

Earth Watch

PROTECTING NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS



Quolls are native to Australia.

Animals come in all shapes, sizes and types. Most are very cute, but some harm the environment when they move to places they do not belong. When animals go to a new place, some of them spread too fast or hurt the other animals that live there.

WHAT ARE PESTS?

Animals that belong in a country are called *native animals*. New species that cause trouble are called *pests*. Some pests are farm animals or pets gone wild (or *feral*). Others were taken to new areas by accident or on purpose as people explored the world.

Cane toads are from South America, but they were brought to Australia to eat beetles that were destroying sugar cane crops. They look like frogs, but their poison kills frog-eating native animals. Stoats (or weasels) from America cause problems in New Zealand. They eat the chicks of native kiwi birds, which are

endangered. Some pests travel by accident. Rats and mice come on ships. Bats, birds and insects fly. Mites and ticks arrive in the fur of other animals.



European starlings are very pretty birds, but they are pests that steal nests from native birds.



Flowers, plants and fruits like blackberry bushes can spread to take over wild places.



Sniffer dogs are good at smelling for pests at airports. They sit down next to luggage if they sniff pests.

HOW DO PESTS SPREAD?

In the past, people did not know the dangers of bringing plants or animals to new countries.

Boats were not checked, so pests got a free ride around the world. Cats, dogs, birds and rabbits got loose or were set free. Pigs, goats, cows and horses also went feral. Their hooves can damage habitats, and they compete with native animals for food and water.

Customs and border control agents now carefully check planes and ships for pests. These days, pests mostly travel through careless packing of goods or by hitching a ride with humans when they travel to new places.

Now that you know how to stop the spread of pests, you can help protect Australia's native plants and animals.

5 WAYS TO STOP PESTS

1. Be careful not to order plant or animal products from overseas or post them from Australia.
2. After hiking, wash your boots clean of mud before you travel home.
3. Don't take any fruit, vegetables or plants with when you visit other states or countries.
4. Never remove native animals from their homes or release insects, pets, fish or farm animals into the wild where they don't belong.
5. Protect national parks by telling rangers about any pests that you see.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Earth Watch: Protecting Native Plants and Animals

Questions

1. What native animals and plants are found near your home?

2. Do you know of any introduced pests that are in your area?

3. How do pests in your area threaten the native environment?

4. What can you do to help reduce the risk to the native environment?

5. Draw the habitat of a native animal in your area.