

Wild donkeys are not the same as feral donkeys

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Towards the end of the dry season: wild donkeys capitalising on green pick a month after a human lit wild-fire

Feral animals behave in a manner that is at odds with their functional roles in a landscape. As such they are often justifiably regarded as pests.

Wild animals do not necessarily display feral behaviour. Natural fight or flight tendencies are merely one trait that wild animals display. More importantly: given the chance, wild animals instinctively behave in line with their functional roles within a landscape.

When introduced to new contexts, exotic wild animal-behaviour can easily deteriorate to feral behaviour. A similar deterioration of behaviour can be observed in native animals when ecosystem-function has been compromised. (e.g. too many roos, cockatoos, dingos, mice, ...)

Some view donkeys to be a pest. In many instances this may be true and millions of dollars of tax-payer earnings have been spent to remove the species from Kimberley landscapes. Total eradication of wild donkeys in the Kimberley is now achievable...

Donkey-culling has become very effective due to the use of radio collars and tracking devices:

- Tranquillise a jenny, collar her, shoot all her family and friends and let her go...
- Track her down per helicopter a month later... shoot all her family and friends and let her go...
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- Once collared animals begin to team up we know the eradication program is effective...
- Genetic viability is lost... and the donkeys are removed from the landscape...

Meanwhile vegetation formerly processed by donkeys keeps growing and then dies off. Wild-fire and related environmental degradation escalates... This trend is not obvious to the untrained eye and any requests/proposals submitted in recent years to verify this by means of biological monitoring were met by departmental apathy. A common belief is that existing WARMS' (WA Rangeland Monitoring Site) suffice to let us know what is going on.

One would be safe in stating that there is not a single WARMS that is not within a cooee of where one could drive to with a 4WD.

In a world of declining biodiversity and compromised ecosystems, the challenge is to initiate and maintain functional animal behaviour *(regardless of species)*.

Kachana Pastoral Company believes in changing the behaviour of the remaining few donkeys *(and other introduced herbivores that now run feral)* and putting them to use for better landscape outcomes...

Due to the lack of *(both original and indigenised)* herbivores on Kachana we put our donkeys to work as a land-management tool:

Phase one: - carbon abatement and minimize the effects of wild-fire

Phase two: - carbon sequestration, soil-building and rehydration of upper-catchments



These pictures were taken after a wild-fire *(this explains the lack of ground-cover)*. Photos are of me shifting wild donkeys away from an area where plants and soil now require time to recover.

The pictures show me applying LSS methodology (Low Stress Stockhandling) to these animals for the first time... my father (in his seventies at the time) had been the only one to work with them previously...

Working on horse-back over a four-year period, Dad got them used to "pressure-release techniques"

In our arid, rugged environments where conventional pastoralism is not viable, *(and has in some cases already failed,)* it is our aim to get formal government support to use these animals as a **"water-shed management-tool"**.

(Over the last twenty years local support and collaboration in this respect have been encouraging. It may now be time to scientifically evaluate what we do.)

In this sort of terrain we can easily work with wild donkeys from over 150 meters away. The animals are nervous, but they do not panic. The pressure applied is very subtle and the animals respond instantly.





We reduce the size of the flight-zone if we need to get in closer...

Here we are letting them walk through a gap in the fence and then down towards a creek... something they would instinctively **not do** as a group...



Pressure-release techniques are applied in such a way that cooperation becomes their favoured option.