

The spread of the cat, *Felis catus*, in Australia: re-examination of the current conceptual model with additional information

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an update of Abbott, I (2002) Origin and spread of the cat, *Felis catus*, on mainland Australia, with a discussion of the magnitude of its early impact on native fauna. *Wildlife Research* 29, 51–74. An additional 33 journals of expeditions of exploration or excursions beyond settled areas before 1895 were located, and as expected from the current conceptual model, none of these recorded cats. These accounts of travel through country as yet unsettled or sparsely settled by Europeans necessitate only one small modification (relating to north-east Queensland) to the conceptual model presented previously. In addition, nearly 150 new records of cats were located in other parts of Australia, and all are consistent with the chronology of spread hypothesized in the previous paper. For Tasmania, following their introduction in 1804, cats were first recorded there as feral in the 1840s. Incidental records were found indicating that in parts of Australia the spread of the cat was assisted by their release in regions experiencing their first outbreaks of rabbits, by flood-linked irruptions of the long-haired rat (*Rattus villosissimus*), and by their release to control rodents destroying sugar cane plantations in northern Queensland. Feral cats of large size were first detected in various regions of Australia some 10–30 years after local settlement.

Keywords: exotic, mammal, predator, releases, spread, chronology

INTRODUCTION

From several hundred sources Abbott (2002) compiled information about the presence of the cat on mainland Australia and its apparent absence from newly explored country in the period up to 1883. The main outcome of that study was a conceptual model of the colonization of mainland Australia, presented as a series of eight maps (Fig. 3 of Abbott 2002), showing that there had been multiple introductions by Europeans as they settled the various regions of Australia. It was posited that cats first became feral around Sydney by 1820, around Perth and in south-east Australia by 1840, in north-west Australia by 1870, and over 90% of the continent by 1890.

Further research on historical changes in distribution and abundance of conspicuous bird and mammal species in Australia (Abbott 2008) has uncovered many additional records of cats, both domestic and feral, in Australia (including Tasmania). This, together with access to previously overlooked journeys of exploration or visits to country as yet unsettled by Europeans, provides an opportunity to examine the validity and robustness of the provisional conclusions presented by Abbott (2002).

Given the great increase in the database assembled, this paper also takes the opportunity to investigate when 'large' feral cats were first reported. This topic is of interest as domestic cats in the process of becoming feral are

expected to have gradually increased in body size each generation because of the operation of natural selection as feral cats encountered large populations of medium-sized marsupials around farms and villages.

Four key questions are investigated in this paper:

1. Is absence of records of feral cats from newly assessed accounts of unsettled or sparsely settled country inconsistent with the previously proposed model of spread?
2. Are any of the new records of feral cats inconsistent with the previously proposed conceptual model of spread?
3. How adequately does the spread of the cat in Tasmania align with the model previously proposed for mainland Australia?
4. When were feral cats of noticeably large size first encountered?

METHODS

A large number of primary and secondary documents, not previously accessed, were reviewed for information on the presence of cats, either in domestic situations, or feral. The context of documents that included no references to cats was carefully appraised. If the document included references to conspicuous native species such as dingoes, kangaroos, quolls, bustards and emu, then I presumed

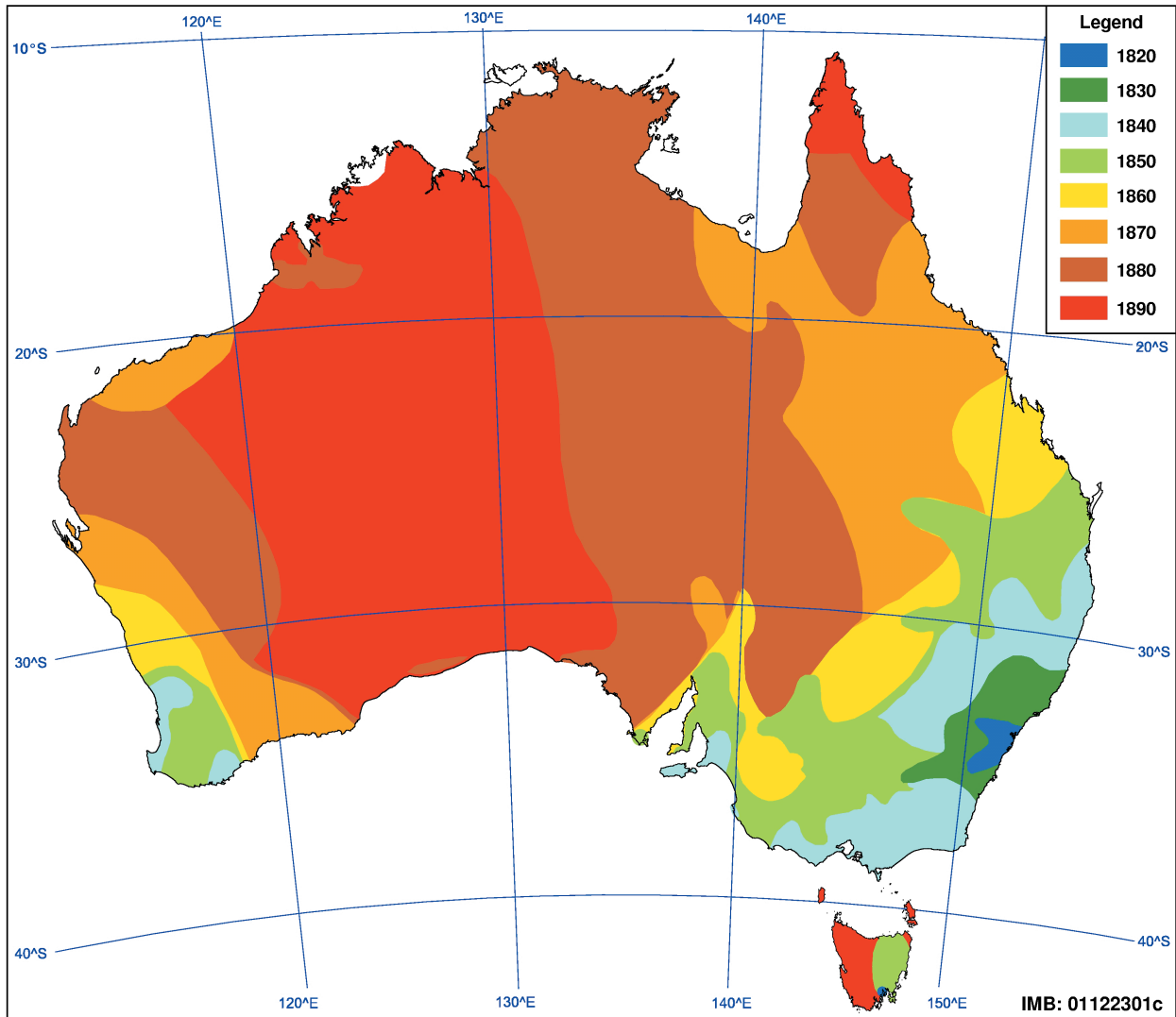


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the colonization of Australia by the cat, consolidated and updated from Abbott (2002: 63). Cats are present before, or by, the year shown.

