

NSWDEER SOP3

Trapping of feral deer

Background

Capture and euthanasia of feral deer may be used for management purposes. Clover or box traps are used to capture individual deer, and larger paddock, corral or 'enclosure' traps are used for groups of deer.

Although trapping is considered to be an ineffective tool for large areas, it may be useful in urban/residential areas where feral deer are becoming a nuisance or traffic hazard, or where populations have already been reduced and individuals need to be targeted.

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a guide only; it does not replace or override the relevant legislation that applies in NSW. The SOP should only be used subject to the applicable legal requirements (including WHS) operating in the relevant jurisdiction.

Individual SOPs should be read in conjunction with the overarching Code of Practice for that species to help ensure that the most appropriate control techniques are selected and that they are deployed in a strategic way, usually in combination with other control techniques, to achieve rapid and sustained reduction of pest animal populations and impacts.

Application

- Trapping is time-consuming and labour intensive and is therefore an inefficient method for large-scale feral deer management in Australia. It can be effective in controlling problem individuals in urban and semi-urban areas.
- Some individuals may be particularly trap-shy and therefore reluctant to enter the trap. Also, if food sources are readily available, deer may not be hungry enough to approach a baited trap.
- Traps have the potential to cause significant suffering and distress so should only be used when there is no suitable alternative.
- Selection of appropriate traps, trap sites and trap size will maximise chance of capture and minimise the distress caused to target and non-target animals.
- Every effort must be made to avoid target and non-target deaths from factors such as exposure or shock.
- Traps must be used in accordance with relevant NSW legislation (*Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*).
- Shooting of captured feral deer should only be performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience with firearms and who hold the appropriate licences and

accreditation. Storage and transportation of firearms and ammunition must comply with relevant legislation requirements.

Animal welfare implications

Target animals

- Feral deer are likely to suffer distress and potential capture myopathy from being confined in a cage trap. They can sometimes also be injured while trying to escape, leading to facial, leg and antler injuries. If multiple deer are caught in the same clover trap this increases the likelihood of receiving injuries.
- Traps must be inspected daily to prevent suffering and possible death from exposure, dehydration, starvation and/or shock. Risk of injury and capture myopathy increases with increased time spent in the trap.
- Where possible, trapping should be avoided when adverse weather conditions threaten the welfare of trapped animals.
- Corral traps should have hessian or shade cloth on the walls to create a visual barrier. This will help to minimise injuries caused by animals jumping into the sides of the trap.
- Smaller traps must be set up at sites where vegetation can provide shade and shelter. Where large paddock traps are used, access to water, feed and shelter must be provided if deer are to be held for more than 24 hours.
- Captured animals must be approached carefully and quietly to reduce panic, further stress and risk of injury.
- Trapped feral deer must be killed as quickly and humanely as possible (if euthanasia is the intended outcome).
- If lactating females without their young are caught in a trap and killed, reasonable efforts should be made to find dependent fawns and kill them quickly and humanely.

Non-target animals

- Traps are not target specific, therefore other species may be caught (depending on the trap mechanism and size of the animal).
- Traps must not be set near areas that are regularly frequented by non-target species.
- Live non-target animals caught in traps must be examined for injuries and signs of illness or distress and dealt with as follows:
 - Animals that are unharmed or have only received minimal injuries such as minor cuts or abrasions should be immediately released at the site of capture.
 - Animals that have more severe injuries or are suffering from thermal stress should receive appropriate attention. An animal suffering from thermal stress can initially be placed in a suitable quiet holding area that provides warmth or shade to allow recovery before release. Animals with treatable injuries that cannot be immediately released or those failing to recover from thermal stress should be presented to a veterinarian or a registered wildlife carer for treatment.

- o Animals that have injuries that are untreatable, or which would compromise their survival in the wild should be euthanased using a technique that is suitable for the species. For more information on euthanasia techniques refer to [GEN001 Methods of Euthanasia](#).

