

# Standard Operating Procedure GOA002: Aerial shooting of feral goats

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## Background

Feral goats (*Capra hircus*) can have a significant impact on the environment and agricultural production and are a potential reservoir and vector of endemic and exotic diseases. Although often considered pests, feral goats are also an important resource, harvested commercially primarily for meat. Control methods include trapping, mustering, exclusion fencing, ground shooting and shooting from helicopters. Radio-collared 'Judas' goats are sometimes used during aerial shooting campaigns to locate sparsely distributed goats or groups that are difficult to find. Refer to *GOA005 Use of Judas goats*.

Aerial shooting of feral goats from a helicopter is used in inaccessible areas, and to manage low-density populations or remove survivors from other control programs. It is also used for broadscale population reductions when prices for goats are low and mustering is not economic. Teams involved in shooting from a helicopter include a shooter, a pilot and a spotter/counter who locates the goats and records the location and number of animals shot.

Aerial shooting can be a humane method of destroying feral goats when it is carried out by experienced and skilled shooters and pilots, the animal can be clearly seen and is within range, the correct firearm, ammunition and shot placement is used, and wounded animals are promptly located and killed.

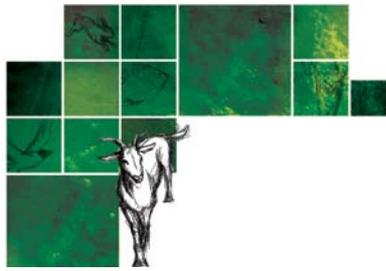
This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a guide only. It does not replace or override the legislation that applies in the relevant state or territory jurisdiction. The SOP should only be used subject to the

applicable legal requirements (including OH&S) operating in the relevant jurisdiction.

## Application

- Aerial shooting should only be used in a strategic manner as part of a coordinated program designed to achieve sustained effective control.
- Aerial shooting is a cost-effective method where goat density is high. Costs increase greatly as goat numbers decrease. Also, feral goats learn to avoid helicopters, so successive shoots can become less effective.
- Aerial shooting is effectively used to control feral goats in inaccessible or rough terrain.
- In areas of heavy cover (eg vegetated creek lines, woodlands and forest), effectiveness is limited since goats might be concealed and difficult to locate from the air.
- The optimal period for aerial shooting is during dry seasons or droughts when goats are forced to congregate around remaining areas of water and feed. Shooting during drought reduces the number of goats that would otherwise die slowly of hunger or thirst.
- For safety reasons, shooting from a helicopter must not be undertaken in adverse weather conditions (eg strong wind, rain, low cloud, hot days that cause unpredictable thermals).
- Shooting of feral goats should only be performed by competent, trained personnel who have been tested and accredited for suitability to the task and marksmanship and who hold the appropriate licences (eg NSW Feral





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Animal Aerial Shooter Training [FAAST] course; NT Parks and Wildlife Advanced Firearms course; Qld Biosecurity Aerial Platform Marksmanship Course).

- Helicopter pilots must hold the appropriate licences and permits and be skilled and experienced in aerial shooting operations.
- Helicopter operators must have approval from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to undertake aerial shooting operations.
- Aerial shooting should comply with all relevant federal and state/territory legislation, policy and guidelines.
- Storage, use and transportation of firearms and ammunition must comply with relevant legislative requirements.

### Animal welfare considerations

#### *Impact on target animals*

- The humaneness of aerial shooting as a control technique depends on the skill and judgement of both the shooter and the pilot. If properly done, it can be a humane method of destroying feral goats. On the other hand, if done inexpertly, shooting can result in wounding that can cause considerable pain and suffering.
- Aerial shooting should not be done if the nature of the terrain reduces accuracy resulting in too many wounding shots and prevents the humane and prompt despatch of wounded animals.
- Shooting must be done in a manner that maximises its effect, thus causing rapid death. This requires the use of appropriate shot placements, appropriate firearms and ammunition as described below.
- Only head (brain) or chest (heart-lung) shots must be used. Shooting at other parts of the body is unacceptable.
- Since it is very difficult to assess if an animal is dead from a distance, it is essential that a deliberate policy of 'overkill' be followed, where a minimum of two shots are used per animal. That is, after an initial head or chest shot, another shot/s must be fired into the chest or head to ensure death. If the initial shot is to the head, it must be correctly placed to achieve instantaneous loss of consciousness and loss of brain function. A follow-up chest shot (or shots) will ensure death if the initial head shot is not lethal.
- Correctly placed head shots cause brain function to cease and insensibility will be immediate.

