

Non-indigenous Bird Management in Victoria

Discussion Paper

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Summary

Non-indigenous birds have a wide range of potential and realised impacts in Victoria, particularly lost horticulture and other crop production. They can have serious impacts on our natural environment through out-competing or displacing native birds and also reduce amenity value in urban areas.

The lack of clear and robust direction on the management of non-indigenous birds represents a significant gap in invasive animal policy in Victoria.

Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) is developing a new risk-based approach to the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria, in line with DEPI's broader principles for managing biosecurity risks. The new approach aims to:

- reduce the risks associated with non-indigenous birds that have the potential to become invasive species in Victoria
- provide a framework which allows the Victorian Government to identify and manage threats to Victoria from non-indigenous birds
- ensure there will be no impediment to the current keeping of non-indigenous birds in Victoria.

DEPI is now consulting with key stakeholders to develop and improve Victoria's policy for the management of non-indigenous birds.

About this Discussion Paper

Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) is developing a new risk-based approach to the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria, in line with DEPI's broader principles for managing biosecurity risks. The proposed new approach aims to:

- reduce the risks associated with non-indigenous birds that have the potential to become invasive species in Victoria

- provide a framework which allows the Victorian Government to identify and manage threats to Victoria from non-indigenous birds

- ensure there will be no impediment to the current keeping of non-indigenous birds in Victoria.

This discussion paper outlines the proposed policy approach to the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria and provides information on how you can provide your feedback to the Department of Primary Industries. This will involve a six-week consultation process with the community, primary industries, government, and environment groups.

The DEPI will use the feedback and ideas that this consultation process generates to improve the policy.

Part 1 - Background and Context

Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) recognises that the risks associated with non-indigenous birds in Victoria are not being adequately managed under current legislation. Victoria's current approach is inconsistent with other states and territories and national policy, and does not align with Victoria's risk management approach to the management of invasive animals. DEPI is now consulting with key stakeholders to develop and improve Victoria's policy for the management of non-indigenous birds.

Why is DEPI developing new policy for management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria?

There is a potential role for government to manage adverse effects of invasive species on the economy, environment and social amenity. However, at present there is no Victorian policy specific to the management of non-indigenous birds or their impacts.

Non-indigenous birds have a wide range of potential and realised impacts in Victoria, particularly lost horticulture and other crop production. They can have serious impacts on our natural environment through out-competing or displacing native birds and also reducing amenity value in urban areas.

Non-indigenous birds have become established through escape from captivity and domestication, by deliberate release and by accidental importation in cargo.

There are at least 20 introduced species of birds established on the Australian mainland. Of these, 15 bird species are known to be present in Victoria. Notable examples of these are the Indian Myna, Common Starling, European Blackbird, and House Sparrow. In addition to these widely established introduced species, other species are present in the wild in small numbers or as occasional escapees, including Canada geese, Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Indian Ring-necked Parakeets.

The lack of clear and robust direction on the management of non-indigenous birds represents a significant gap in invasive animal policy in Victoria. The proposed approach outlined in this document is aimed at filling that gap and providing certainty about the roles and responsibilities for managing non-indigenous birds in Victoria.

Q1. Do you agree with the need for better policy direction for the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria?

What is within the scope of this proposed approach and discussion paper?

The intent of the proposed approach is to consider all non-indigenous birds. The key aim is prevention with a strong focus on trying to prevent new species from establishing in the wild.

For the purpose of this paper, the term management in relation to birds refers to actions intended manage the risks associated with non-indigenous birds. It includes a range of activities such as:

- declaration of species under relevant legislation
- prevention of certain high risk species from entering the state
- removal of birds from the wild
- raising awareness of risks posed by species and promoting responsible ownership

The proposed approach does not cover native bird species as these are covered under the *Wildlife Act 1997*.

The proposed approach will not impose any significant regulatory burden on the current keeping of non-indigenous birds, including those kept for avicultural purposes or primary production. Any future legislative changes that affect private keeping or businesses under future legislation would require public consultation, as safeguarded under the *Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*.

