

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR EASTERN QUOLLS ON NORTH BRUNY ISLAND

PROJECT UPDATE DECEMBER 2022



Eastern Quoll.
Image credit: David Hamilton

QUARTERLY PROGRESS (OCT-DEC)

Our last report for 2022, with only a couple more updates until the project draws to a close in June 2023. The number of cats removed from the project area is slowing down, with alternative approaches being investigated to remove known remaining cats. We have updates on the results of trials as well as information on other trapping methods.

FERAL AND STRAY CAT TRAPPING UPDATE



Feral kitten on baited trap.

A total of 106 cats have been removed from the project area to date. Trapping of cats this quarter has been hampered by high rainfall, making access to some sites difficult. Despite having traps at 50 locations, for a total of almost 1000 trap nights, no cats were caught during this quarter. However, a number of cats continue to be seen on cameras, particularly feral cats around Cape Queen Elizabeth and the seabird rookeries. Bruny Farming will continue trying to trap these cats, while we investigate other methods of cat control we can employ in addition to trapping.

We'd like to extend our thanks to everyone who is carrying out trapping on their property and those who have reported cat sightings. It all helps us to better manage the impacts of cats on Bruny's wildlife and agriculture.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Rates of registration and compliance with the Bruny Island Cat By-Law remains steady, with 74% of cat-owning households fully compliant with the By-Law, and half of the remaining households close to compliant. There is a total of 55 recorded domestic cats on Bruny Island.

In December 2022, cat management signage was put up on the noticeboard at The Neck. By targeting this popular spot, we hope to further spread the message about the Bruny Island By-Law to tourists, occasional visitors and shack owners. This is the same signage that was put at the ferry terminal in April, and highlights what visitors and residents can do to protect the island's unique wildlife from cats.

We congratulate Cyril Scomparin who recently completed his PhD with Menna Jones at the University of Tasmania titled "Ecology and control of feral cats on a large island ecosystem". Many of you will have met Cyril over the last few years as he has been putting out traps and camera traps across Bruny Island. Cyril's research confirmed that feral cat densities at The Neck seabird colony are much higher than those found on mainland Tasmania and at other Bruny Island seabird rookeries such as Whalebone Point. Encouragingly, cat densities at The Neck dropped 5.4-fold between 2017 and 2019 and ongoing trapping is continuing to suppress cat numbers. Another interesting finding was that 84% of feral cats detected as part of camera trap surveys were found in the wet forests of South Bruny, a more unusual habitat for cats.

In December, NRM South project officer Catherine Young held stalls at Lunawanna and Dennes Point markets to chat with market goers about their environmental concerns for Bruny Island. The two topics high on many people's lists (fish farms and tourism) are outside of our remit, but we will continue to advocate for Bruny on these issues where possible. Other concerns that were raised included invasive species (cat, deer, weeds), roadkill, habitat loss and climate change, just to name a few. It is clear that there is a huge interest in environmental issues within the community and we hope to continue working with Bruny Islanders to protect the island's amazing biodiversity. If you would like to talk further, please get in touch cyoung@nrmsouth.org.au



NRM South community market stalls

RESEARCH RESULTS

COMPLETION OF CURIOSITY BAITING TRIAL

A large part of the Bruny cats project has included trialling new and emerging techniques for feral cat control that can be added to our toolbox alongside traditional trapping techniques. This research has been conducted by Biosecurity Tasmania and has included non-lethal trials of thermal shooting and Felixer grooming traps. Most recently Biosecurity Tasmania conducted a non-lethal trial of Curiosity® baits.

These baits consist of a small hard plastic pellet encased inside a meat sausage. Typically, the pellet would contain 80 mg of the toxin PAPP (para-aminopropiophenone), however in this non-lethal trial the pellets contained Rhodamine B. This is a non-toxic fluorescing dye that shows up under ultra-violet light in the whiskers of animals that consume the baits.

The aim of this trial was to determine;

- 1) if cats would take and eat the baits; and
- 2) if quolls would take and eat the baits.

Previous trials with captive eastern quolls have had mixed results, with some individuals consuming the sausage and pellet and others eating only the sausage and leaving the pellet behind.

For this trial, 50 baits were placed in the bush for 14 days, with a camera trap on each bait. Most of the baits picked up by animals were taken away from the view of the camera so we cannot confirm if the pellets were eaten. However, none of the quolls trapped after baiting had traces of the Rhodamine B marker in their whiskers. Regardless of whether they were eaten, 70% of baits were picked up by quolls, most within five days.

This means that the baits were then unavailable for cats and therefore this form of baiting is not considered to be a viable option for feral cat control on Bruny Island. Although baiting of this kind has been shown to be a successful control method for feral cats in other parts of Australia, there are no one size fits all solutions. These types of trials are important for assessing the impact of each control method for the Bruny Island ecosystem.



Cat with bait



Quoll near trap

NEXT PHASE OF FELIXER GROOMING TRAPS TRIAL

Following on from the success of the Felixer grooming trap non-lethal trials on Bruny Island, we hope to continue exploring the use of these devices as a method for controlling feral cats. Felixers use a series of sensor beams and a computer algorithm to detect animals and distinguish cats from other non-target species (e.g. quolls, possums, wallabies). When a cat is detected, the Felixer sprays a dose of toxin onto the coat of the cat which it later ingests through grooming. The previous trials found that of the 1152 animals detected by the camera, only the cats were identified as targets, but in this trial no toxin was deployed. Following on from the success of this trial, permits for a deploying the Felixers in 'lethal mode' are currently being explored.

HOW YOU CAN HELP



- Record all sightings of feral cats on Bruny Island via FeralCatScan. Visit the [website](#) or download the free smart phone App or contact Kingborough Council ph: 6211 8200 / kc@kingborough.tas.gov.au to report a cat sighting.
- Get assistance to trap stray or feral cats on your property. Contact Kingborough Council's Cat Management Officer, on 03 6211 8200 or kallan@kingborough.tas.gov.au for information. Where appropriate stray cats are transferred to Ten Lives Cat Centre for rehoming.
- Encourage cat owners to protect their cat, along with local wildlife and livestock by complying with the Bruny Island Cat By-Law.
- Find out more about the project [here](#), or contact NRM South on 0447 266 527.



Travelling to Bruny this summer? Keep an eye out for our sign at the Kettering terminal!

Project partners



Supporting organisations



This project is supported by NRM South through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. It is delivered in partnership with Bruny Farming, Biosecurity Tasmania, Kingborough Council, Ten Lives Cat Centre, the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Cooperation and with support from the weetaoona Aboriginal Cooperation.

