



Feral Goats

Capra hircus



Photograph by Allan Gardner

A feral goat is any goat which is not suitably identified and effectively contained.

Goats were first liberated in New Zealand by Captain Cook in the early 1770s. More were introduced in attempts to establish a food source, set up a fibre industry and to control weeds. Many domestic goats escaped and boosted a growing feral population, and by the 1930s goats had become a major forest pest and the Government had begun control campaigns.

Today feral goats, whether deliberately or accidentally liberated, are still a major pest. Goats are notoriously difficult to fence in, and farms next to forests provide a constant source of reinvasion.

Goats live in herds which can number anywhere up to several hundred. A goat population can double in size approximately every two years. Females,

known as nannies, begin breeding as early as six months of age, and twins are common.

Goats live in a great variety of habitats from dense native forest to open or semi open grasslands. They can survive where other animals might well starve to death. Goats browse the forest floor, destroying regenerating seedlings and opening up the forest so possums can move through it more easily. The possums then destroy the forest canopy and the combination of goats and possums could eventually cause the entire forest to collapse. On steeper country, close and destructive cropping by goats denudes the soil, with erosion the inevitable result.

Control Methods

Shooting is the most common method of control, though shooting to control should not be confused with recreational hunting. Recreational hunting may help to keep goat numbers down, but more often than not it only keeps them dispersed and difficult to control.

Where goats are living in open or semi-open country the shooter should position himself to cover all escape routes and if possible force them into an area where they can be easily seen and shot.

The herd will usually have a leader, normally an old nanny, and by shooting this leader first and then any others which appear to be leading, the herd will become confused and may not move as far or as fast. If the coloured animals are shot first the remaining white goats are much easier to see. In heavy cover such as native bush, goats can be stalked to within quite close range. Often their smell or



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their bleating will betray their location. Always stalk upwind towards goats as they have an acute sense of smell. They also have very good eyesight, which should be taken into account especially in more open country.

Shooting should not be attempted unless the shooter is in a good position to shoot most if not all of the herd, as the missed goats will become much harder to shoot in the future. When numbers are low, professional goat cullers may use dogs to find goats. These dogs need to be suitably trained and stockproof.

Any of the common centre fire rifle calibres will kill goats with well placed shots, though the smaller high velocity calibres such as .222, .223, and .243 are probably the most practicable due to their lower noise, recoil and cost. They will humanely kill goats if hit in the chest or shoulder area.

Wild Goat Management Strategy

Under the Northland Regional Council's Pest Management Strategy the Regional Council will work with the Department of Conservation to control goats. Assistance will be provided to land owners where goats are causing significant loss of production or where significant environmental damage is occurring.

The objective of the strategy is to reduce feral goat populations to a level where there is no significant loss to primary production or significant environmental damage, and at this low level land owners should be able to maintain goats without Regional Council assistance.

Important

Under the Regional Council Pest Management Strategy no person shall keep goats unless they are effectively fenced or contained and suitably branded or clearly marked with visible identification. The owners of goats which have escaped should advise the Northland Regional Council immediately. After the owner has been given seven days to recover the animals the Council may capture or destroy them and charge any costs to the owner.



Photograph by Allan Gardiner

Pine tree damaged by feral goats

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