



Achievements from the three-year Australian Government funded program to control feral pigs in Victoria's Otway Ranges were highlighted last month at the Otways Ecological Research Forum held in Colac, Victoria. This project was managed by the Conservation Ecology Centre based in Cape Otway, Victoria. Over 200 researchers, land managers, and community members gathered to discuss the latest ecological research being undertaken in the Otways, and how it can be best applied to benefit the environment and Country.

Incursions of feral pigs in the Otways has been relatively recent, with their abundance, distribution and landscape specific behaviour previously being undefined.

Multiple methods were used to determine the most effective approaches to locate and control populations of feral pigs across a unique patchwork of land uses and types. Seven camera grids were deployed at four target locations, eleven GPS tracking collars were fitted to a mixture of boars and sows, 76 waterway samples were collected for environmental DNA analysis, and an aerial infrared monitoring flight was conducted.

In addition to these management and monitoring techniques, a strong focus was placed on stakeholder engagement. Over 30 community engagement sessions were held over the term of the project. Ongoing collaborations and relationships were formed with private landholders, Landcare networks, forestry plantation companies, water authorities, Parks Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

This enabled the project to be carried out across various land tenures to accommodate for feral pig movement in the landscape. This played a crucial role in forming a wholistic and effective control program.

The most effective, and primary method of control used, was cage trapping (96.8%). Sodium nitrite (HOGGONE) baiting and ground shooting were also utilised, when necessary. By incorporating feral pig ecology, practicality, and collaboration, feral pig numbers were reduced by over 95% within the targeted landscapes. A total of 317 feral pigs were controlled across the Otways.



Next steps

Australian Government funding for this project through their Wild Otways Initiative ceased in July 2023. The Conservation Ecology Centre is now running a scaled back program, funded through the Victorian Government's Otways Biodiversity Protection Project.

Thanks to the team's hard work, feral pig populations are much lower than what they were 3 years ago. However, an increase of feral pig activity is beginning to be seen in spots outside of the targeted focal areas. It is now more important than ever that this work continues, with adequate resourcing behind it. Without this, it's inevitable that populations of feral pigs in the Otways will reach and exceed their previous numbers and continue to impact on the region's biodiversity, environmental, agricultural, cultural and social assets.

The collaborations that the Conservation Ecology Centre is continuing to build upon are a step in the right direction. Sustained and sufficient funding is needed to help build capacity and ensure that feral pig management in the Otways is effective long term.

Unfortunately, there's no quick, easy solution to effectively manage feral pigs. The management techniques that have been used require a significant amount of time, effort and persistence, along with dedicated teams of people working towards the same goal.

Based on their experiences with this project, the Conservation Ecology Centre has put together a 'Feral Pig Management Guidelines and Learnings' document for land managers. If you would like a copy of the document or want to find out more about the Otways Feral Pig Project, please contact James Templeton at:

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To find out more about the Otways Ecological Research Forum and other presentations on issues such as Phytophthora management, planned burn ecological strategies, threatened species conservation, and how biocultural knowledge can be used to manage country visit: <https://www.conservationecologycentre.org/2023/08/17/otways-ecological-research-forum-2023/>.

Recordings of this year's presentations, will be available soon on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@conservationecologycentre>



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