Q2. Do you agree with the scope of the proposed approach?

National legislation and policy context

Pest management is primarily the responsibility of the states and territories but the Australian Government plays a role in coordinating strategic pest animal management, including through regulation of quarantine and live animal imports into Australia, funding research at a national level, and membership of the Vertebrate Pests Committee (VPC).

The VPC is an Australian committee with the role of providing coordinated policy and planning solutions to pest animal issues. The VPC is responsible for the 'Guidelines for the Import, Movement and Keeping of Non-indigenous Vertebrates in Australia' which outline a national approach

within the context of Australian Government, State and Territory legislation to minimise the risks posed by the introduction, keeping and movement of non-indigenous vertebrates, including birds.

The Guidelines focus on the development of appropriate strategies to prevent the establishment of new species that pose significant risk to the environment, primary production, or public safety. The guidelines outline the process used to assess the species' pest risk, assign them to one of four threat categories; extreme, serious, moderate or low, and manage them on the basis of their threat category. For more information on the VPC or the guidelines, refer to <http://www.feral.org.au>.

The federal environment department regulates international trade in non-indigenous birds to:

- help reduce illegal international trade in endangered species
- prevent exotic birds becoming established in the wild as pest species (feral animals)
- prevent the introduction of new diseases into captive and wild bird populations in Australia

The Exotic Birds Record Keeping Scheme (EBRKS) is a national, voluntary scheme to help bird keepers maintain adequate records showing where they have obtained exotic birds they hold. It was developed by federal government in consultation with aviculturists through the Exotic Bird Keepers Advisory Group (EBAG). There is no easy way to measure the level of participation the EBRKS, however it is estimated to be low. For more information on EBRKS please refer to <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/exoticbirds/index.html>.

Victorian legislation and policy context

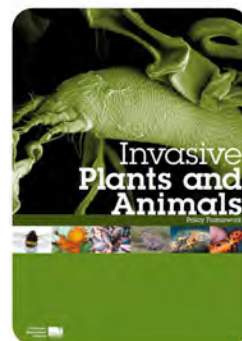
Victoria takes a risk management approach to invasive animals, which is aligned with national guidelines and is focussed on protecting Victoria from the threats and impacts of invasive species. Management of existing and potential invasive species in Victoria is guided by a whole of government Biosecurity Strategy and by the Invasive Plants and Animals Framework (IPAPF). The Biosecurity Strategy and the IPAPF emphasise a risk-management approach to government involvement and investment to ensure that the state is well-positioned to meet future biosecurity challenges.

The main legislation covering invasive animal management in Victoria is the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act). It provides the power to declare species of animals as 'pest animals' and regulates the control, importation into the State, keeping, movement, trade and

release of pest animals in Victoria. In Victoria, no species of birds have been declared as pest animals under the CaLP Act. However, it is within the power of the CaLP Act to do so, if the species is, or has the potential to be a threat to primary production, Crown land, the environment or community health in Victoria.

Victoria is developing new legislation for the management of invasive species. For further information on the new invasive species legislation, please refer to the DEPI website (<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-victoria-pest-animals-weeds/legislation-policy-and-permits/new-invasive-species-management-legislation>).

Information collected in this consultation process will be considered by the DEPI in the refinement of Victoria's policy for the management of non-indigenous birds. Once finalised, this policy will inform Victorian Government decisions made under the new invasive species legislation post 2014.



Part 2 - Developing a new approach to non-indigenous birds

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is proposing a new approach for the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria.

The Victorian Government is developing a new policy to address the significant gap in how the threats posed by non-indigenous birds are managed in Victoria.

The intended outcomes of implementing the proposed policy would be that:

- non-indigenous bird species of Extreme or Serious Threat¹ not currently known to be within Australia, are banned from importation, keeping and sale in Victoria;

- new high risk non-indigenous bird species are prevented from establishing in the wild in Victoria;

- private bird keepers may still keep the species they currently hold without increased regulatory burden;

- an obligation to control widely established bird species is not imposed upon landowners; and

- partnerships between aviculturists and government are developed to promote responsible management of non-indigenous birds.