Death from a shot to the chest is due to massive tissue damage and haemorrhage from major blood vessels. Insensibility will occur sometime after, from a few seconds to a minute or more. If a shot stops the heart functioning, the animal will lose consciousness very rapidly.

- Wounded goats must be located and killed as quickly and humanely as possible with further shot(s) directed at the chest or head. If left, wounded animals can suffer from pain and the disabling effects of the injury (including sickness due to infection).
- A 'fly-back' procedure must be followed, in which the shooter is flown back over the shot animals so that follow-up shots to the vital areas can be applied. The cost of ammunition and extra flying time must not deter operators from applying this flyback procedure. In areas that are accessible, a ground crew of several individuals walking or on all-terrain vehicles can be used to locate and humanely kill any wounded animals.
- To minimise the animal welfare implications of leaving dependent kids to die a slow death from starvation, it is preferable not to undertake aerial shooting programs when females are kidding or have dependent young at foot. Although feral goats have been observed to breed at all times of the year, there are periods when the majority of kidding occurs (eg in southwest Queensland, kidding mainly occurs in May–June). Control at times of kidding might be less effective, as females are usually more secretive and tend to leave the group to give birth in isolated and/or sheltered locations. Control programs are therefore best targeted before major kidding periods.
- If lactating females are shot, efforts should be made to find dependent kids and kill them quickly and humanely. Note that kids are not always easy to find – approximately half of mothers ('stayers') tend to stay in the vicinity of the newborn kid, while others ('leavers') leave them alone to forage. Lactating females tend to be found away from the mob. If kids are bigger, they will often be found with the mother.

#### *Impact on non-target animals*

- Shooting is relatively target specific and does not usually impact on other species. However, there is always a risk of injuring or killing non-target animals, including livestock, if shots are taken before an animal has been positively identified.

- Sensitive livestock such as horses, deer and ostriches are easily frightened by gunshots, helicopter rotor noise wind and so on and might injure themselves by running into fences and other obstacles. Avoid shooting in areas where these livestock occur or organise their removal from the area before the shooting program.

## Health and safety considerations

- The potentially hazardous nature of aerial shooting requires that safety protocols be strictly followed. Each team member must be aware of and trained in all aspects of helicopter and firearm safety.
- The helicopter pilot must perform a thorough pre-flight briefing with all personnel to establish communication protocols between the shooter and the pilot including pre-shot manoeuvre, commands for firing and emergency procedures.
- Shooting from a helicopter can be hazardous, particularly in areas of rugged topography. The combination of low-level flight, close proximity to obstacles (trees, rocks, wires) and the use of firearms make this task extremely hazardous.
- It is essential that ejected firearm shells do not interfere with the safe operations of the helicopter. It might be necessary to fit a deflector plate to the firearm to ensure shells are ejected safely.
- Firearm users must strictly observe all relevant safety guidelines relating to firearm ownership, possession and use.
- When not in use, firearms must be securely stored in a compartment that meets state/territory legal requirements. Ammunition must be stored in a locked container separate from firearms.
- Adequate hearing protection should be worn by the shooter and others in the immediate vicinity of the shooter. Repeated exposure to firearm noise can cause irreversible hearing damage.
- Safety glasses are recommended to protect the eyes from gases, metal fragments and other particles.

## Equipment required

### Firearms and ammunition

- Self-loading rifles (SLR) with large magazine capacity such as the M14, M1A, L1A1 or Heckler and Koch M19 in .308 calibre are suitable. They should be fitted with a spot on/aim-point/ red dot scope. 130, 150 or 160 grain soft- or hollow-point ammunition is appropriate for feral goats.

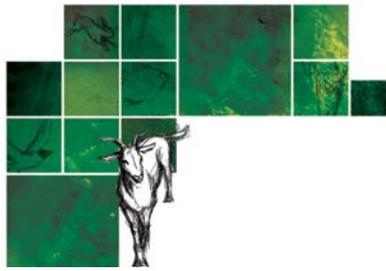


Image: Mal Leeson

- 12-gauge pump action shotguns with 70–75 cm barrels set on  $\frac{3}{4}$  to full choke with SG or SSG ammunition are also used. SSG or AAA shot is recommended for smaller animals (less than 40 kg).
- To provide a backup in case of firearm/ammunition malfunction, at least two firearms should be carried by shooters at all times.
- The accuracy and precision of firearms should be tested against inanimate targets before any shooting operation.

### Aircraft

- Aircraft used for aerial shooting should be manoeuvrable, fast and responsive to allow quick follow-up of any wounded animals. They should also allow for a good shooting position for the shooter. Operating conditions and performance characteristics of the aircraft will determine the most suitable for the job. Robinson 44 or equivalent or turbine-powered helicopters such as the Bell 206 Jet Ranger are recommended.
- GPS (global positioning systems) and computer mapping equipment such as GIS (geographic information systems) should be used to assist in the accurate recording of information (eg where animals are shot) and to eliminate the risk of shooting in off-target areas.



