

Dogs used to sniff out Arnhem Land's feral cats

In the first trial of its kind in the Northern Territory, researchers funded by the National Environmental Research Program (NERP) have been using the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's specially trained dogs to track the movements of feral cats in Arnhem Land.



Credit: Terry Mahney

During a 12-day field trip around the Manmoyi and Kamarrkawan outstations near Maningrida, researchers from the NT Government, Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) and Warddeken Indigenous rangers followed the expert noses of [springer spaniel Sally](#) and catahoula hound Brangul.

NT Government Director of Terrestrial Ecosystems Graeme Gillespie said the team was then able to capture cats and fit them with radio-transmitting collars, allowing the team to monitor their movements.

‘Let there be no mistake – feral cats are a huge problem and very widespread. It’s a situation that requires immediate action because it could lead to massive loss of biodiversity across northern Australia,’ Dr Gillespie said.

‘Across the continent it’s estimated that there are 15 million feral cats killing 75 million native animals every night, so it’s very important that we get a better understanding of their hunting patterns and the impact they’re having.

‘Many Australian mammals have a relatively low reproduction rate which makes them particularly susceptible to population crashes as cat numbers increase.

‘Despite the prevalence of cats in the landscape, tracking and studying them is much harder than you’d think. They’re

very secretive, solitary animals and mostly nocturnal, and very hard to trap. We know from stomach content analysis that cats are eating a staggering number and variety of animals.'

AWC's Hugh McGregor has been using Sally and Brangul for his feral cat research in the Kimberley, with great success.

'These specially trained dogs have allowed us to catch more cats than we could have using traditional trapping techniques. On this trip, they helped us find two cats which are now being tracked,' he said.

Every couple of weeks until Christmas, the cats will be located by the rangers and NT government scientists, and the GPS coordinates of their movements wirelessly downloaded.

'All this research activity is a coordinated effort to better understand feral cats and their impact on native mammals, and it is really highlighting to us the critical role Indigenous Protected Areas can play in protecting our biodiversity,' Dr Gillespie said.

Source: AWC

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