Workplace health and safety considerations

- Trapped feral deer can be dangerous to handle. They will be nervous and agitated and can inflict serious injury with their large bodies and legs. If these deer are killed whilst still in the cage, there should be no need to handle them directly.
- Firearms are hazardous. All people should stand well behind the shooter when a deer is being shot. The line of fire must be chosen to prevent accidents or injury from stray bullets or ricochets.
- Firearm users must strictly observe all relevant safety guidelines relating to firearm ownership, possession and use.
- Firearms must be securely stored in a compartment that meets state legal requirements. Ammunition must be stored in a locked container separate from firearms.
- The shooter and others in the immediate vicinity should wear adequate hearing protection to prevent irreversible hearing damage, and safety glasses to protect eyes from gases, metal fragments and other particles.
- Care must be taken when handling live deer and carcasses as they may carry diseases such as Q-fever, salmonellosis, toxoplasmosis and yersiniosis that can affect humans and other animals. Routinely wash hands after handling all carcasses.

Equipment required

Traps

- Corral traps may be permanent or portable designs constructed at commonly used feeding sites, water points or trails. Trap gates can be triggered remotely, by trip-wire, or there may be a one-way entrance. In NSW, corral traps have been used to trap fallow and rusa deer.
- Clover traps are designed for capturing individual deer. They are small traps, around 2 m long x 1 m wide x 1.5 m high, with a metal or wooden frame covered in nylon mesh to minimise injuries, and a trip wire that triggers a sliding door to close the trap. In NSW, clover traps have been used to trap rusa deer.
- Paddock traps are large paddock scale enclosures where feed, water and cover are provided. Trap gates can be triggered remotely, by trip wire, or there may be a one-way entrance. Larger trap sizes give deer enough room to move away from people entering the trap, allow for effective handling and will also reduce the pressure on the fences.

Lures/baits

- Bait is required to attract deer into a trap, and may consist of feeds such as lucerne hay, Rhodes grass hay, corn or barley, or could be a water source.

- Attractiveness and palatability of the bait will vary with season and location.

Firearms and ammunition

- Smaller calibre rifles such as .22 magnum rimfire with hollow or soft-point ammunition are adequate for euthanasia of deer at short range (within 5 metres). If shooting animals from a greater distance, refer to *NSWDEER SOP1 Ground shooting of feral deer* for more detailed information.

Procedures

Selection of trap sites

- Traps should be set in areas where deer are known to be active. Camera traps could be used to establish the areas with most deer traffic and least non-target activity.
- The location of all trap sites must be accurately recorded. This information should be readily available to others in case the trapper is unable to return to check the traps.
- Do not place traps in areas where they may be interfered with/damaged by large stock or humans.

Placing and setting the trap

- For a period of time prior to trapping, traps should be left open with free feed inside to attract deer and allow them to acclimatise to entering the trap. This should increase the probability of captures and potentially decrease the stress perceived by captured animals.
- Before setting each trap ensure that it is functioning properly.
- The trap should be firmly staked to the ground or be heavy enough to prevent deer or some other animal from tipping it over and injuring itself, and/or releasing the trap door.
- Place free feed inside the trap in a suitable position in relation to the trap door mechanism.
- It is preferable to set traps at the end of each day and check early each morning. When traps are open during the day there is a greater risk of birds, such as magpies and currawongs, entering and triggering the trap. If traps need to be left open during the day, they should be checked again in late afternoon and not set on excessively hot days.
- Traps should be checked twice per day during peak fawning periods, and at least once per day at all other times.

