap has been identified in control activities in the wider Lower Blackwood catchment. We are seeking additional sources of funding to increase our control activities during the winter months, when parts of the SCP are not easily accessible. We are also investigating corporate support for ongoing feral pig management in the Lower Blackwood catchment.
- Our monitoring information has identified the issue and threat of other feral animal species in the Scott Coastal Plain, namely foxes and cats. We will continue to explore options of control programs for both these species, and plan to seek additional funding to support this.



Special Thanks

This project is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program



natural resource
management program



A special thanks to our other project supporters:

- Peppermint Estate
- Shire of Nannup
- Collins Bros Orchards for their excellent supply of bait apples!



And a big thankyou to all participating landholders!
We look forward to your continued support and collaboration in tackling this important issue.



And Remember - Report A Pig!

www.lowerblackwood.com.au/projects/feral-pig-control



Lower Blackwood Catchment
Land Conservation District Committee



**For more information and to report a pig sighting,
head to our website:**

www.lowerblackwood.com.au