Landholder Guide for Monitoring and Reporting Feral Deer

THE NORTHERN RIVERS IS ON
FERAL DEER ALERT

This guide will help you to identify if feral deer are present or moving through your property and how to report them.

Introduction

Feral deer are fast becoming Australia's worst emerging vertebrate pest problem. As deer populations expand, they are invading new areas. There are 6 species of introduced feral deer throughout states and territories of Australia.

The Northern Rivers is fortunate enough to be one of the last remaining havens on the eastern seaboard of Australia not to have established feral deer populations.

Recent monitoring has shown that feral deer are starting to move into the Northern Rivers from surrounding regions (Southeast Queensland, the Northern Tablelands and the Central Coast). Once established in an area, feral deer are a major cause of vehicle accidents, reduce the ability of farmers to earn a living from the land, and damage the natural environment.

When you first see a deer it can be a novelty, but feral deer breed quickly and become very difficult to manage as their populations increase. As a landholder in the Northern Rivers, you can play an important part in stopping feral deer from establishing, by keeping an eye out for them on your property.

As feral deer have only just started moving into the Northern Rivers we still have an opportunity to prevent them from establishing, but we need to act now! As a landholder, if you don't know the difference between Rusa, Red or Fallow Deer, don't stress. The actual species does not matter too much, as long as you know that it is a deer.

Step 1 Do an inspection for feral deer on your property

The best place to start your search for signs of deer on your property is where multiple stock trails and/or wildlife tracks intersect, as well as areas with resources, such as food and water.

Your property inspection should look for:

- Wallows, particularly at the head of dams or along creeks. Deer tracks around the edges will indicate the number of deer visiting.
- Broken or damaged fences. There may be hair caught where they push through.
- Shredded bark and ring barking on trees and broken saplings from deer rubbing their antlers.
- Deer scats and tracks. Deer trails are often quite pronounced due to the impacts of their hard hooves.
- Plant browsing by deer can lead to hedging of plants. Deer browse lines on vegetation are at a height other animals (e.g. cows and wallabies) could not reach (approximately 1.5–2m high).

As feral deer are still in the early stages of establishing in the region, most landholders will not have seen a deer on their property yet.

Figure 1 Deer scats, tracks, damage

The benefit of collecting informal records of deer on your property will show seasonal and annual fluctuations in the sizes and freshness of scat piles, the number of tree rubs or the signs of plant damage, and will indicate whether deer numbers are increasing or decreasing.

Figure 2 An example of habitat areas to inspect for signs of deer: Multiple tracks and trails intersecting (◯), dams and springs – drinking water and wallowing (◯) and priority locations – bedding, sunning and lekking (gathering of males during the rut) (◯).

Step 2 If possible, install one or two trail cameras on your property

Due to the size, structure and body temperature of feral deer, trail cameras (example left) are a very effective monitoring tool. These cameras are triggered by a combination of heat and movement.

Mount the camera 1 metre above ground level. Have the camera facing your target area so that it can focus on the deer and capture quality images. You should angle your camera at approximately 25° down and away from the sun, favourably facing north or south (this keeps the sun away from the lens and maximises image readability).

Camera settings used will depend on what information you are after and the type of camera you have.

As all trail cameras are slightly different to format, it is important to follow the setup instructions in the manual that comes with the camera.

Suggested settings are as follows:

Field	Setting
Trigger	Motion (photo)
Sensitivity	High
Pictures / trigger	3-5
Picture interval	Rapid fire
Quiet time	No delay

Choosing a location

If possible, set up the camera in a location where you have found signs of deer.

If you have not yet found any signs of deer on your property, set your camera up in areas of habitat preferred by deer such as intersecting trails and/or water bodies (see figure 2).

The camera should have a clear viewing area with a wide angle of view, where it will not be triggered by plant movement. Remove or trim back vegetation within the detection zone to minimise false triggers.

Camera installation

Cameras can be mounted on a post, tree or fence dropper. Avoid attaching the camera to a tree that deer or cattle are rubbing on or a tree that native animals (like possums) climb, to reduce the risk of the camera being bumped.

A wooden stake, steel post or dropper can be put into the ground 6 metres from the camera in the centre of the field of view to provide a reference point for deer height and distance from the camera.

