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You can help keep Western Australia free of pest animals

Marion Massam

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**YOU CAN
HELP KEEP
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA
FREE OF
PEST
ANIMALS**



**FREE CALL 1800 084 881
TO REPORT SUSPECT PEST ANIMALS**

YOU CAN HELP KEEP WESTERN AUSTRALIA FREE OF PEST ANIMALS

By Marion Massam, Vertebrate Pest Research Section, Forreestfield.

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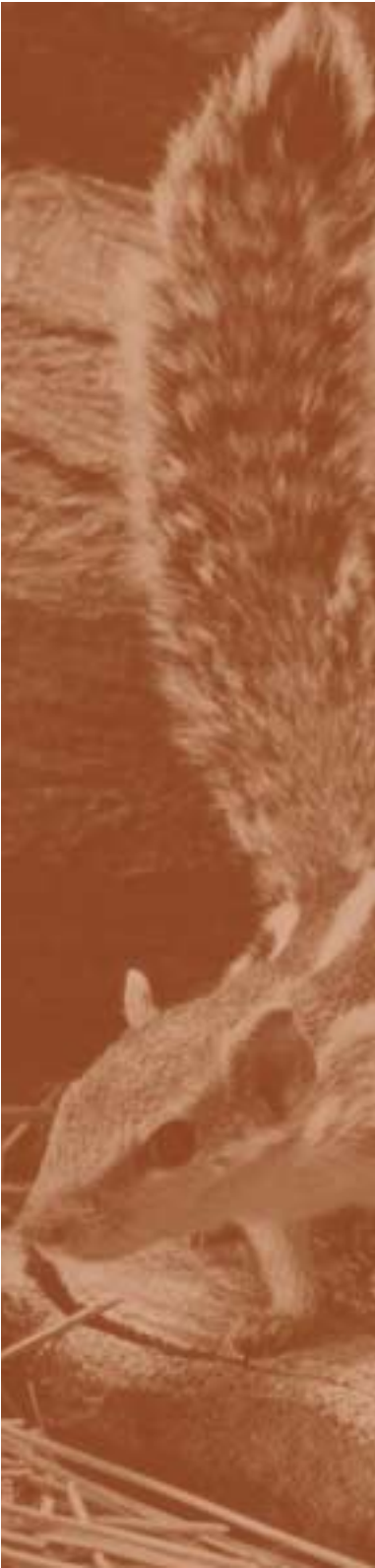
Quite apart from their economic and environmental impacts, the sheer nuisance value that certain pest animals can create for people - even in the shelter of our own backyards - is reason enough to want to keep them out of Western Australia.

Currently our State is free from numerous pest animals that, interstate or overseas, damage crops, spread exotic diseases, endanger the survival of native animals and disturb habitats.

You can help in maintaining this freedom, by being on the lookout for the animals featured on the following pages. As yet, they are either absent from Western Australia or confined to small areas. If they were to become widely established, our agricultural industry, natural habitats and possibly even our lifestyles and health would be seriously affected.



Over the years, animals that could threaten Western Australia in such ways have frequently entered the State, accidentally via ships, boats and vehicles or deliberately via illegal importation. However, most of these invasions were successfully eradicated or contained, primarily because they were detected soon after the animals arrived.



If pest animals are found quickly - which could well rely on vigilant members of the public reporting sightings - then immediate steps can be taken to control them while their numbers are still low. Swift action increases the chance of successful eradication and limits the costs of control. The benefit is considerable savings to individual producers and industry, with flow-on benefits to the rest of the community.

As well as the pests mentioned in this bulletin, many other animals that are sometimes kept as pets have the potential to become pests and should be reported if they are seen in the wild. A good example is the Indian ringneck parrot. There are also serious pests that cannot be legally kept in Western Australia, such as reptiles introduced from other countries. These too should be reported if seen in cages, on someone's property or in the wild.

See the notes at the end of this bulletin to find out how you, personally, can help in discovering pest species, and the guidelines you should follow if you want to import animals.

Male blackbird (Photo: Tom & Pam Gardner).



Female blackbird
(Photo: Brian Chudleigh).



Blackbird

(Turdus merula)

Prohibited in Western Australia; present in eastern Australia

Blackbirds are about 25-26cm long and are roughly the size of a mudlark or magpie-lark, but with shorter legs and a longish tail. Often seen walking or loping across the ground, blackbirds may be found in gardens, orchards, thickets, the understorey of wetter woodlands and forests, and along timbered watercourses. A blackbird was last destroyed in Western Australia in 1996, north of Albany. Overseas, blackbirds damage many soft fruits, spread weeds including blackberry, and compete with native birds. Damage to the soft fruit industry could result in higher prices for consumers.

Cane toad.



Did you know...?

Cane toads can even intrude on your holidays. At Christmas 2004 one was found in a caravan park at Kununurra, and in early 2005 one arrived in suburban Perth, having hidden in a shoe which the owner innocently packed in a suitcase before flying home from Queensland.