The proposed policy has five key components:

1. Certain non-indigenous bird species of significant concern to Victoria that are not known to be in Australia should not be brought into, kept or sold in Victoria

These species should be declared under Victorian invasive species legislation. This approach will help prevent new species from establishing in Victoria. It is consistent with national policy, other invasive animal management in Victoria, and with the relevant provisions of the current legislation.

In practice this declaration would only apply to a handful of Extreme or Serious threat species that are not currently kept in Victoria.

¹ VPC threat categories, see Glossary of terms for further information

2. Certain non-indigenous bird species that are known to be in Australia and have high pest potential and/or complex husbandry should be limited to zoological institutions

These species should be declared under invasive species legislation and their keeping restricted to collections with appropriate levels of expertise and security. This approach will ensure that the keeping of these species continues to be limited to appropriate facilities in Victoria. It is consistent with national policy, other invasive animal management in Victoria, and the relevant provisions of the current legislation.

In practice this declaration would only apply to a handful of species that are already restricted to zoological institutions in Victoria. These may include species such as condors and penguins.

3. Non-indigenous bird species that are known to be in Victoria in private collections should NOT be subject to a permit system or other type of increase in regulatory burden

DEPI does not consider it reasonable to increase the regulatory burden for bird keepers in Victoria. Permits to keep species in private collections would not be required.

This approach (as outlined below in **3a** and **3b**) will enable the keeping of these species without an increase in regulatory burden but will also help to prevent new species from establishing in Victoria. It is consistent with national policy, other invasive animal management in Victoria, and is consistent with the relevant provisions of the current legislation and the Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria.

Bird species known to be in private collections in Victoria will be allocated as described **3a** and **3b** on the basis of their threat to Victoria.

3a: For those species determined to pose a high threat of establishment in the wild in Victoria, the feral or wild populations of those species should be managed by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries as appropriate.

This category would cover high risk species that are detected in the wild, before they establish self-sustaining populations. This would usually only involve a few individual birds (eg escapees from private collections) and management programs would have a high likelihood of success.

DPI would seek to work in partnership with bird keepers to develop strategies to limit escapes from aviaries. This would involve developing a cooperative working relationship with the avicultural community.

3b: Those species determined not to pose a high threat of establishment in the wild in Victoria should be exempt from invasive species legislation in Victoria.

DEPI would have no role in active management/control activities when these species are detected in the wild but would encourage community-led action where appropriate.

4. Non-indigenous quail, pheasants, and partridges should continue to be managed as Game species in Victoria

Game species are considered under the *Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012*. DEPI does not consider it reasonable to change the current management of non-indigenous quail, pheasants and partridges.

5. Non-indigenous bird species that are widely established in Victoria should be exempt from legislation in Victoria

DEPI does not consider it reasonable to impose the lawful responsibility to control widely established bird species upon landowners (including those in the suburbs) when it is highly unlikely to result in overall population management. Problem birds or flocks could still be managed, but at the discretion of landowners and as long as the management complies with other relevant legislation, such as animal welfare. DEPI will continue to support community-led action for the management of these species in the wild, where appropriate.

Q3. Do you think that the proposed approach will reduce the likelihood of non-indigenous birds with high pest potential establishing self-sustaining populations in the wild?

Q4. Do you think the proposed approach offers enough flexibility to manage non-indigenous birds into the future (e.g. climate change, population growth)?

Q5. Which aspects of the proposed approach do you support?

Q6. Can you suggest how the proposed approach could be improved?

Q7. How will the proposed approach affect your organisation and/or sector?

Q8. Do you have any other comments?



Indian Myna (photo C. Tzaros)

Part 3 - Case Study: Indian Ringneck Parakeets in UK

Indian Ringneck Parakeets are considered a serious agricultural pest in their native range and have had significant negative impacts on agricultural production, native species and public amenity in the UK. The Indian Ringneck is a species that is widely held in private collections around the world, and if established in the wild could pose significant risks to the economy, environment and social amenity of Victoria.