Once installed and set up is complete, turn the camera on and arm the camera. Leave the camera in place for as long as possible, at least 2 weeks. It is recommended you check the batteries and change the SD card regularly.
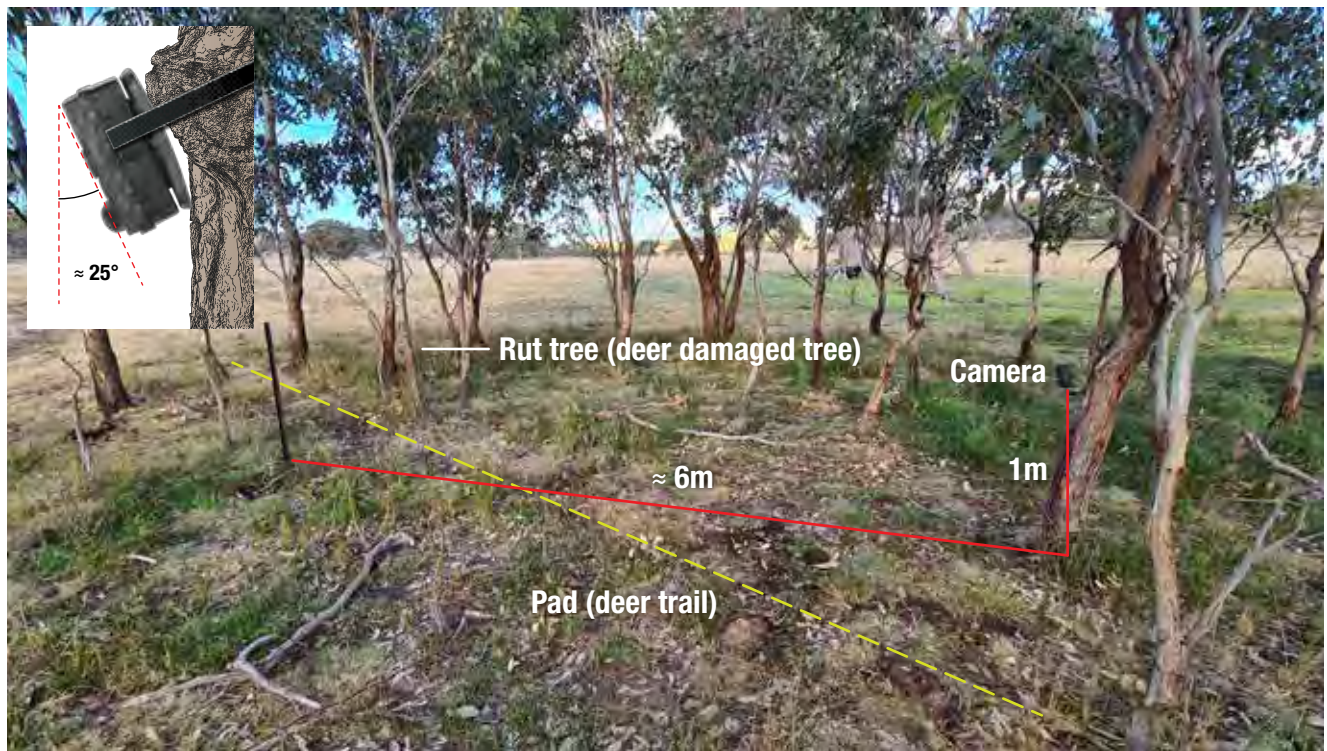

Figure 3 An example of a camera installation. This location was selected due to its proximity to a tree damaged by deer. Inset: Cameras should be angled at approximately 25° down and away from the sun, favourably facing north or south.

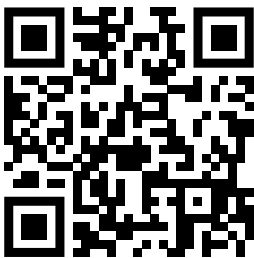# Reporting feral deer using DeerScan

The Northern Rivers Feral Deer Alert program recommends reporting deer sightings, damage, and animal control successes through the FeralScan (DeerScan) website or smartphone app.

Deer reports will help track deer movements through the landscape. Increased data and knowledge of deer presence in the area will help to identify priority areas for deer control and help prevent feral deer establishing in the Northern Rivers.

