

Cat-astrophe!

adapted from an article by Mindy Weisberger

- 1 The cat's out of the bag — and all over Australia. A new study by the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Queensland finds that feral cats inhabit 99.8 percent of the continent's landmass, including 80 percent of the land that makes up its islands.



- 2 European explorers first introduced cats to Australia in the 18th century. With no large predators and easy access to tasty small animals, the invasive felines swiftly adapted to the hospitable continent. Since then, feral cats have contributed to the extinction of close to 30 native mammal species — such as the big-eared hopping mouse, the Eastern hare-wallaby and the pig-footed bandicoot — and are instrumental in the current decline of many more, the study authors wrote. "Australia is the only continent on Earth other than Antarctica where the animals evolved without cats, which is a reason our wildlife is so vulnerable to them," Gregory Andrews, Australia's Threatened Species Commissioner, said in a statement.
- 3 Sarah Legge, co-author of the study, discovered that population density varied widely across the country, with as many as 100 cats in 0.4 square mile (1 square kilometer) in some spots. Densities in urbanized areas could be 30 times greater than in natural environments. By revealing where feral cats tend to congregate, the scientists' results could help conservationists develop strategies to address the locations most at risk. "Our study highlights the scale and impacts of feral cats and the urgent need to develop effective control methods, and to target our efforts in areas where that control will produce the biggest gains," Legge said.

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