that the observational ability and interest of the recorder was high. The absence of a record of a cat was therefore likely to be of significance. In contrast, the absence of records of cats by observers who failed to note much of the natural history of the district travelled through was regarded as equivocal. I took the view that absence of a record of a cat in such cases did not necessarily imply non-detection. Limited space precludes the listing of the many documents in this category.

RESULTS

Absence of records of feral cats

Several of the new accounts are by other members of expeditions of exploration led by Sturt, Leichhardt, and Burke and Wills (Table 1), none of whom recorded cats. These accounts provide a check on some of the accounts used by Abbott (2002). One of these accounts is particularly

significant, being the diary of the astute naturalist and collector John Gilbert, who recorded no cats.

The accounts of travel through unsettled or sparsely settled country (Table 1) indicate the need for only one modification to the conceptual model presented in Fig. 3 of Abbott (2002). It appears that the dense rainforests of north-eastern Queensland had no feral cats present in the 1880s. This minor adjustment has been made to Fig. 1.

New records of feral cats

The c. 100 additional records of cats located (Table 2) allow many of the blank spaces depicted on Fig. 2 of Abbott (2002) to be detailed (Fig. 2). Records of cats in domestic situations (house, farm) have been distinguished from records of feral cats (remote from settled areas). The former are only suggestive of the possibility of cats becoming feral, whereas the latter actually demonstrate independence of cats from humans. None of the additional records are inconsistent with those previously discovered.

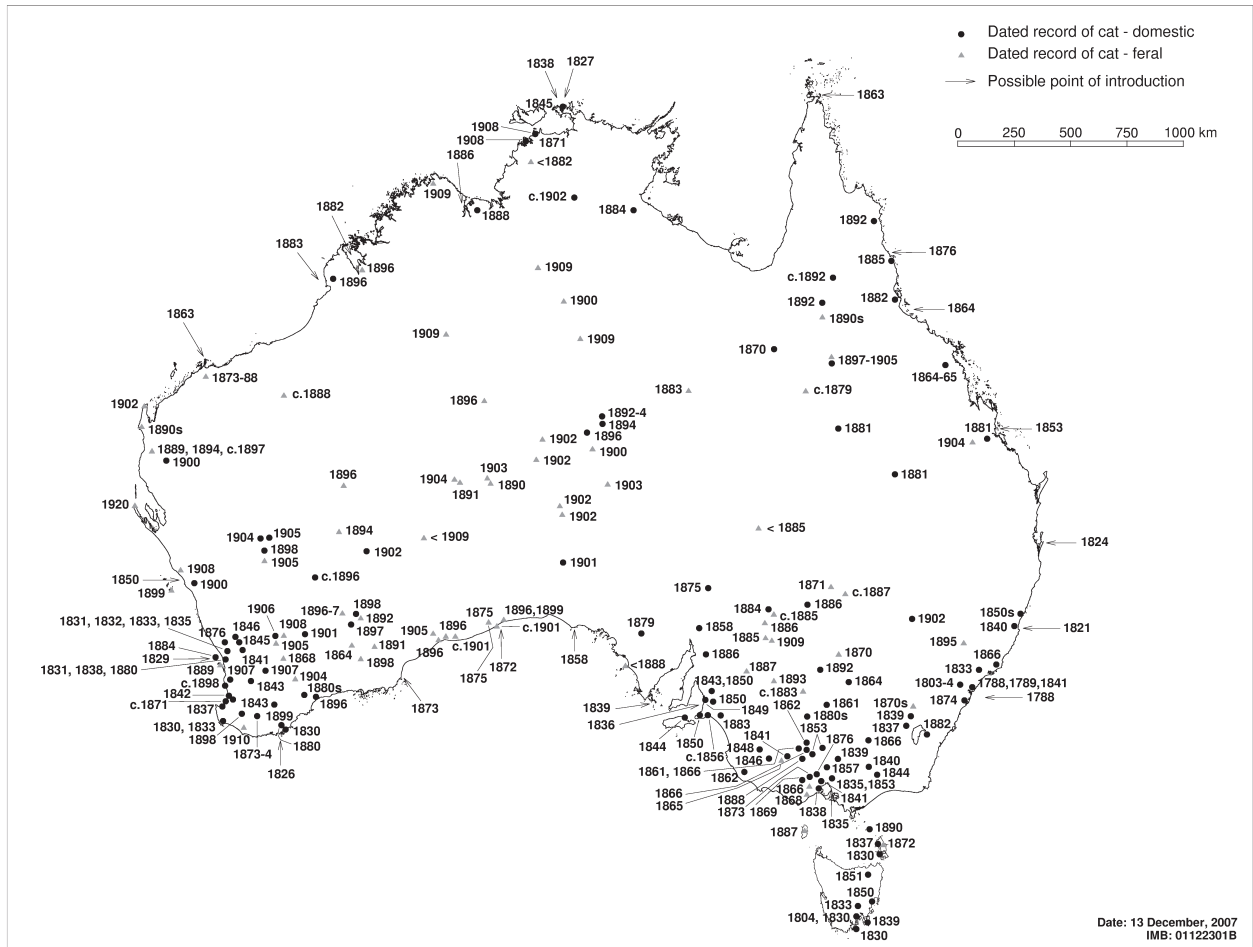


Figure 2. Records of domestic and feral cats in Australia during the period 1788–1910, consolidated and updated from Abbott (2002: 58). Note: A few late additions to Table 2 are not included on this map.