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### Other equipment

- flight helmet (with intercom)
- fire-resistant flight suit
- safety harness
- other personal protective equipment including lace-up boots, gloves and appropriate eye and hearing protection
- survival kit (including a first aid kit)
- emergency locating beacon
- lockable firearm box
- lockable ammunition box.

### Procedures

- The best time to shoot feral goats is when they are most active and away from cover; that is, in the early morning, late afternoon and evening. When the weather is very hot, goats will often be found near water (eg around creek lines, gullies). If the weather is cold, goats are likely to be found on the eastern aspects of hills during the early morning.
- Target goats should be mustered away from watercourses and areas of dense vegetation before being shot, as wounded animals will be difficult to locate if they go down in these locations.
- Goats can sometimes exhibit secretive behaviour, especially if they have had previous exposure to aerial shooting. It is possible that they learn to avoid approaching helicopters and will hide in vegetation, under cliff ledges and so on. They can also remain motionless, making them very difficult to see in some situations.
- When in clear country, shoot the dark-coloured goats first. White goats are more visible and will be easier to find if they escape into cover.
- Once a target is sighted and has been positively identified, the pilot should position the helicopter as close as is safe to the target animal, to give the shooter the best opportunity for a humane kill.
- The pilot should aim to provide a shooting platform that is as stable as possible. Shooting from a moving platform can significantly detract from the shooter's accuracy.
- A feral goat should only be shot at when:
  - it can be clearly seen and recognised
  - it is within the effective range of the firearm and ammunition being used
  - a humane kill is probable.
- If in doubt, do NOT shoot.
- Small kids can be difficult to hit with a single projectile, so a pump action shotgun might be more effective at achieving a humane kill. The recommended range is 20–30 metres. An SLR should only be used on kids when conditions are good (minimal wind and turbulence) and the pilot can position the helicopter to within 20 metres of the target animal.
- When shooting feral goats, all animals must receive multiple shots to vital areas to ensure a rapid death. This is because animals can appear to be dead but might only be temporarily unconscious after a single shot.
- For aerial shooting, the initial shot to the head is preferred since it is easier to achieve with a moving animal. However, the judgement of the shooter is paramount in determining the optimum first shot placement for each target animal. In some situations (ie when conditions are ideal) an initial head shot will achieve a quick humane death. In other situations, an initial chest shot will be more appropriate.
- Immediately after delivering the first shot, the shooter must perform a second chest shot to ensure a humane death.
- In a line of running animals, shoot the animals at the tail end first and then move forward until all animals in the line have been shot. Any wounded animals must be destroyed immediately before returning to the remainder of the herd.
- The fly-back procedure must then be undertaken to ensure death and apply follow-up shots to vital areas if necessary. Any wounded animal in a group should be killed immediately before any further groups are targeted and shot.
- Records should be kept of number, type and location of animals killed, hours flown, ammunition used and details of established fly-back procedures.

