

# Protecting threatened species from feral pig impacts in the WA wheatbelt



Previous monitoring and surveillance work undertaken by Wagin Woodanilling Landcare Zone (WWLZ) identified the need for management action in riparian areas in the Shires of Wagin and Woodanilling in southern WA to reduce the substantial impacts being caused by growing populations of feral pigs.

Funding was obtained by WWLZ from Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management program to reduce environmental damage being caused by feral pig activity to river systems and agricultural land. These river systems form an important habitat corridor for the nationally threatened Red-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale calura*). The presence of other threatened species including Western Spotted Quoll (Chuditch, *Dasyurus geoffroii*); and Rakali (Australian water-rat, *Hydromys chrysogaster*), have also been reported in these river systems.

The objective of this project, running until December 2025, is to reduce the pressure from feral pigs in targeted sections of these river systems by reducing their populations. An experienced and trained vertebrate pest contractor was engaged by WWLZ to humanely destroy feral pigs and protect river habitat. Land adjoining the State-owned river corridors are a major area of focus. The contractor works in this area under an operations licence within the State managed zone, alongside landholders who own property abutting these riparian zones where pigs may gain access.

Due to some control areas located within state managed land, baiting has not been utilised. Rather, management methods being used are trapping and ground shooting. Night vision equipment is being employed to increase the efficiency of feral pig removal. Over a 9-month period, commencing in April 2023, almost 400 pigs have been dispatched - much higher than anticipated or expected! The removal of these animals

has resulted in observable reductions in sightings and their impacts to both the riparian and agricultural areas. The local community are very surprised with the numbers of feral pigs being removed, reflecting that the size of feral pig populations are often underestimated.

Work has started for 2024. Remote operated camera-based trapping technology has been purchased by the contractor for use in the area. It is anticipated that the use of this equipment will increase the numbers successfully trapped whilst managing the significant effort, time and labour involved with trapping. Locations where feral pigs are congregating to access available water have already been identified, due to the surrounding region being so dry. These have become key focus areas for the contractor. Unfortunately, setbacks are being experienced - recreational hunters are disturbing the preparation work, including free feeding, being done to attract sounder groups into traps. This emphasises that feral species management is all about the community working closely together to achieve a common and shared goal.

It is critical that once feral pig management programs commence, they don't stop. Sustained pressure on populations is needed to minimise risks of population recovery and re-invasion of cleared areas. As is the case for many feral pig management programs, keeping the momentum going and on-ground work continuing post December 2025 is a major issue. Management of feral pigs will need to be upheld by land managers working together in coordinated groups. To maintain activity, it has been suggested that the contractor be engaged on an *ad-hoc* basis in the future to maintain lowered populations or a consistent management program be established. More in-depth conversations with local landholders are needed to commence planning for this next phase.

*Damage from feral pigs in the riparian habitat in the WWLZ (Photo courtesy of WWLZ)*