The accidental importation of a cane toad or the killing of a native frog thought to be a cane toad is no one's fault and reports of such incidents are treated as opportunities to learn about how to avoid them happening again so the State is better protected.

Cane Toad

(Bufo marinus)

Prohibited in Western Australia; present in eastern and northern Australia

Cane toads are typically about 10-15cm long and have rough, warty skin, visible, rounded eardrums and toes that are not enlarged at the ends. Behind the ears are large, very obvious glands studded with pores through which milky looking poison is exuded. Found in Western Australia on a number of occasions, cane toads are often accidentally transported across the State border in goods shipments, or they may hitch a ride in vehicles, camping gear or luggage. Considered to be one of the world's 100 worst invasive species, cane toads poison native amphibians, reptiles and mammals, and eat beneficial insects such as dung beetles. Because the toads are so poisonous, dogs and cats which mouth or bite them may die without proper veterinary care.

House Crow

(*Corvus splendens*)

Prohibited in Western Australia; not yet present in Australia

House crows are about 43cm long, slightly smaller than the common Australian 'crows' (which are more correctly called Australian ravens), and have black plumage, a paler collar, upper back and breast, and black eyes - whereas adult Australian 'crows' have white eyes. The house crow's voice is a short, repeated caw, very different to the long, drawn-out aah-aah-aaaaahhhh of the common native 'crow' (or raven) in the south-west. House crows travel to Western Australia by ship from south-east Asia and may be found near sea ports - indeed, one was destroyed at Port Hedland in 2003. Overseas they compete with native animals, foul buildings, hide food in gutters - blocking the drainage and creating breeding places for mosquitoes - and spread human diseases. Birds arriving on ships could also carry exotic diseases. House crows damage horticultural and cereal crops, as well as taking the eggs and chicks of poultry - and any of these activities could have a flow-on effect for consumers of domestic produce.

Did you know...?

House crows have a repertoire of crimes, judging from overseas reports. At resorts in Africa they have stolen people's jewellery, and, in India, power blackouts resulted when the heavy nests - in which crows often weave wire - fell onto cables and caused short-circuiting.



House crow (Photo: Morten Strange).



Common Myna

(Acridotheres tristis)

Prohibited in Western Australia; present in eastern Australia

Common mynas are 23-25cm long, slightly smaller than red wattlebirds, and have cocoa-brown bodies, glossy black heads and throats, and large white wing patches that are very obvious when they fly. All these features help distinguish them from the native yellow-throated myna which is a more olive-yellow colour. Common mynas spend a lot of time feeding on the ground. Although they are most likely to occur in Western Australia near sea ports - having arrived by ship from elsewhere in Australia or from south-east Asia - one bird was destroyed further inland, in the Perth suburb of Guildford, in 2004. They are considered to be one of the world's 100 worst invasive species. Overseas and interstate they compete with native species, damage horticultural and cereal crops and may spread weed seeds. Mynas can also become a nuisance by nesting in building cavities, causing noise at roosting sites, and transmitting irritating bird mites.

*Common myna
(Photo: Berris Stokes).*

Did you know...?

*Mites from common mynas' nests can become annoying when they invade houses and offices, and one such mite (*Ornithonyssus bursa*) causes dermatitis in people. Common mynas boldly intrude on human living spaces, even stealing food from hotel tables.*

Tree sparrow
(Photo: Morten Strange).



House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and Tree Sparrow

(*Passer montanus*)



*Male (left) and female (right)
house sparrows.*

Prohibited in Western Australia; present in eastern Australia

House sparrows are 14-16cm long, tree sparrows are 13-15cm long, and both are slightly smaller than singing honeyeaters. Both species of sparrow have wedge-shaped, finch-like bills. They hop across the ground and are usually seen in human settlements. In Western Australia they have been found feeding at bird cages, seed works, a poultry farm and a shopping centre. Tree sparrows are regularly found at or near sea ports, having arrived by ship from south-east Asia. About 60 were removed from Port Hedland in 2002. A population of about 70 house sparrows was removed from Wanneroo in the early 1990s. Sparrows may compete with native birds, and they damage many cereal and fruit crops. Their droppings spoil crops, animal feed and stored grain as well as food in places where people eat. Nests can block gutters and downpipes.

Did you know...?

Sparrows arriving by ship could carry exotic diseases, and within Australia they can transmit viral diseases such as salmonella. Their capacity to carry human diseases is all the more concerning given their liking for cafes, where they have an assured supply of crumbs.



Indian palm squirrel.