### Aiming points

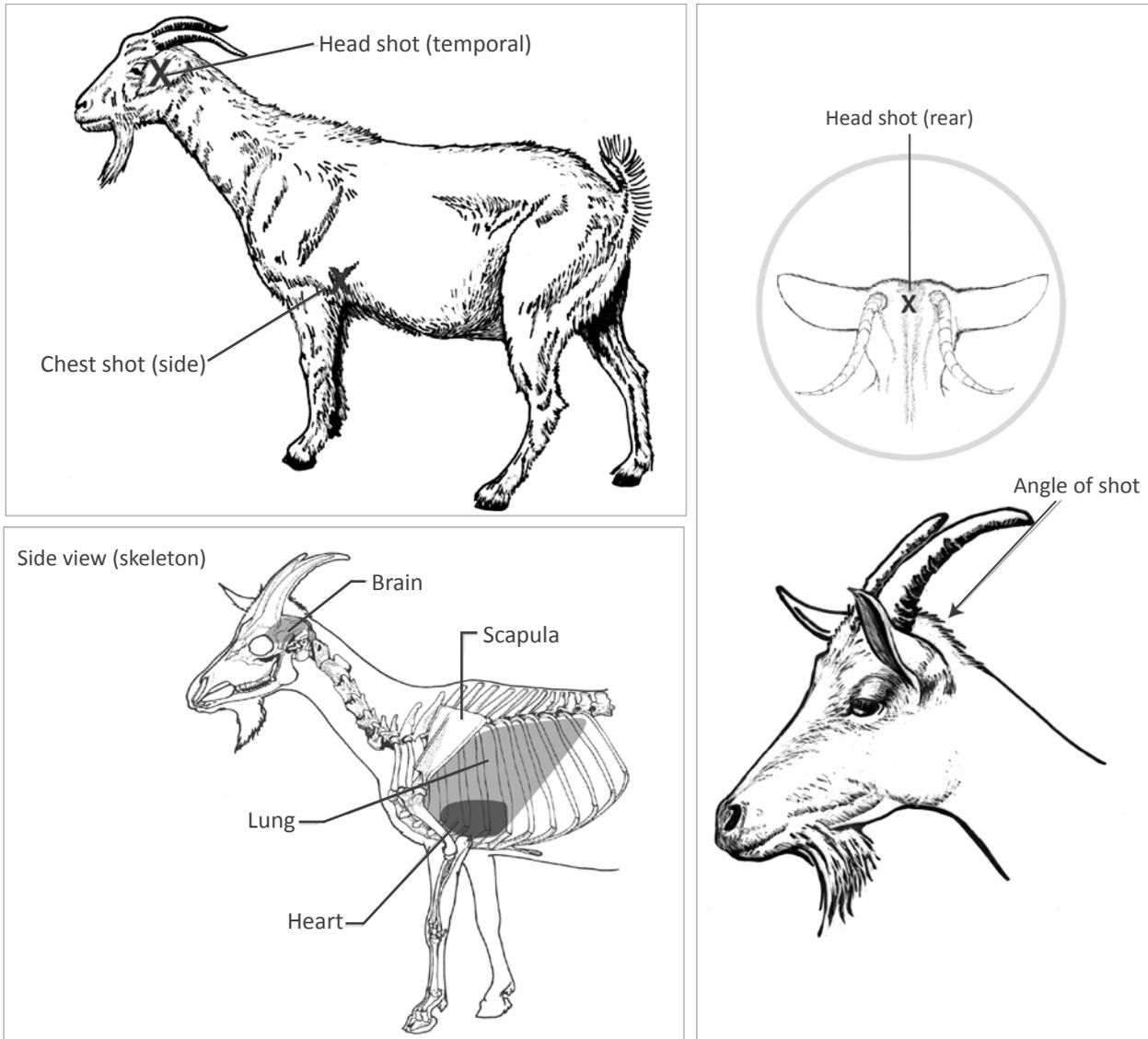
- Aiming points for head and chest shots are as follows (see Diagram 1):

#### Chest Shot

##### Side view

- The animal is shot from the side so that the bullet enters the chest at a point behind the foreleg slightly above and immediately behind the elbow joint.

Diagram 1: Recommended shot placements for feral goats.



### Head Shots

#### Poll position (rear view)

- When aerial shooting, most head shots will be taken at this rear view position, as animals are running away from the helicopter.
- The firearm should be aimed at the back of the head at a point between the base of the horns and directed towards the mouth.

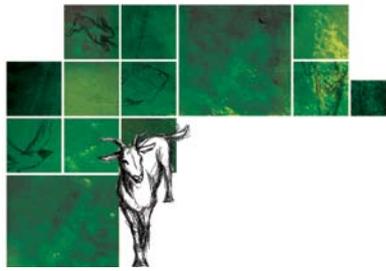
#### Temporal position (side view)

- This shot is occasionally used when a second shot needs to be delivered to an injured animal that is lying on its side.

- The goat is shot from the side so that the bullet enters the skull at a point midway between the eye and the base of the ear.

#### Frontal position (front view)

- The horn structures on adult goats make the temporal (side-on) or rear head shots the preferred points of aim. Shots to the front of the head can be used on kids. However, this method is not suitable for mature goats, as the brain is located well back in the skull. The shot is directed at a point of intersection of lines taken from the base of each ear to the opposite eye.



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## Further information

Contact the relevant federal, state or territory government agency from the following list of websites:

- Australian Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities  
<http://www.environment.gov.au/>
- Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
<http://www.daff.gov.au>
- ACT Territory and Municipal Services Directorate  
<http://www.tams.act.gov.au/live/environment>
- NSW Department of Primary Industries  
<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>
- NT Department of Land Resource Management  
<http://lrm.nt.gov.au/>
- Qld Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
<http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/>
- SA Biosecurity SA, Department of Primary Industries and Regions  
<http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa>
- Tas Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment  
<http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/>
- Vic Department of Primary Industries  
<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/>
- WA Department of Agriculture and Food  
<http://www.agric.wa.gov.au>

Also refer to:

- Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre  
<http://www.invasiveanimals.com/>  
or <http://www.feral.org.au>

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