

Responsible Pet Ownership Protects Native Wildlife

Owning a pet is highly rewarding, and many people enjoy having a pet for companionship, social interaction, and a sense of security. However, everyone who owns a pet must be aware of their responsibilities to their pet and the wider community. As a responsible pet owner, you have an obligation to ensure that your pet does not harm native wildlife and impact the environment.

In New South Wales, all cats and dogs, other than exempt cats and dogs, must be microchipped by twelve weeks of age and registered by six months of age. Annual permits are also required for owners of non-desexed cats, restricted dog breeds, and dogs declared to be dangerous.

Cats

According to the New South Wales *Companion Animals Act 1998*, if cats are microchipped, registered, and wearing a collar, there are no restrictions on where they can roam, except in prohibited places such as protected wildlife areas.

Cats have a significant impact on the environment through predation of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals. Predation by cats on native wildlife is a major contributor to the extinction of some twenty-two Australian mammals. Unfortunately, free-roaming cats harm and kill native wildlife, even when fed daily. To protect native wildlife, and for your cat's safety, the Society recommends that all cats be kept indoors, particularly at night when most roaming behaviour occurs, or be permitted outside in a secure cat run.

Keeping cats indoors not only helps to protect our native wildlife but also to prevent cats from being run over by cars, mauled by dogs, poisoned, and lost as a result of roaming freely outdoors.

Responsible Cat Owners':

1. De-sex their cat/s. De-sexing cats help to reduce straying, fighting and aggression, and antisocial behaviour, such as spraying to mark territory. It also helps to reduce the number of unwanted cats born each year.
2. Ensure their cat/s is microchipped. If you fail to have your cat microchipped, you may be issued with a fixed penalty notice for \$180, or a court may award a maximum penalty of up to \$880.
3. Ensure their cat/s is registered and that their contact details are up to date. Registrations can be completed online via the [NSW Pet Registry](#) or [Service NSW](#). If your cat/s is lost, up to date contact details are the best way to bring your cat/s home.
4. Keep their cat/s indoors or permit their cat/s outside in a secure cat run to protect native wildlife.
5. Dispose of their pet's faeces appropriately. Cat faeces that wash into waterways can harm native fish, frogs, and other aquatic wildlife.



Dogs

Many native animals are attacked by domestic dogs each year. Dog attacks can often be fatal, making them a common cause of death for many native species. Generally, the larger the dog, the more likely it could be responsible for a fatal attack on a native animal. Many dog attacks on wildlife occur in the dog's own backyard.

Some animals, like koalas, can defend themselves. They have sharp teeth and claws capable of causing deep wounds. Any dog that attacks a koala may risk serious injury. Regardless, on average, approximately 110 koalas are attacked and killed by dogs each year.

Managing the interactions between domestic dogs and native wildlife is becoming an increasing challenge. Existing management strategies to reduce dog attacks on native wildlife rely heavily on responsible pet ownership.

Responsible Dog Owners':

1. De-sex their dog/s. Desexing is important to consider for both male and female dogs as it can improve their overall health and behaviour. It also prevents unplanned litters of puppies that could add to the thousands of dogs waiting for homes in shelters or with rescue groups if not rehomed.
2. Ensure their dog/s is microchipped. If you fail to have your dog microchipped, you may be issued with a fixed penalty notice for \$180, or a court may award a maximum penalty of up to \$880.
3. Ensure their dog/s is registered and that their contact details are up to date. Registrations can be completed online via the [NSW Pet Registry](#) or [Service NSW](#). If your dog is lost, up to date contact details are the best way to bring your dog/s home.
4. Keep your dog inside at night or confined to a secure space when native wildlife is most active.
5. When exercising your dog in public spaces, it is essential they are kept on a leash and restrained at all times except when you are in an allocated off-leash area.
6. Dispose of their pet's faeces appropriately. If your dog defecates in a public place, you must remove the faeces immediately and dispose of it correctly.

If you find a sick or injured native animal, contact [WIRES](#) on 1300 094 737.

[Australian Wildlife Society](#), founded in 1909, is a national not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation. We are dedicated to conserving Australian wildlife through national environmental education, public awareness, advocacy, hands-on wildlife conservation work, and community involvement. Become a [member](#) of the Australian Wildlife Society.