Spread in Tasmania

Domestic cats were introduced to Tasmania in 1804, the year after European settlement commenced at Hobart (Nicholls 1977, Hamilton-Arnold 1994). By the early 1820s, cats (along with other domestic and farm animals) were said to thrive abundantly (Evans 1822: 55). Early explorers in north-west Tasmania, such as C Hardwicke in 1823 and H Hellyer and J Fossey in 1827, and naturalists such as J Backhouse in 1832 and R Lawrence in 1833, did not record feral cats (Backhouse 1843; Bischoff 1832; Burns and Skemp 1961; Crawford *et al.* 1962; Ellis 1987; Meston 1958). GA Robinson, who traversed unexplored or little-explored parts of the island on six journeys during the period 1830–4, did not record feral cats. Because these journals (Plomley 1966) offer detail on many species of native animals, the absence of records of cats is suggestive of the absence in the early 1830s of feral populations remote from settled areas of Tasmania.

Rabbits were imported to Tasmania in the late 1820s and by 1831 were reported in the ‘thousands’ (Plomley 1987: 646), presumably in settled districts. By the 1840s, cats in Tasmania had become feral ‘in some parts of the Colony’ (Breton 1846: 132) and ‘in many locations’ (R

Gunn in West 1852: 328). In the 1840s and 1850s, cats were first recorded depredate native animals such as snakes, birds and mammals (Gunn 1846, 1852; Cotton 1851; West 1852; Ellis 1979). Feral cats became well established in parts of Tasmania (*The Australasian* 14.6.1884: 780).

Earliest records of large feral cats

Most records simply state that a feral cat is large, without providing dimensions or weights. Early records of large feral cats were found in north-western New South Wales in 1870 (Randell 1978: 227), near Roebourne WA sometime between 1873 and 1888 (Anon. 1888), at Minilya River WA in 1889 (Brockman 1987: 142), at the eastern goldfields, WA in 1892 (Sligo 1995: 81), in south-west WA in 1904–7 (G. Shortridge in *The West Australian* 18.6.1907: 7), and near Broken Hill in 1909 (Macgillivray 1910: 89).

DISCUSSION

The model of spatial spread of the feral cat does not of course present any information on density. However, it

appears from the numerous travels undertaken by GA Robinson in Victoria in the 1840s that feral cats were very uncommon, as he recorded none in contrast to his many records of other conspicuous fauna (Clark 2000a–e). In fact, the first documented record of a feral cat in Victoria is from the 1850s. This reinforces the concept proposed by Abbott (2002) that the process of domestic cats establishing feral populations was slow and patchy.

Similarly, the first records of feral cats in other regions of Australia are: 1860s (south-west WA), 1870s (New South Wales, Queensland), 1870s–80s (north-western WA), 1880s (South Australia, Northern Territory), and 1890s (south-eastern WA). These data are suggestive of a minimum of 10 to 20 years after domestic cats were introduced to a region as companion animals to settlers (as pets, ratters or mousers). It appears that feral cats established earlier in WA than in eastern Australia, other than Victoria and Tasmania, even though New South Wales was settled earlier than WA.

Other early observers noted many conspicuous species of birds and mammals, without recording encounters with feral cats. For example, James Backhouse in 1836 did not record cats in recently settled parts of New South Wales (Backhouse 1843). William Morton did not record cats in western and north-central Victoria during the period 1842–7, in southern NSW in 1848 and 1860, or in east-central Queensland in 1859 (Randell 1978). William Telfer Jr did not record cats in Tamworth NSW district in the 1850s, some 10 years after European settlement (Milliss 1980). The mounted policeman and officer in charge of native police, WH Willshire, wrote a short novel evidently based on his own experiences in the bush of southern Northern Territory during the period c. 1876–90 (Willshire 1895). Although alluding to numerous species of native fauna, Willshire did not refer to cats, either feral or domestic.

There are several instances where feral cats are known to be present, or can reasonably be presumed to be present, in a district (Abbott 2002), but no actual record was made by an observant traveller. Because such a traveller noted the occurrence of bird species and other mammal species, the absence of any record of feral cats probably indicates very low density of feral cats. Examples include: Normanton, Qld to Powell Creek Telegraph Station, NT, 1883 (Monteath 2004); Eucla WA, 1888 (Luck 1988); between Oodnadatta SA and Coolgardie WA, 1895 (Hübbe 1897); WA eastern goldfields, 1892–c. 1900 (Gaston 1984); WA eastern goldfields, 1895–6 (Thompson 1993); Kalgoorlie–Mt Magnet WA (Price 1896); northern Great Victoria Desert WA, 1897 (Russel 1899); between Kalgoorlie, Eucla and 50 miles north of Eucla, 1901 (Muir 1901); between Cardunia Rocks (east of Kalgoorlie, WA) and the South Australian border, 1908 (Anon. 1908); Coongan River, WA, 1908 (Whitlock 1909); northern Kimberley, WA, 1911 (Conigrave, CP 1938); and Kimberley, WA, 1916 (Basedow 1918).

Whether early settlers kept a domestic cat seems to have been a matter of personal circumstances, perhaps simply reflecting the degree of ailurophilia or antipathy towards cats. Some contemporary paintings are suggestive that some boundary riders did not keep a cat (JS Prout

1843 in Milliss 1980: 124), whereas others indicate that some squatters did (artist not identified but scene painted before 1846, Flower 1968: 46; E. Snell 1849 in Griffiths 1988: 77). One well-travelled visitor (Demarr 1893) spent five years living on the frontier in the early 1840s, including Queanbeyan NSW (9 months), droving to Port Phillip (5 months), living at Delatite Vic (12 months), and travelling in and shepherding at New England and Darling Downs districts (8 months) and Moreton Bay (12 months). In his book, Demarr records much interesting but trivial information, including the presence of pet dogs and cockatoos, and not once mentions pet cats kept at shepherds' huts.

The paucity of early records of cats in rural New South Wales may reflect the high proportion of single men employed by pastoralists (Blainey 1980: 121). It seems highly likely that as settlers married and had children at least one cat would have become part of the household. Photographs, usually undated, and reminiscences reinforce the link between the presence of women or girls and pet cats (Cerutti 1977: 88–89; Isaacs 1990: 65, 87, 103, 240; Muir 2006: 206, 244). In addition, two early records of cats preying on rodents in dwellings (1833, Waterhouse 1984a; 1840s, Henderson 1851) amplify records cited by Abbott (2002: 58), and confirm the value of domestic cats in controlling rats and mice. Cats were also valued for protecting fruit trees from frugivorous birds (The Western Australian Almanack 1842).