The National Pest Alert for this species can be found at <http://www.feral.org.au/animal-pest-alert-indian-ringneck-parakeet>.

Background

The Indian Ringneck, or Indian Ring-necked Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), is also called the Roseringed Parakeet or African Ring-necked Parakeet. It is a gregarious tropical Afro-Asian parakeet species that is common throughout much of its extensive natural range. Since the population appears to be increasing, the species has been evaluated as Least Concern by IUCN in 2009. Indian Ringnecks are widely kept as pets.

Populations resulting from the escape or release of caged birds occur in Europe, the United States, the Middle East, Japan, Singapore and several island groups including the Hawaiian, Canary, Andaman and Maldivian islands. Many of these populations are expanding in size and range.

This species is now widespread in the UK, with some colonies estimated to number in their thousands. Indian Ringnecks have been documented in the wild from Wales in the west to England's east coast and as far north as Glasgow in central Scotland.

There are various suggestions as to how the birds first became introduced in Britain, including release from Shepparton Film Studios when *The African Queen* was being filmed, to accidental releases from quarantine at Heathrow Airport. Others suggest the birds arrived as bedraggled castaways that flew ashore after a cargo ship capsized near London. But a likely scenario is that the birds escaped and/or were deliberately released from homes and pet stores.

Because they are so common, many Indian Ringnecks have little monetary value. While handsome, they can bite hard and can be very noisy. These factors contribute to many birds escaping or being released into the wild.

Description

The Indian Ringneck is a long-tailed, grass-green, red-beaked parrot, 37cm to 43cm in length (body and tail). Male birds have a narrow black and pink collar which is absent from female and immature birds.

Indian Ringnecks are very vocal with a variety of distinctive screeching calls. They can be identified by their typical shrill kee-ak call. Their flight is swift and direct with rapid wing beats.

Habitat

Indian Ringnecks occupy a range of habitats including semi-desert, open scrub, bushland, evergreen forest, light rainforest and agricultural land with scattered trees. They also inhabit gardens, orchards, towns and cities.

Introduced populations are found mainly in cities and towns where they rely on rich fruit-bearing vegetation and bird feeders for food. In England these populations are spreading from towns into rural areas.

Escaped Indian Ringnecks are often attracted to bird feeders containing seed or fruit put out for other species

Reproduction, food and behaviour

Indian Ringnecks usually nest in tree hollows higher than 3.5m off the ground, but they can also use holes in rock faces, roof cavities and walls. They do not tend to excavate their own holes so are dependent on finding a natural split in a tree or finding a hole made by another animal.

They eat a wide variety of foods including cereal grains, legumes, fruits, nuts and blossoms. Indian Ringnecks are assertive, adaptable and resourceful. Being social birds they are usually seen in small groups but they can form large flocks of hundreds at roosts and food sources. The species is long-lived, commonly surviving in captivity for 20 years.

Impacts of Indian Ringneck Parakeets

In its native range in India, the Indian Parakeet is considered one of the most destructive bird pests of agriculture due to their appetite for fruit and other crops, such as maize.

In the UK, the species can damage fruit trees, and have been observed feeding on fruits such as apples, grapes, pears, plums, raspberries, and strawberries, as well as cereal crops like barley and corn. In one instance Indian ringnecks have been reported to have reduced the output of a vineyard to one sixth of the expected production.

Indian Ringnecks can carry diseases such as Newcastle Disease and Cryptosporidium that may also affect the poultry industry.

There is potential for noise nuisance and risks to human health associated with fouling, particularly in the vicinity of large communal roosts. In these roosts, Indian Ringnecks can number in the hundreds.

Indian ringnecks in the UK have been found to outcompete some of Britain's native bird species; in part because they begin breeding in early March, which is earlier than other cavity-nesting species, and also due to the species being highly competitive for nesting sites. Indian Ringnecks are a particular threat to hollow dwelling native birds, including owls, woodpeckers, and falcons.

