

Many in the community are concerned about the destruction caused by feral deer. Tree guard in rainforest pocket in Monbulk Creek, Dandenong Ranges National Park.



PHOTO: ALEX MAISE

Must we live with the deer invasion?

PHIL INGAMELLS SAYS PROGRESS ON DEER CONTROL MIGHT BE AT HAND, BUT A BIT OF AMBITIOUS CO-ORDINATION WILL HELP.

With no one yet affecting lasting impact on the million or more deer ripping through Victoria's orchards, vineyards, rainforests and alpine systems, the necessary big steps in management are yet to manifest.

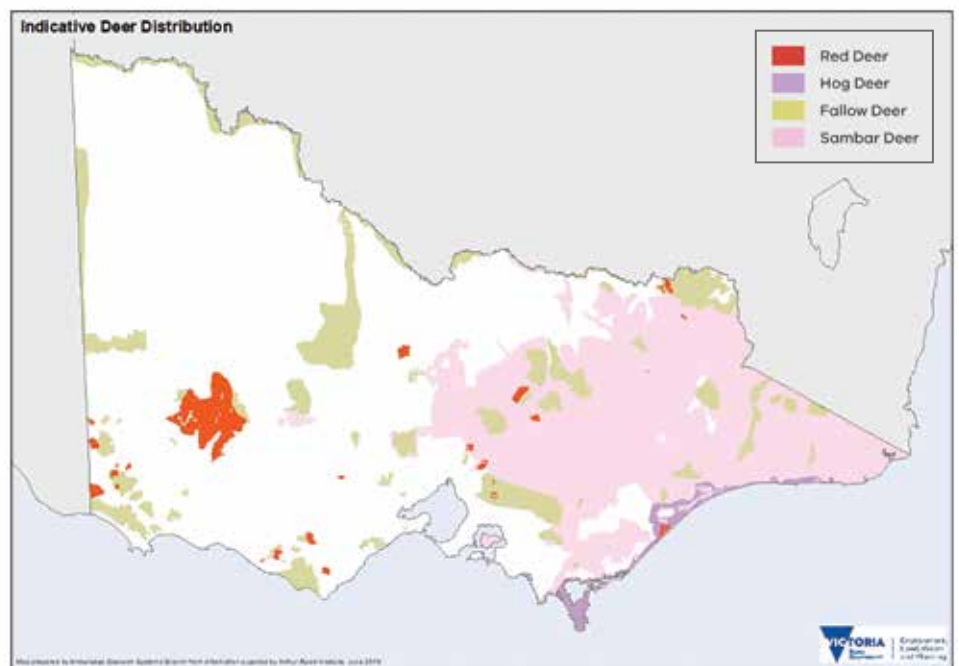
Quite a lot has happened on the deer management front over the last couple of years, and there's no shortage of enthusiastic people looking for co-operative control:

1. The Victorian Government now has a Deer Control Strategy, funded to the tune of \$18 million over four years. It was developed from an inadequate draft primarily put together by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (which hosts the hunter-oriented Game Management Authority). The final, improved strategy was largely the product of our Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), but it still has many shortcomings, not least that it still fails to list deer as a pest animal. Not only that, it handballs action to the development of three Regional Plans, of which the eastern Victoria and western Victoria plans aren't timed to start until a Melbourne peri-urban plan is finalised, hopefully by the end of 2021.
2. Parks Victoria has been running deer management trials, and building the occasional emergency deer fence, but real action has been short on the ground until ...
3. DELWP, together with Parks Victoria, has probably come up with the most effective action yet, aerially shooting deer and other pest animals over the fire-affected landscape of eastern Victoria. That has now gone into its second round.
4. In the meantime, a number of Melbourne eastern region Green Wedge councils have been running deer forums, and developed strategies, tools and incentives to help private landholders deal with deer.
5. Melbourne Water is developing a deer management plan for some of the closed catchments that protect Melbourne's water supply.

6. The East Gippsland Conservation Management Network has set up a deer management program on private and public land around Lake Tyers, involving government agencies, amateur hunters, professional pest controllers and an Aboriginal community.
7. In frustration at inadequate Victorian Government co-ordination, a community-based group the Cardinia Deer Management Coalition has initiated a statewide Victorian Deer Control Network, potentially involving hundreds of organisations keen to control deer. Its operation will be facilitated by an officer engaged by the Invasive Species Council to work on the Victorian deer problem.
8. One bright hope for all of the above might be the new National Deer Management Coordinator, a recent appointment acting under the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions and funded by the federal and state governments. The position will lead the development of a National Feral Deer Action Plan – a noble but difficult task.

Clearly the call for action is broad and strong with the agricultural community, the conservation community, as well as local, state and federal governments all working on the problem. What's missing is the strategy that will actually pull these disparate actions together. That critical strategy will hopefully be the Victorian Government's three Regional Deer Plans, but they might be a couple of years away.

In the meantime, we still have to act. The rapidly increasing feral deer population is certainly not waiting. • PW



Estimated breeding distribution of deer (combined) in Victoria

MAP COURTESY DELWP