

Cats, Foxes and Bushfires

Are Cats and Foxes responsible for the worst bushfires in Australia?

Before European settlement in Australia, some (but most definitely not all) areas were regularly burned as a form of rural husbandry by the indigenous inhabitants. How may this burning have been possible, without incurring the great fires that have beset Australia since the 1930s?

Before feral cats and foxes roamed this continent in their millions, there were other animals that did so. These were the small marsupial nibblers: Potoroos, Pademelons, Bettongs, Tammar and Parma wallabies etc, and there were various types to fill every ecological niche in Australia. However, now, with the exception of some isolated pockets these beautiful little marsupials have all but vanished in the wild. An animal as large as a fox or even a large feral cat can kill a tammar wallaby; and they do, that is why the nibblers are so rare.

Before the great bushfires that surrounded Sydney in the New Year of 1995, it was estimated that the litter on the forest floor in some areas had built up to between ten and fifteen tonnes per hectare. A build up of this magnitude could never have happened if those small animals had been there to nibble it away as they had done for millions of years.

There are three master nibblers of the litter on the forest floor, and they include in their diet the greatest fire hazard of the Australian bush, the fallen leaves of the eucalypt. These creatures are the Pademelon, the Tammar and the Parma wallabies.

Would it then, not be reasonable to say, that cats and foxes are responsible for the worst bushfires in Australia's modern history? One must then ask. Who is responsible for the introduction of the cats and foxes? Well I'd suggest that we don't blame the cats and foxes, we have caused the problem so it is we who must fix it.

What is the point when the Departments of Conversation will decree that, this or that animal, is to be protected by law and spend \$millions to enforce such laws when they do nothing towards the eradication of the feral animals that are responsible for a good part of the problem.

Why do 'INQUIRIES' never consider the Ferals versus the Nibblers?