How to get started

The first step is recording locations where deer are seen – or heard. It's easy. Simply download the FeralScan app or visit www.deerscan.org.au, set up an account and report your deer sightings, damage and even control.
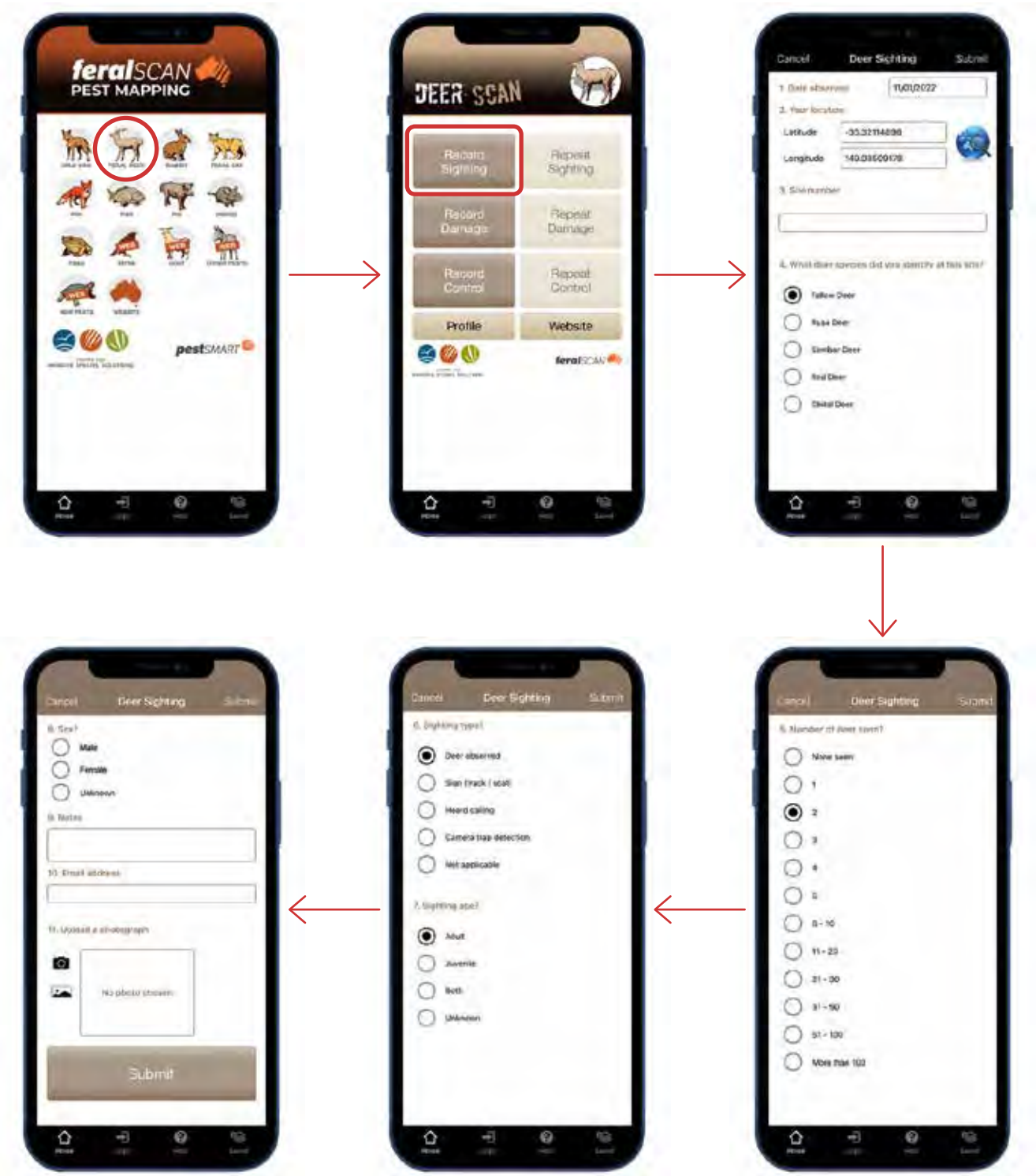
Frequent recorded sightings will build a clearer picture of deer activity in the Northern Rivers region.

Protecting landholder privacy

Security settings on FeralScan ensure that public users of the website and app cannot view deer locations at property level. This measure helps to protect private landholders from hunters viewing deer records and illegally accessing private land.

How to use the FeralScan app to record feral deer

More information

If you are interested in learning more about the different types of deer in the Northern Rivers, visit feraldeeralert.com.au and feralscan.org.au

You can also request a feral deer ID pocket guide from the Deer Project Officer. Contact Rachel Hughes on 02 6670 2400 or email tsc@tweed.nsw.gov.au

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