I also found an intriguing record, evidently from New South Wales, of female Aborigines 'with puppy dogs, occasionally cats and kittens' being carried in bags (Mann 1885: 58). The context makes it clear that this is referring to Aborigines in contact with settlers and may date from the early 1840s.

One or more cats were kept on ships, probably as pets and to repress populations of rats. Several records of cats on ships (including shipwrecks), additional to those cited by Abbott (2002: 58), were discovered: 1802 (one, Campbell 1896: 780); 1803 (more than one, Flinders 1814 vol. 2: 208); 1831 (four, Plomley 1966: 341); 1832 (one, Chapman 1985: 565); 1836 ('very numerous', Stevenson 1930: 26–27); 1849 (one, Griffiths 1988: 33–34); 1861 (one, Henderson and Henderson 1988: 46); 1870 (one, Cambridge 1903: 42); 1879 (2 cats on board a ship about to depart from Port Walcott WA, Bush 1879); 1896 (several, Twain 1897: 4), and c. 1910 (more than one present, Skinner 1972: 81). The most significant is that of a pet on a pearling lugger off the Kimberley coast of north-western Australia in c. 1900 (Bligh 1938: 223). Although a later record, a cat was kept on a lugger at Dirk Hartog Island in 1920 to prevent seabirds roosting (Whitlock 1921a: 175). Luggers anchored in sheltered coves and inlets of offshore islands and sometimes were wrecked during cyclones, and one or both of these mechanisms may have been responsible for a population of feral cats present in 1912 on Hermite Island in the Montebello Group (Montague 1914: 630–1). (It is also possible that cats may have been introduced to control rats present on islands). Although disbelieved by White (1788, letter dated May 1770), there are a number of

instances where domestic and feral cats have been observed swimming (Flinders 1985: 12; Dutton 1994: 32–33; Read 2003: 93). Thus it is possible for cats to establish from shipwrecks.

In June 1885, the Victorian Government proclaimed feral cats, as well as quolls and goannas, as natural enemies of the rabbit under the Rabbit Suppression Act of 1884. Their destruction in districts experiencing rabbit outbreaks was prohibited (*The Australasian* 13.6.1885: 1113). It was noted that rabbit trappers were in the habit of killing any feral cats that were captured in rabbit traps. Feral cats, along with quolls and goannas, were thought to merit protection in Victoria given their value in depredate rabbits (*The Australasian* 10.1.1885: 60, 7.2.1885: 251, 18.7.1885: 106, 15.8.1885: 298).

In parts of Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales the spread of the cat was augmented by human intervention to control outbreaks of rabbits. The rationale seems to have been that domestic cats could be increased in numbers ‘more readily and more rapidly than any other suitable animal at the disposal of man’ (*The Australasian* 17.10.1885: 730). In Queensland ‘[p]eople turned domestic cats loose in the bush’ (Cameron 1956: 1212). In 1886 the NSW Government sent 400 cats to Tongo station, on the Paroo River NSW, to help control rabbits (*The Australasian* 3.4.1886: 633; Rolls 1969: 117). Large numbers of domestic cats were transported and released elsewhere, with the hope that some measure of control of rabbits would be achieved (*Adelaide Observer* 6.10.1888: 32; Keith 1892: 18; Fry 1900: 258; *The Kalgoorlie Miner* 12.4.1897 [unpaginated]; CD McLauchlan in *The Kalgoorlie Miner* 28.9.1904: 2; Anon. 1907: 309; *The West Australian* 7.2.1925: 11, 21.2.1925: 11; *The Western Mail* 18.6.1936: 5; Rolls 1969: 117–8). Such activities probably commenced in the early 1870s in Tasmania, late 1870s in Victoria and South Australia, early 1880s in New South Wales, late 1880s in Queensland, and late 1890s in Western Australia, following the arrival of, and increase in, rabbits (Stodart and Parer 1988).

Sometimes repression of rabbit outbreaks with tame cats took place locally (Rolls 1969: 116–117). In about 1869 a settler near Cape Schanck, Victoria, released ‘scores’ of domestic cats into paddocks when rabbits first appeared (*The Australasian* 4.10.1884: 635). One farmer near Bacchus Marsh, Victoria had erected two houses for cats, which initially were confined and fed daily, and were later allowed to come and go as they pleased (*The Australasian* 13.6.1885: 1113). Crommelin (1886: 32) recommended that domestic cats should be released in threes and fours (one being a tomcat), and ‘a small house should be built for them, not far from water, where they should be partially fed for three or four weeks’. One grazier at Burrungul, near Mount Gambier, SA ‘turned out some cats and built a shed for them. They started to breed, and in nine months cleared the rabbits off a thousand acres’ (J Livingstone in Anon. 1893: 40). In Queensland, however, it was stated that ingestion of rabbits filled the stomach of cats with balls of rabbit fur, which killed the cats (Cameron 1956: 1212).

It is also likely that occasional plagues of the long-

haired rat *Rattus villosissimus* in western Queensland facilitated an increase in feral populations of cats (Corfield 1921: 81; *The West Australian* 26.12.1925: 5; Crombie 1944). Domestic cats surfeited on these rats near Cloncurry/Julia Creek Queensland in 1869–70, and although dingoes, snakes, hawks and owls increased, Palmer (1886) did not mention the presence of feral cats. This locality had been settled in 1864. The earliest documented plagues of long-haired rats were in 1861 (Bonyhady 1991; Jeffries and Kertesz 1993) and in 1864 (the latter during flooding of the Darling River, NSW, Bennett 1887). It is likely that rat plagues in the 1860s in western New South Wales and south-western Queensland and in the late 1880s in north-eastern South Australia (Plomley 1972) increased the density of feral cats. The spread and increase of rabbits in South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales during the 1870s and 1880s (Royal Commission 1890; Rolls 1969) should also have increased the spread and density of feral cats.

Cats were also introduced into the canefields of northern Queensland in order to combat the destructive activities of rats, presumably *Rattus sordidus* (AJ Campbell in *The Australasian* 27.11.1886: 571).

In the Wimmera district of Victoria in 1884 there was a plague of the house mouse *Mus domesticus* in houses and over the land (*The Australasian* 26.7.1884: 153). Although domestic cats soon ceased to kill mice, the great density of mice in the bush may have aided the spread of feral cats.

