

Addressing feral cats' diet may help protect native species

February 2 2015

Because reducing the impacts of feral cats—domestic cats that have returned to the wild—is a priority for conservation efforts across the globe, a research team recently reviewed the animals' diet across Australia and its territorial islands to help consider how they might best be managed.

The investigators recorded 400 [vertebrate species](#) that feral cats feed on or kill in Australia, including 16 globally threatened birds, mammals and reptiles. The cats feed mainly on rabbits when they are available, but they switch to other food groups when they are not. Reptiles were eaten most frequently in [desert areas](#), whereas medium-sized mammals, such as possums and bandicoots, were eaten most frequently in the temperate southeast.

"Our most significant finding was a pattern of prey-switching from rabbits to small native mammals," said Tim Doherty, lead author of the *Journal of Biogeography* study.

"This is important because control programs for rabbits could inadvertently lead to feral cats killing more native mammals instead. This means that land managers should use a multi-species approach for pest animal control."

More information: Doherty, T. S., Davis, R. A., van Etten, E. J. B., Algar, D., Collier, N., Dickman, C. R., Edwards, G., Masters, P., Palmer, R., Robinson, S. (2015), A continental-scale analysis of feral cat

diet in Australia. *Journal of Biogeography*. [DOI: 10.1111/jbi.12469](https://doi.org/10.1111/jbi.12469)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Addressing feral cats' diet may help protect native species (2015, February 2) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-feral-cats-diet-native-species.html>

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