

# Deer Management in Nillumbik



Image Credit: FYXO

## Feral Deer in your area

Deer are an introduced species in Australia. Six feral deer species have established wild populations in Australia, with the distribution and abundance of some species increasing in Victoria. The main feral deer species you're likely to encounter are Sambar, Fallow and Red deer.



**Sambar Stag**

Sambar are large (110-270kg) and live in family groups



**Sambar Hind**



**Red Deer Stag**

Red Deer are medium (90-160kg), living in single sex groups



**Red Deer Hind**



**Fallow Deer Stag**

Fallow are smaller (35-90Kg), usually found in herds



**Fallow Deer Hind**

Source: Game Management Authority

## Deer Harbour

Deer are found in bushland and open forest where there is access to pasture that provides food, water and shelter. This is also found in urban fringe areas and along corridors of bush and creek lines. Deer will follow these corridors, adapting to living near people and their animals.

The outer eastern and northern fringes of Melbourne are part of the geographical range of Sambar, Fallow and Red deer.

## Deer Behaviour

Deer display territorial behaviour (actively protecting their patch), and have dominance hierarchies in their groups. They can exhibit aggressive behaviour particularly the larger deer to humans and livestock including horses.

They have increased in both distribution and density across Victoria, especially since the mid-1990s.

In this area deer occur on land owned or managed by individuals, corporations and public authorities with the likelihood of a single deer being found across all of these land tenures in a single day.

Deer occupy large territories, but will be seen moving from their bedding areas into adjacent farmland when there is little feed available in the bushland areas.

## The Status of Deer

Deer in Victoria are managed under the *Wildlife Act 1975* by the Game Management Authority (GMA). The GMA is part of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions; it has responsibility for the management of game animals.

Deer are unprotected on private land when they are proven to cause damage, and they can be controlled with a Permission to Destroy Deer on Private Property, signed by the landowner.

Deer are game species on public land, and subject to game hunting regulations.

Control of problem deer on private land is not administered by the GMA as it is not considered as being for 'recreational purposes'.

If a shooter is intercepted on private land by a GMA officer or Victoria Police they must be able to show written approval from the land owner and a Public Place Permit if required.

A Public Place Permit is permission to use a firearm in a populous or built up area.

Recreational hunters are not able to hunt on private properties in populous areas, even with permission of the landholder, as their Firearms Licence prohibits use in populous places. They would be unlikely to obtain the approval of Victoria Police for a public place permit.

## Damage Caused by Deer

Deer cause damage to plants, fences and agriculture as well as increasingly coming into contact with people and vehicles on roads.

They are large, heavy hooved animals, capable of covering large areas, with indiscriminate eating of vegetation, both native and planted.

Deer are even-toed ungulate (hoofed) ruminants, so they are mammals that chew the cud regurgitated from its rumen (first stomach), much like cows.



Damage to trees, gardens and soils through browsing and trampling

Damage by deer includes:

- grazing of ground-storey grasses, forbs and groundcovers which reduces food for native animals, and leads to bare earth and erosion
- browsing of mid-storey shrubs which changes forest structure and cover, and destroys plants that are food sources for pollinators such as bees, wasps etc.
- destroying fences and trees antler rubbing
- destroying gardens, vegetable patches, large-scale crops and vineyards through eating and trampling
- eroding and flattening of vegetation from wallowing
- reducing water quality and damaging habitats of aquatic invertebrates through wallowing activities.



Large deer wallow in Kinglake National Park. Source: T Fitzgerald

# Management Options

## Fencing

Due to their size, it is very difficult to exclude deer, however deer-proof fences of 1.5-1.9m high can be constructed, and can also be modified to allow continued movement of native animals underneath.

Protection of threatened plants (e.g. orchids) is usually undertaken through construction of small (sometimes temporary) fences or cages over individual plants, or fencing out larger areas with deer-proof fencing. Tree damage caused by rubbing of antlers can be prevented through the use of fenced cages surrounding the trunks.

Crops, pasture, orchards and vines can be protected through large deer-proof fences but they are cost-prohibitive for very large areas.



## Restricting Access to Water

Preventing access to water (e.g. dams) using fencing will encourage deer to go elsewhere to feed and drink.

## Harbour modification

Thinning out (where permitted) or fencing off dense vegetation (or known bedding areas), and removing weeds such as Blackberry from your property will limit deer options for safe hiding places during daylight hours.

## Deterrents

Scaring or repelling deer using lights, noises, animals, smells, or water (e.g. sprinklers) and the use of unpalatable plant species may work temporarily, but deterrents usually need to be changed periodically.