As noted *inter alia* by Abbott (2002: 59–60), the earliest records of large feral cats are from the 1850s (Victoria) and 1883 (eastern part of the Northern Territory). The additional information found confirms the presence of large feral cats some 10–30 years after settlement. It is understandable that measurements of body size are lacking in the historical record. Nonetheless, the observers who noted ‘large’ cats presumably were familiar with the range of body sizes exhibited by domestic cats. Consequently, there is no reason to doubt that ‘large’ cats were indeed recognizably large relative to domestic cats. Larger size would confer an advantage in subduing medium-sized marsupials. Furthermore it is difficult to understand why feral cats should confine their prey items to small rodents.

Despite the discovery of additional records of feral cats, many gaps remain in Fig. 2. Ideally, it should be possible to replace the map of inferred spread (Fig. 1) with a map of isolines (at decadal intervals), showing the actual spread.

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Table 1

Exploration of, or travel in, mainland Australia without any record of feral cats, 1788–1910.

Year(s)	Explorer/traveller	Region traversed	Reference
Jul 1801	J Grant	Hunter River, NSW	Grant 1803
Oct–Dec 1802	J Tuckey	Port Phillip, Vic	Tuckey 1805
Oct 1803–Jan 1804	G Harris	Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, Vic	Hamilton-Arnold 1984
May–Jun 1839	E Eyre	Broughton River to Mt Eyre and Baxter Range, SA	Waterhouse 1984a
May 1839	P Stewart	Cobourgh Peninsula, NT	Cameron 1999
Jul–Dec 1839	A Buchanan	Sydney to Adelaide	Buchanan 1924
May–Jun 1841	T O'Halloran	Adelaide to Rufus River and Lake Victoria	O'Halloran 1904
Jul–Aug 1843	C Frome, J Henderson	Gawler to Lake Frome, SA	Auhl and Marfleet 1977
Aug 1844–Dec 1845	D Brock (member of expedition led by C Sturt)	Darling River, NSW to Grey Range, Qld	Brock 1975
Aug 1844–Dec 1845	C Sturt	Darling River, NSW to Grey Range, Qld	Waterhouse 1984b
Oct 1844–Apr 1845	J Murphy (member of expedition led by L Leichhardt)	Jimbour to Burdekin R, Qld	Sprod 2006
Oct 1844–Dec 1845	W Phillips (member of expedition led by L Leichhardt)	Jimbour, Qld to Port Essington, NT	Sprod 2006
Oct 1844–Jun 1845	J Gilbert (member of expedition led by L Leichhardt)	Jimbour to Nassau River, Qld	Gilbert 1845
Jul–Aug 1846	J Horrocks	Depot Creek to Pernatty Lagoon, SA	Anon. 1906
Dec 1846–Jul 1847	H Turnbull (member of expedition led by L Leichhardt)	Jimbour to Peak Range, Qld and return	Turnbull 1983
Oct 1860–June 1861	H Beckler and W Wright (members of Burke and Wills expedition)	Darling River to Torowoto Spring NSW, and Bulbo River Qld, and return	Jeffries and Kertesz 1993
Sep–Oct 1862	J Bonnin	Gawler Ranges, SA	Bonnin 1909
May–Aug 1866	E Hooley	Geraldton to Port Walcott, WA	Sharp 1985
Jan–Mar 1867	F Barnett	Julia Creek, Williams River, Cloncurry River, Dugald River, Qld	Gill 1987
1874–1875 (months unknown)	J Brockman	Murchison River to Fortescue River, WA	Broad and Bridge 2006
Apr–Sep 1876	W Hodgkinson	Cloncurry, Diamantina, Mulligan and Georgina Rivers, Qld; Coongie Lake, SA; Cairns Range, NT	Hodgkinson 1877
Feb–Apr 1841	W Brodribb	Port Albert and Lake Wellington districts, Vic	Brodribb 1885
Sep–Dec 1880	C Palmerston	Upper Daintree, McLeod and Mitchell Rivers, Qld	Savage 1989
1881, Mar–Oct 1886	W Froggatt	Herberton, Cairns, Kuranda, Mt Bellenden Ker, Port Douglas, Qld	Froggatt 1935
Apr–Aug 1882	C Palmerston	Between Mowbray Creek and Mulgrave River, Qld	Savage 1989
Nov–Dec 1882	C Palmerston	Between Innisfail and Herberton, Qld	Savage 1989
Dec 1844–Jan 1885	C Palmerston	Between Herberton and Barron Falls, Qld	Savage 1989
Apr–Sep 1885	H Johnston	Ord River, WA	Johnston 1885
Jul–Nov 1886	C Palmerston	Russell River, Qld	Savage 1989
Jan 1889	B Spencer, C French	Croajingolong, Vic	Spencer and French 1889
1891–1892 (months unknown)	A Gunn	Prince Regent River, WA	Willing and Kenneally 2002
May–Oct 1897	H Russel	Barrow, Cavenagh and Warburton Ranges, WA	Russel 1899
Jul 1899–Mar 1900	H Hill	Lake Wells, Warburton Range, Rawlinson Range, WA, Petermann Range, Musgrave Range, SA	Chambers and Bridge 2007

Table 2

Additional records of cats on mainland Australia and islands, 1788–1910.

