

FERAL ALERT

Forensic fingerprinting of starlings

Starlings are one of the world's top 100 invasive alien species. Introduced by European settlers in the late 1850s, the bird has now colonised most of south-eastern Australia. It is omnivorous and lives in large noisy flocks (the quarrelling of a breeding colony in the roof above my bedroom in England was deafening! Ed.). It can cause extensive damage to cultivated grain and horticulture crops, as well as competing with native species for food resources and nesting hollows.

WA has been battling for 50 or more years to try to stop starlings getting here, patrolling the Nullarbor, shooting and poisoning any invaders seen. But recently, small populations have established near Esperance, at Munglinup and Condingup. A big effort is going into controlling them.

A new technique being tried is DNA fingerprinting. This will enable the flocks to be traced back to their original points of departure, and will give a better idea of how wide a buffer needs to be, to try to limit more incomers.

The newly formed State Starling Management Advisory Committee is developing a Strategic Plan for the long-term management of this pest. To find out more, go to www.agric.wa.gov.au and search for 'starling'.

The 'Landcare Burnout' mentioned is an important issue. Have any readers got ideas or suggestions concerning this that we could all consider? – Ed.