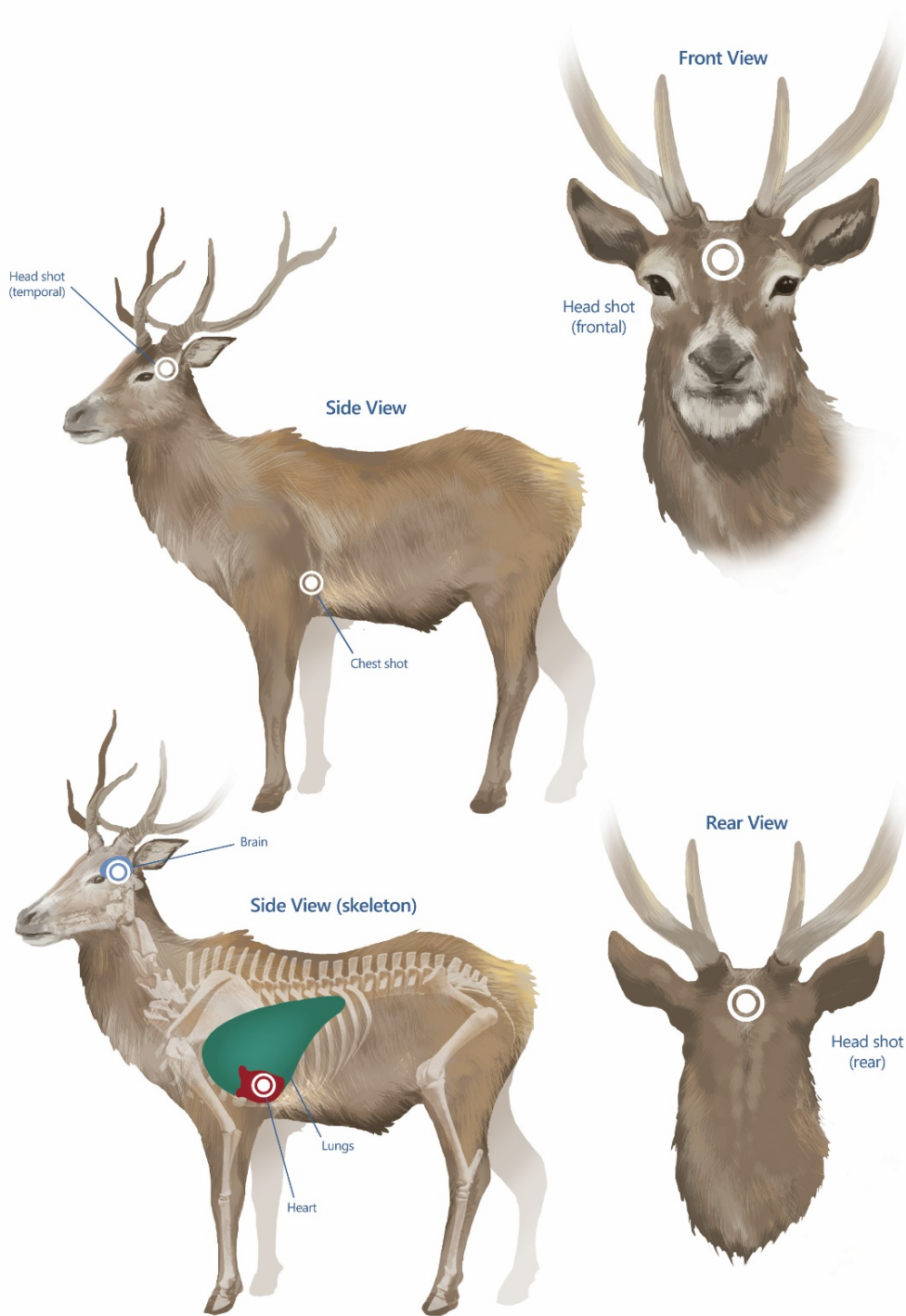
Euthanasia of trapped feral deer

Shooting

- Trapped feral deer can be euthanased by shooting whilst still held in the trap.
- It can be difficult to shoot feral deer humanely as they become very nervous and agitated when restrained and in the presence of people. Unnecessary people should keep away from the area. The shooter should approach the animal in a calm and quiet manner.

- Never fire when the deer is moving its head, be patient and wait until the deer is motionless before shooting. Accuracy is important to achieve a humane death. One shot to the head should ensure instantaneous loss of consciousness and rapid death without resumption of consciousness.
- To maximise the impact of the shot and to minimise the risk of misdirection the range should be as short as possible i.e., 5 to 20 cm from the head. See Figure 3 for shot placement diagrams.
- Where deer are contained within large paddock traps shooting should be undertaken at night as per *NSWDEER SOP1 Ground shooting of feral deer*.

Figure 3 Shot placement for ground shooting of feral deer



Note that shooting an animal from above or below the horizontal level as depicted here will influence the direction of the bullet through the body. Adjustment to the point of aim on the external surface of the body may need to be made to ensure that the angled bullet path causes extensive (and therefore fatal) damage to the main organs in the target areas.

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