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
c. 1803–4	?Parramatta, NSW	A nightjar was 'supposed to have been killed by a cat'	Vigors and Horsfield 1827: 194
1830	Anderson Island, Bass Strait	Resident 'keeps...cats'	Plomley 1966: 270
1830	?Bruny Island, Tas	'The natives train up the English cat to catch opossums'	Plomley 1966: 170, 231
1830	Hobart, Tas	Domestic cat on verandah	Fenton 1901: 394
1833	Near Singleton, NSW	At Mr Bell's house 'rats and mice...chased by a huge tom cat, who was generally stationed in the loft and not infrequently notified his presence in a most indelicate and disagreeable manner'	Waterhouse 1984a: 42
1833	Near Hobart, Tas	'[?domestic] Cats are very fond of this plant, <i>Drosera peltata</i> ...'	Anon. 1859: 30
1837–8	Flinders Island, Bass Strait	A pet monkey took two kittens from the Aboriginal settlement; 'a domesticated cat of my own' [clearly distinguished from a quoll]; quarrel over the death of a cat	Plomley 1987: 425, 501, 534
1837	Near Urialla, NSW	Two cats noted at the beginning of an overlanding journey, but they soon ran away	Kiddle 1961: 42
1838	Point Henry, Vic	Three cats landed	Kirkland 1845: 176
1839	Pt Puer, Port Arthur, Tas	An overseer's cat killed by a youngster	Rosenman 1987: 519
1839	Yass, NSW	Four cats or kittens, domestic situation	Russell 2002: 88
1840	Yesabba, NSW	Cats mentioned, domestic situation	Frost 1984: 90
1840	Melbourne, Vic	Cats taken there by ship from Sydney	Boldwood 1884 (Sayers 1969: 2)
1841	Sydney, NSW	One cat lost, Elizabeth Street; £5 reward offered for its return	<i>The Sydney Herald</i> 21.8.1841: 3
1841	Trawalla, Vic	One kitten in cart, travelling to Melbourne	Kirkland 1845: 206
1842	Australind, WA	'Cats we hear are scarce at Australind; this reminds us of old times, when a kitten was worth 20s in this colony [in Perth]. The inhabitants of Australind may easily obtain a reasonable supply from this neighbourhood [Perth]. In the early days of the colony, we had an importation of cats from Van Diemen's Land [Tasmania], and the advantage turned out very profitable'	<i>The Perth Gazette</i> 4.6.1842
1842	?Perth district, WA	'a number of cats and kittens have...been found serviceable in orchards and vineyards', to control birds destructive to fruit	The Western Australian Almanack 1842: 30
1843	Adelaide, SA	A cat ate the heads of 2 bird specimens	Chisholm 1938: 226
1844	Adelaide region, SA	Since European settlement, Aborigines eat dead cats, which are baked in the ground	Cawthorne 1927: 64
1844	Kangaroo Island, SA	Cat ran out of a hut set on fire	Tolmer 1882 vol. 1: 319
1844	Tambo River, Vic	'Saw the largest cat Tongiomunja hut'	Clark 2000d: 89
1845	Portland, Vic and Mt Gambier, SA	A domestic cat transported in a bag from Portland to Mt Gambier because stores were being ravaged by native rats	<i>Border Watch</i> 8.8.1957
1848	Newlands station, Victoria	Domestic situation	Hamilton 1914: 40
< 1849	?travelling to Murrumbidgee River from Sydney, NSW	'a favourite emigrant cat was teaching her kittens to lap milk out of the best tin meat-dish'	Harris 1849 (1867: 44) [a novel based on colonial residence]
1849	Between Noarlunga and Willunga, SA	Sketch of inside of a farm house, with 2 cats depicted	Griffiths 1988: 77
Late 1840s	Macleay River, NSW	'Cats are plentiful, and a good mouser is invaluable. Indeed, when an establishment is left for any length of time without this useful animal, it becomes overrun with rats, who devour or destroy everything'	Henderson 1851 vol. 2: 45
1850	Kensington, SA	Cat on house roof	Griffiths 1988: 90
1850	Near Cape Jervis, SA	Pet cat	Yelland 1970: 59
?1851	Kangaroo Island, SA	Island overrun with animals, including the wild cat [on p. 36 of vol. 1 the native cat is described, so presumably wild cat refers to the feral cat]	Lancelott 1852 vol. 2: 252
1853	Melbourne, Vic	Dead cat floating in Yarra River	Daniel and Potts 1970: 17
1853	Bendigo, Vic	Domestic situation	Kelly 1859 vol. 1: 247
c. 1856	Hindmarsh Island, SA	Domestic situation	Conigrave, JF 1938: 68
?1857	Mclvor [=Heathcote], Vic	'cats being positive curiosities' in Victoria	Kelly 1859 vol. 2: 15

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
1860s	Perth, WA	Cats numerous in Perth. Boys caught them for a German, who paid 1 shilling per head	<i>The Western Mail</i> 25.11.1920: 42
1861	Zara station [near Wanganella, NSW]	Goanna entered a shepherd's hut and seized a domestic cat	<i>The Argus</i> 11.2.1861: 5
1861	Peg Leg, Tarrengower, Vic	Domestic cat and snake killed each other	<i>The Argus</i> 18.3.1861: 5
1862	Mt Gambier, SA	'Notice. All Dogs and Cats trespassing on the premises of the Telegraph in this township after this date will be destroyed'	<i>Border Watch</i> 13.6.1862
1862	Bendigo, Vic	Domestic cat poisoned by arsenic	<i>The Argus</i> 7.3.1862: 5
1864	Lachlan River and back-country, NSW [Mossgiel]	Cats introduced to control a plague of rats	Bennett 1886: 164; KHB in <i>The Queenslander</i> 26.7.1879: 107
1864	York to Depot Hills, Lake Cowan, Lake Lefroy, WA	'Even when we were out with Hunt we often came across their tracks [cats gone wild], and now [1902] they are to be found in scores all over the country'	Anon. [JW Cowan] in <i>The Kalgoorlie Miner</i> 30.12.1902: 6
1865	Langi Ghiran ranges near Ararat, Vic	Skye terrier and wild [feral] cat in a fight	<i>The Argus</i> 19.4.1865: 4
1866	Near Beechworth, Vic	Blind domestic cat	<i>The Argus</i> 8.6.1866: 5
1866	Castlemaine, Vic	Small kitten [domestic] caring for ducklings	<i>The Argus</i> 19.9.1866: 5
1866	Porcupine Flat, Tarrengower, Vic	Cat [domestic] shot raiding a pigeon roost	<i>The Argus</i> 19.9.1866: 5
1866	Near Avoca, Vic	Large domestic cat seized a child by the neck and thighs at some little distance from a dwelling	<i>The Argus</i> 9.10.1866: 5
1868	Barwon Park (near Winchelsea), Vic	Becoming a nuisance; > 100 lately destroyed because eating Ceylon partridges; breeding in rabbit burrows	<i>The Argus</i> 5.6.1868: 5
1868	Cuminin station, WA	'wild domestic cats were distributed all about'	BW Leake in <i>The Western Mail</i> 5.7.1951: 58
1869	Near Teesdale, Vic	A great number railed in packing cases from Ballarat	<i>The Argus</i> 3.4.1869: 5
1870s	Boro, NSW	Pure white domestic cat at inn	Atkinson 1980: 25
1870	North-west of Lake Cargelligo, NSW	'It is a very remarkable fact that the domestic cat is to be found everywhere throughout the dry back country. I have met with cat, some of enormous size, at least fifty miles from water'	Randell 1978: 227
1870s	Murrumbidgee River near Yass, NSW	'The domestic cat has become wild, and breeds in these fastnesses, a dangerous adjunct to our carnivora, which should be determinately destroyed'	Atkinson 1980: 32
Early 1870s	Cressbrook, Qld	Domestic situation	Banks 1931: 48, 74
1871	Between Warrego and Paroo Rivers, NSW	'We were further disturbed by wild cats (domestic cats gone wild) fighting with each other, or killing birds, near our camp'	Randell 1978: 242
c. 1871	Australind, WA	Grandmother always had a box of kittens in house	Jephson 1933: 60
< 1872	Victoria (no locality provided)	Kitten kept in bedroom 'with a view to keeping the mice at a distance'; also describes interaction with a pet sugar glider	'A Resident' 1872: 177
1872	Flinders Island, Bass Strait	Many 'domestic cat gone wild have been destroyed by dogs'	Murray-Smith 1987: 23
1872	Drayton, Qld	Cat taken on dray with family moving to Stanthorpe	Davis 1976: 19
1873	Mt Bolton district, Vic	Cat in hut	Evans 1975: 37
1873-4	Deeside, WA	Numerous references to domestic cats: 'Got plenty of cats don't know what to do with them, confound them'	Muir Diaries 28.10.1873, 20.1.1874, 30.1.1874, 2.2.1874
1873-88	North-west Australia [?Roebourne, WA]	'It is an impossibility to keep [domestic cats] long about a place, as they instinctively take to the bush, and become not only very wild, but with each succeeding [sic] generation increase greatly in size, and I can assure you they are animals you have to be very careful in tackling. Once when I was out riding after kangaroo one of these monster cats suddenly jumped out of a tree right in front of my horse, and so fierce did he look that, I got out of his road as quickly as possible'	Anon. 1888: 118
1875	Wingana, near Mundrabilla, WA	Domestic cat with 5 black kittens. 'The cats are all black here. The natives brought in a wild kitten and it was black with a small white bit on its breast'	Muir 2005: 173
1875	Sliding Rock, east of Beltana, SA	Cat recorded as present in findings of an inquest relating to a fire in a store	State Records SA GRG1/27 #31 (F. Williams, pers. comm.)

