

Progress Report SP 2014-003

Cat Eradication on Dirk Hartog Island

Animal Science

Project Core Team

Supervising Scientist	Dave Algar
Data Custodian	M Johnston
Site Custodian	Dave Algar

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Update requested

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Project Team	granted
Program Leader	granted
Directorate	required

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D Algar, G Desmond, J Fletcher, N Hamilton, M Johnston, M Onus, C Tiller

Context

On Dirk Hartog Island, the largest island off the Western Australian coast, 10 of the 13 species of native terrestrial mammals once present are now locally extinct most likely due to predation by cats. The island was established as a National Park in November 2009, which now provides the opportunity to reconstruct the native mammal fauna. Dirk Hartog Island could potentially support one of the most diverse mammal assemblages in Australia and contribute significantly to the long-term conservation of several threatened species. Eradication of feral cats would be a necessary precursor to any mammal reintroductions. The objective of this project is to develop and implement a successful eradication campaign for feral cats on the island.

Aims

The aims of this project are to facilitate native fauna reintroductions to Dirk Hartog Island through researching feral cat behaviour and susceptibility to baiting programs, implementing a cat eradication program, and developing effective cat monitoring protocols that will allow success of eradication programs to be assessed.

Progress

- Monitoring track access and camera traps for cats in both the southern and northern sections of Dirk Hartog Island continued.
- Cat activity is absent south of the barrier fence.
- Baiting of the northern section was undertaken in May 2015 and subsequent trapping has removed the majority of cats that remained post-baiting.

Management implications

The biodiversity outcome from this project will be a measurable decline in the cat population on Dirk Hartog Island, eventually to zero when eradication is confirmed. This is essential before fauna reconstruction activities can commence. Cat eradication will also assist the conservation of the extant fauna, including three threatened taxa. There is global interest in the outcomes of this project and the techniques used. Knowledge and technology transfer to other agencies contemplating cat eradications on islands will be through presentations and publication of manuscripts in scientific journals.

Future directions

- Verify absence of cats using independent techniques (detector dogs and sentinel cats).
- Undertake seasonal surveillance monitoring for cat presence across the island and instigate immediate control effort if detected.
- It is anticipated that cats will have been eradicated by late 2016, with confirmation after extensive monitoring by late 2018.
- Drafting a series of manuscripts for publication relevant to the overall program and techniques developed. These manuscripts are additional to those already published.