Indian Palm Squirrel

(Funambulus pennanti)

Contained to areas around Perth Zoo; not present in eastern Australia

Indian palm squirrels are 25-27cm long, roughly the size of a rat, with obvious stripes along their backs and sides, and a long bushy tail. They dart rapidly across the ground and climb with great agility, often nesting in palm trees and in or close to houses and gardens. As they are known to eat birds' eggs, they could reduce the numbers of native birds nesting in parks and gardens. Palm squirrels that are found any distance from the areas around Perth Zoo are removed; a small colony was removed from Willagee in 2002-03. They may damage garden plants and horticultural crops by eating fruits and buds. They also scavenge for waste food and have been seen stealing school students' sandwiches. Palm squirrels may also damage electrical wiring, creating a fire risk.

Did you know...?

At Perth Zoo, Indian palm squirrels get into many enclosures and steal food intended for the other animals, so that zoo staff have to provide more food than they would do otherwise. There is a possibility that palm squirrels could spread diseases to the captive animals.

Adult starlings showing how birds can appear either spotted (left) or just glossy black (right).



Juvenile starling.



Starling

(Sturnus vulgaris)

**Prohibited in Western Australia;
present in eastern Australia**

Starlings are about 21cm long, twice the size of welcome swallows and stockier, with fine, pointed beaks and short tails. They are usually seen in flocks that, in flight, turn quickly in a tight group. Starlings move across the ground by waddling, not hopping, and prefer feeding in open grassland, although they are found in many habitats from urban to rural. While found in some locations in the south-east of the State, they could turn up anywhere in Western Australia. Small populations are present around Esperance, but a lone bird was found at a mine near Fitzroy Crossing in 1998. Starlings are considered to be one of the world's 100 worst invasive species. They spread weed seeds, compete with native species and pose a substantial disease threat. In Australia, they are major pests of fruit crops and affect intensive cattle, pig, and poultry production by consuming their feed. Where starlings are present in large numbers, farmers must monitor their stock troughs very regularly because the birds drink and bathe there until all the water is gone.

Did you know...?

Starlings foul buildings, defoliate trees and annoy people with their noise. If the droppings and noise of a few birds seem trivial matters to you, imagine them multiplied - in the northern hemisphere, some urban starling roosts contain more than one million birds.

Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo

(Cacatua galerita)

Contained to small feral groups near Perth and Pinjarra; prohibited elsewhere in the south-west; native to the Kimberley and eastern Australia

Sulphur-crested cockatoos are 44-51cm long, and white with a long, sulphur-yellow, forward-curving crest. They would almost certainly compete with native and endangered species such as red-tailed and white-tailed black cockatoos. In eastern Australia sulphur-crested cockatoos damage many horticultural and broadacre crops, young tree plantations, mature trees, and grassed areas such as golf courses and ovals. Large flocks may also create a noise nuisance.

Did you know...?

In Victoria, the damage that sulphur-crested cockatoos and certain other birds do to the soft timbers of houses is estimated to cost up to \$25,000 per house to repair, and some insurance policies refuse to cover such damage.



Sulphur-crested cockatoo.

Rainbow lorikeet
(Photo: Bird Observers
Club of Australia).



Did you know...?

More than 1000 rainbow lorikeets roost in trees flanking Perth Domestic Airport. A population of this size causes excessive noise and the fouling of buildings and parked cars. It also poses a potential threat in the form of aircraft bird-strike.

Rainbow Lorikeet

(Trichoglossus haematodus)

Contained to the Perth metro area; prohibited elsewhere in the south-west; native to the Kimberley and eastern Australia

Rainbow lorikeets are 25-32cm long, and brightly coloured. They have a swift direct flight with rapid whirring wing beats and display flashes of dark green and bright red. Rainbow lorikeets screech continuously while in flight and when at food sources or roost sites. As a result of aviary escapes they are now common in the wild in suburban Perth, where they may compete with native species. In other states rainbow lorikeets are pests of fruit crops. In Western Australia, complaints about their noise and droppings are becoming common, as are reports of them damaging backyard fruit crops and even roses. They are now beginning to damage commercial fruit crops.



How you can help

You can greatly assist in our efforts to keep pests out of Western Australia by keeping an eye open for exotic animals and anything that looks suspicious or out of the ordinary. Be especially vigilant at road freight terminals and at sea ports, because many pests, particularly birds, hitch rides on ships, boats and vehicles. Dirty containers and cargo, and bee swarms near such items, are also a cause for concern. Anyone seeing anything unusual should contact the nearest office of the Department of Agriculture, or telephone Freecall 1800 084 881.

When importing animals into the State

In order to protect our State from invasion by pest species, the Western Australia Department of Agriculture conducts inspections of incoming animals at airports and border check-points. If you intend to import animals, arrange to do so during business hours.

Would you like to know more?

For general information or to report suspected pest animals:

- contact the nearest office of the Department of Agriculture, or telephone Freecall 1800 084 881, or
- visit www.agric.wa.gov.au and type the name of the animal or bird into the search facility and click 'go' or go to 'Importing and Keeping Introduced Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Amphibians in Western Australia'.

For further information about importing animals and birds, visit the website and go to 'Frequently Asked Questions: Animal Importations'.

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