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
1876	?Upper Swan, WA	A large black cat, in an inn	Broad and Broad 1992: 188
1876	South Australia	'All the domestic animals, and most of the birds known in Europe, have been acclimatized here, and without a single exception they seem to do well'	FG Waterhouse in <i>Harcus</i> 1876: 281
c. 1876	?Ballan, Vic	Domestic cat catching mice	Cambridge 1903: 168
c. 1879	Winton, Qld	Cats surfeited from eating rats with bushy tails in plague. Rats followed by a plague of dead cats in the waterholes	Corfield 1921: 81
1879	Kyneton, Vic	Pet cat of a lady visited by a local physician	Anon. 1935
1879	Thurulgoona, Warrego River, Qld	Cats were introduced in about April 1879 to assist in the destruction of a plague of rats	Armstrong 1879–80: lxii
1879	Yartoo station, SA	A newly formed station with 'tame cats & kittens of the household rubbing, jumping & purring over and about us all night' [sleeping in a waggon]	Anon. 1998: 7
c. 1880s	Victoria	Government secured all domestic cats they could obtain and let them run in the bush, as rabbits began to assume serious proportions	<i>The West Australian</i> 7.2.1925: 11
?1880s	Dirk Hartog Island, WA	'No doubt cats were introduced with the sheep'; 'approaching the size of leopards'	Whitlock 1921b: 129; <i>The Sunday Times</i> 24.10.1920: 4
?1880s	Tyntyndyer station, near Swan Hill, Vic	References to pet cats	Cerutty 1977: 88–89
1880s	Moyarra, Vic	Cat brought by coach from Buninyong to control rats; one night it killed 30 rats	J. Rainbow in South Gippsland Development League 1920: 321–322
1880	Perth, WA	'Had great cat shooting match today after dinner, being overrun with the beasts, we had two cats and they appear to increase the population every month and were a nuisance so I murdered the whole lot, two cats and four kittens'	Hillman 1990: 439
1880	Kendenup, WA	'wild cats' tails' hung on sticks on an Aboriginal grave	North 1892: 151
1880–85	Queensland	Cats killed bush rats in western Queensland in 1880 and 1885 as they moved south. Cats wearied of killing kangaroo mice in plague in Queensland in 1884	<i>The West Australian</i> 26.12.1925: 5
1882	Wangamana, between Wanaaring and Bourke, NSW	A pet black tomcat, shepherds' camp	Burdett 1936: 26
1882	Near Queanbeyan, NSW	Two records of a cat being let out of her box at night and finally escaping into the scrub	Frost 1984: 215, 218
c. 1882	Mallee Cliffs, NSW	A domestic cat reported to bring in a rabbit every morning to a hotel	Crommelin 1886: 32
c. 1883	Balranald-Wentworth district, NSW	Five cats killed by poisoning a warren under an old house and 'a large red Cat came out of the Bilbee hole and dragged the dead Rabbit under, and the [rabbit] inspectors lost their supper'	Crommelin 1886: 30, 32
1883	southern NSW	'The [feral] domesticated cat is protected from destruction in the districts of Albury, the Hume, the Murrumbidgee, the Murray, Balranald, Bourke and Wentworth'	Noble 1997: 118
1883	Near Goolwa, SA	Cat got out of box, on journey to Meningie	Frost 1984: 227
1884	On the Lower Broughton [River], apparently SA	Cats used successfully to extirpate rabbits	Royal Commission 1890: 103
1884	Lower Broughton [River], apparently SA	'the cats were successful'	Keith 1892: 18
1884	Rottnest Island, WA	Wild cats numerous	Barker 1885: 159
1885–95	Wimmera district, Vic	Government policy to exterminate rabbits through the agency of cats	<i>The West Australian</i> 21.2.1925: 11
1885	Johnstone River district, Qld	Following a plague of 'bush rats' [<i>Rattus sordidus</i>] in sugar cane plantations, planters were importing cats with a view to exterminating the rats. Some 25 cats had arrived from Townsville, followed by a consignment from New South Wales, 'for a plantation north'	AJ Campbell in <i>The Australasian</i> 27.11.1886: 571
1885	Netley, NSW	Rabbiters killed [feral] cats and other natural enemies of the rabbit	Royal Commission 1890: 61

