

Feral goats were first introduced into this country by whalers and sealers in the nineteenth century. They were later used for brush weed control and more recently for cross-breeding by the mohair industry during the 1980's. Goats are notoriously difficult to contain with fencing and as early as 1915 goat control began. In 1924 the Government began funding goat control to protect conservation values, today goat control is an ongoing issue for landowners and the Department of Conservation. Feral goats can be found through most of the Bay of Plenty region, with the highest infestations in the eastern Bay of Plenty catchments.

Damage and impacts

Goats are well adapted to steep, rocky terrain that other animals cannot easily reach, they consume a wide variety of vegetation including plants such as ngaio and tutu which are poisonous to most other animals. Continued goat browsing of understory shrubs and regenerating trees in native forests will halt succession and alter forest structure; this also creates a more favourable habitat for other pests such as possums.

By damaging natural vegetation cover and soil conservation plantings, goats contribute to erosion on steeper classes of land. Goats particularly favour open slip faces in steep country and so inhibit revegetation in erosion prone sites. They can also severely damage exotic forestry by browsing young trees, and by stripping bark from older trees.



Photo: Landcare Research

Status as a pest animal in the Bay of Plenty

Under Bay of Plenty Regional Councils Regional Pest Management Plan, Feral goats are classed as a Containment Pest.

This means the council will provide advice and support for work towards the reduction in distribution and density of feral goats within the Region. Ultimately it is the landowners responsibility to control goats on their land.

What is a Feral goat?

Under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977, a feral goat is any goat that is not:

- (a) held behind effective fences or otherwise constrained; and
- (b) identified in accordance with a recognised identification system (as described under the Animal Identification Act 1993).

Any feral goat that invades a property may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of by the landowner. Non-feral (tagged) goats that trespass may be dealt with under the Impounding Act 1955. For further information contact your local district council. All care should be taken to avoid such circumstances through responsible animal husbandry.

Feral goat control

Shooting

Goats are intelligent animals and ineffective, indiscriminate shooting will only make future control more difficult. It is strongly recommended that only experienced hunters carry out goat control work.

Sunny faces in areas of steep terrain and scrub (favoured goat habitat) can be effectively covered by helicopter, and aerial shooting is often a cost-effective control option. Contact a Bay of Plenty Regional Council Land

Management Officer for specific recommendations. Professional hunters using trained goat dogs are recommended for removing goats from heavily forested areas, this is also an excellent follow-up to aerial shooting. While this is a very effective method of control, it is labour intensive and can be expensive.

Small numbers of goats can be controlled by landowners who are proficient hunters. Most centrefire, magazine fed rifles are suitable, particularly .222 and .223 calibres. In bush or scrub, shotguns loaded with buckshot are effective. Firearms must be well maintained and the operator must be familiar with their use. Operators must hold a current firearms licence and know the Firearms Safety code.

Points to consider for goat shooting operations:

- **Weather** - In heavy rain goats will seek shelter. In windy conditions they will avoid exposed places. In sunny, hot weather they may seek shade during the middle of the day.
- **Time of the day** - Goats are most active at dawn and late afternoon when they will generally be feeding. During the middle of the day they spend much of their time resting.
- **Escape routes** - When goats are disturbed they will often use a predetermined escape route, which may be a particular track or a weak section of fence.
- **Pasture** - Paddocks closed up for deferred grazing will draw goats from heavy cover.
- **Terrain** - Goats prefer dry, sheltered areas with a warm, sunny aspect. Typical resting areas are high rocky benches with a good view that allow the animals to see any approaching danger.

Always hunt into the wind, and endeavour to get between goats and their line of escape. When you locate a mob of goats, observe the group for a while. There will be one particular animal that is more alert and dominant than the others. This animal is usually a mature nanny and should be the first target.

When shooting goats always aim for central chest/shoulder area and use a rest if possible. Shoot the dominant and mature animals first, or the leading animal if goats are escaping. Imitating a goat call may stop a running animal or attract unseen goats. Once fleeing goats reach cover they often stop a short distance into the cover. By approaching quietly you can often get another shot at them.

Note that landowners are required under the Dog Control and Hydatids Act 1982 to ensure that the carcasses of any goats killed during the course of goat control operations are either buried or destroyed.

Fencing

The best goat proof fence is a netting deer fence that is well secured at ground level. The minimum recommended requirements for a goat proof fence are:

- Standard nine wire high tensile fence, five posts/20 m.
- Maximum spacing between battens of 1 m.
- Electrified wires at 30 cm, 60 cm and 120 cm.
- Blocked access on post stays.

Fencing must be very tight, and well maintained. Goat farmers must be vigilant particularly if stock numbers are high or feed is in short supply.

How we can help

Bay of Plenty Regional Council Land Management Officers are available to offer advice on goat control and will assist in identifying goat damage if required.

For more information contact a Bay of Plenty Regional Council Land Management Officer.



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