Indian Ringneck Parakeets in Australia

Indian ringnecks are widely kept in Australia. They are regularly found in the wild, particularly in urban environments. In Western Australia, some of these escaped birds are thought to have survived in the wild for at least four years and two groups had reportedly bred. Several captured birds had leg bands that identified them as originating with bird breeders.

The Indian ringneck is rated as being highly likely to establish populations in Australia and become a pest of agriculture, the environment and public amenity. Indian Ringnecks could threaten biodiversity here if they become established in the wild. Native parrots such as rosellas and other hollow-nesting birds. Agricultural crops such as sunflowers, other oilseeds, grapes and other fruit could be at risk.

Part 4 - Having your say

Invitation to make submissions

You are invited to review this discussion paper and provide written comments to DEPI by **Friday the 28th June 2013**.

There are three ways to provide feedback:

1. Use the online feedback form, which asks key questions to help you provide feedback quickly and easily. The online feedback form can be accessed by clicking here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/non-indigenousbirds>
2. Use the key questions included in this discussion paper (and provided below) and email your written comments to Invasivespecies.Consultation@dpi.vic.gov.au.
3. Use the key questions included in this discussion paper (and provided below) and post your written comments to:

**Non-indigenous Birds Stakeholder Consultation,
Invasive Plants and Animals, Biosecurity Victoria,
GPO Box 4440, Melbourne VIC 3001.**

How DEPI will use the comments provided

Your comments will be collated by DEPI and used to inform the further development of the policy for non-indigenous bird management in Victoria.

DEPI will endeavour to provide a response to all who provide feedback to inform them of the outcome of their comments.

The feedback you provide may also be published after the consultation period closes. If you wish to make a confidential submission, please do not use the online feedback form, but rather email or post your comments and clearly mark your comments 'confidential'. Please note that Freedom of Information access requirements will apply to all submissions, even those treated as confidential.

If you have any queries, including requests for electronic or hard copies of the discussion paper, please email Invasivespecies.Consultation@dpi.vic.gov.au or phone 136 186.

Key Questions

Q1. Do you agree with the need for better policy direction for the management of non-indigenous birds in Victoria?

Q2. Do you agree with the scope of the proposed approach?

Q3. Do you think that the proposed approach will reduce the likelihood of non-indigenous birds with high pest potential establishing self-sustaining populations in the wild?

Q4. Do you think the proposed approach offers enough flexibility to manage non-indigenous birds into the future (e.g. climate change, population growth)?

Q5. Which aspects of the proposed approach do you support?

Q6. Can you suggest how the proposed approach could be improved?

Q7. How will the proposed approach affect your organisation and/or sector?

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Biosecurity	Biosecurity is the protection of the economy, the environment, social amenity or human health from negative impacts associated with the entry, establishment or spread of animal or plant pests and disease, or invasive plant and animal species.
CaLP Act	The Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 is the current main legislation covering noxious weed and pest animal management in Victoria and provides the power to declare species of plants and animals as noxious. One of the main objectives is to protect primary production, Crown land, the environment and community health from the threats posed by noxious weeds and pest animals.
DEPI	Department of Environment and Primary Industries
non-indigenous	not indigenous to Australia
VPC	The Vertebrate Pests Committee, a technical sub-committee of the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee
VPC threat categories	The VPC uses a risk assessment process to assign the non-indigenous vertebrate species to one of four threat categories: extreme, serious, moderate or low. The VPC recommend a nationally consistent approach to the import, keeping and movement of exotic vertebrates, as determined by the threat category into which they are placed.
Wildlife Act	The <i>Wildlife Act 1975</i> is the main legislation managing native animals in Victoria. It aims to establish procedures in order to promote the protection and conservation of wildlife, the prevention of taxa of wildlife from becoming extinct; and the sustainable use of and access to wildlife. It also aims to prohibit and regulate the conduct of persons engaged in activities concerning or related to wildlife.