## Removal

Shooting of deer is becoming more common as their numbers increase, however the long-term effectiveness of localised shooting programs is not yet fully understood. For instance, there are questions around how quickly new deer will move into an area.

Shooting is an easy option in open farmland areas, but it can also be considered in peri-urban areas, when using professional contractors who possess appropriate firearms and silencer licences, and public place permits.



- Recreational hunting is prohibited at night-time, and the use of spotlights (including any source of artificial light, infrared device, night vision or heat detecting device) is also banned.
- Where deer are causing damage on private land, and a Permission to Destroy Deer on Private Property has been signed by the landowner, these restrictions are not in place, as the principles of 'fair chase' and other hunting principles do not apply.
- Where deer are causing damage on Crown Land, an approved Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW) permit from DELWP / GMA for the destruction of a specified number of deer is required. However the *Victorian Deer Control Strategy (2020)* aims to remove this legal obstacle.
- In addition to hunting and shooting regulations, many areas of Nillumbik require a Public Place Permit. This is permission to use a firearm in a populous or built up area. The granting of this permit is determined and administered by Victoria Police. They are usually only issued to professional / commercial deer controllers.

**Current deer management actions available for private land**

Action	Cost	Effectiveness
Accept deer as part of landscape	Low	N/A
Guard individual/groups of plants	Medium-High, maintenance required	High
Property Deer exclusion fence	High, with ongoing maintenance	High
Incorporate electric fence option	High	Medium - options poorly known
Recreational hunting to manage deer numbers	Low-High, ongoing cost	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term
Culling program (with signed Permission form) to manage deer numbers	Medium-High, ongoing cost	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term
Harvesting (with signed Permission form) to manage deer numbers	Medium-High, ongoing cost. Some cost may be recouped through the sale of deer meat.	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term.

## Private land deer management actions

- Survey your land for deer sign, damage and record; you can use the DeerScan app. Recording these sightings enables Councils to form a clearer picture of where deer are congregating and moving over the change of seasons, and how numbers are changing over time.
- Speak with your neighbours, to form or join a local deer action group or Landcare group;
- Consider deer exclusion fencing;
- Your Local Council, Landcare Group or Deer Action Group can help you find fencing contractors, professional deer controllers/harvesters and/or game meat processors;
- Make a private agreement to manage deer impact on your land by using a professional deer harvesting contractor on a regular basis, particularly during times where agricultural activities are requiring protection.
- Contact the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria) about the Farmer Assist program, offering free pest animal control to large landholders through the use of their fully accredited and insured volunteers.
- The Vertebrate Pest Management Association Australia is another option for sourcing contact details for deer management contractors.



Fallow Deer. Source: FYXO

## Management: the difference between hunting, culling and harvesting feral deer

Hunting is a recreational activity that includes the elements of fair chase and the taking of 'trophy deer' and or removing meat for personal consumption.

A deer cull program aims to remove deer that are causing damage and loss on your land. Culling is done under controlled circumstances, overseen by the land manager.

Harvesting includes removal of the animals and delivering them (within certain restrictions) to a meat processing facility. Some knackeries are able to process deer for human consumption, pet food or render. Harvesting can be time-consuming with removal of

culled animals from steep or heavily vegetated areas being a difficult process. This may reduce the number of deer culled per night.

Options to conduct a harvesting program on your land include:

- use the services of a professional deer control contractor or a commercial deer harvesting business selling the deer meat;
- join a community based scheme organised by local landholders / Landcare / Council sponsored environmental management program.

You should ask the deer controller to provide a property shooting plan.

This outlines their processes for obtaining permissions (e.g. Public Place Permit where required), safe humane destruction, carcass removal, neighbour notifications, and your written permission for them to harvest the feral deer.

## Council: Actions on deer concerns in the community

Yarra Catchment Councils have been responding to community requests for help and direction to help manage problems of feral deer damaging property, community safety issues and environmental loss on public and private land.

The Melbourne East Region Pest Animal Network has been advocating to government for more effective deer management, and that the State Government and Victoria Police:

- ensure that firearms use in the commercial deer harvesting industry is regulated;
- develop a peri-urban best practice firearms protocol and standards; and
- develop a Victorian deer control & firearms competency and accuracy accreditation for both contractors and volunteer shooters particularly in the peri-urban context

Nillumbik Shire Council aims to help landholders better understand the issues in deer management and create opportunities for improved community-based responses to manage deer problems in our area.

### Record your Deer Sightings

Get involved in Citizen Science and use DeerScan. Register through [www.feralscan.org.au](http://www.feralscan.org.au)

## More Information

Nillumbik Shire Council's [Environment Team webpage](#) contains further useful information. Contact the team for property-specific assistance.

E: [environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au](mailto:environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au) or Ph: 9433 3111