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
c. 1885	Tintinallogy, NSW	'Before [rabbit] trapping began we had large numbers of [feral] cats, but there were very few cats left when the trappers knocked off'; 'The natural enemies here are...tame cats, many of which have gone wild here; we turn out as many as possible; some come back, but not many; they do not come back if half grown when turned out'	Royal Commission 1890: 89, 108
1886	Menindie, NSW	Rabbiters: 'if they could get hold of a good sized [feral] tom-cat and kill it, it was a great feature to them'	Royal Commission 1890: 63
1886	Tarcowie, SA	Boiled a lark egg for sister's cat	Robinson 1977: 90
1887	King Island, Bass Strait	'Wild domestic cats...were very numerous'; 'we killed some perfect monsters'	Campbell 1888: 136; <i>The Australasian</i> 9.3.1889: 534
1887	Paringa, SA	Rabbit trappers killing the natural enemies of the rabbit, including 'wild cats'	Royal Commission 1890: 60
c. 1887	Kallara (between Wilcannia and Bourke), NSW	[Feral] cats noted as one of the natural enemies of rabbits	Royal Commission 1890: 94
< 1888	Flinders Island, SA	Cats extirpated rabbits	Royal Commission 1890: 103
1888	Maldon, Vic	A dead cat (domestic)	Evans 1975: 164
1888	Thargomindah, Qld	'Plague of [?feral] cats', 9 July; 'The proprietors of Thargomindah Station are paying half-a-crown a head for all domestic cats delivered there'	Knight 1895: 382; Noble 1997: 118
1888	Tintinallogy, NSW	'a disease had destroyed a great number of cats, and the bodies of eighteen were seen on the bank of the river...the cats, in a great measure, live on rabbits'	Royal Commission 1890: 200
c. 1888	?Nullagine district, WA	'Years ago, I was out prospecting in the North-West, where white people had never been before, and I saw cats and the tracks of cats many times. That is over twenty years ago'	W. Kingsmill in Western Australian Parliamentary Debates 43: 1341, 28.8.1912
1889	Minilya station, WA	A 'large wild cat' killed	Brockman 1987: 142
1889	Rottneet Island, WA	'the large number of wild domestic cats roaming over the island at will'	AJ Campbell in <i>The Australasian</i> 3.5.1890: 888
Late 1880s	Kimberley region, WA (Fitzroy River, ?Myoorda station)	Domestic cat introduced soon after 1886	<i>The West Australian</i> 7.8.1926: 9
1890s	Bangate station via Angledool, NSW	Cats, farmhouse	Parker 1902: 113–114; Muir 1982: 74, 90, 124
1890	Pelsaert Island, Houtman Abrolhos, WA	'the domestic cats run wild accounted for many [rabbits] also, so much so, that since about 1897 I have neither seen nor heard of a rabbit present there – the cats literally wiped them out, as they could not escape'	FC Broadhurst in <i>The Western Mail</i> 24.10.1908: 10
1890	Deal Island, Bass Strait	'half wild domestic cats'	Le Soeuf 1891: 124
c. 1892	Curham (near Georgetown, Qld)	'There were no fewer than six cats in the house'; three of these were shot by a drunken tenant	Bicknell 1895: 127–8
c. 1892	?Lake Alexandrina, SA	Tame cats left unmolested on a small island in order to control rabbits	<i>The Australasian</i> 27.2.1892: 391
1892	Georgetown, Qld	Cats on roof interfering with sleep	Ellis 1991: 69
1892	Wyalla, Qld	A cat brought in a small snake	Ellis 1991: 96
1892	c. 30 km east of Kalgoorlie, WA	'a large lean famished black cat' shot, at night	Sligo 1995: 81
1892	Mossgiel, NSW	'Some time ago Mr. Parsons tried the experiment of raising wild cats, and actually built a cat house on one part of the run, placed a man in charge, and purchased every domestic cat which was in the district, besides importing others. The experiment, however, did not succeed, a disease of some kind sweeping the cats away to another kingdom. Indeed cats have never proved an unqualified success, although they have been tried on most of the stations in the west. They do not thrive on rabbit, become exceedingly emaciated, and die in a short time. In the old days [?1880s] the rabbiters killed the cats'	Keith 1892: 18
1892	Upper Burnett River, Qld	'The best checks to the entry of serpents within the precincts of human habitations are cats'	Semon 1899: 181
1892	Broken Hill, NSW	[Domestic] cats satiated with rabbits	<i>The Australasian</i> 6.2.1892: 264

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
1892	Balmoral, Vic	'a large number of domestic cats gone wild...caught in these abominable traps'	<i>The Australasian</i> 16.7.1892: 104
1892	Rendelsham, SA	'dogs killed a wild (tame) cat'	D. Stewart (b. 1834) (D. Peacock, pers. comm.)
1893	Sorell, Tas	Domestic cats introduced to destroy rabbits, but they rapidly disappeared once rabbit trappers were employed	<i>The Australasian</i> 25.2.1893: 342
1893	West of Polpitch Lake, NSW	Aborigines 'very fond of cats'	Cudmore 1894: 525
1894	Minilya station, WA	Wild cats killed pet magpie	Brockman 1987: 156
1894	Alice Springs, NT	The mounted trooper's cat brought a specimen of <i>Dasyercus cristicauda</i> into the house	Spencer 1895: 222
1895	Wingen, NSW	'domestic cats gone wild'	Abbott 1913: 11, 13, 16
1895	Snowy River, Vic	A 'domestic cat' disturbed capturing a landrail [not mapped, as it is unclear whether the cat is feral or domestic]	Le Soeuf 1896: 19
c. 1896	Near Mt Ida, WA	Kitten in house	Luck 1988: 89
1896	Yeeda station, WA	'hundreds of cats live on the river [Fitzroy River, Kimberley] and kill all the small game'	Tunney 1896
1896	'a lagoon south of' Fitzroy River, WA	The skeletons or skulls of 47 cats counted; these [feral] cats had probably died of thirst when the lagoon dried up	Keartland 1920: 100
1897	Roebourne, WA	Cat eating lizards [unclear if domestic or feral]	Anon. 1897
c. 1897	?Wandagee station, Minilya River, WA	Aboriginal caught two 'wild cats' and ate them	Gunning 1952: 180
1897–1905	Richmond district, Qld	References to domestic cats (one black), their avian prey, and to 'bush cats'	Berney 1905: 75; 1906: 47; 1907: 106, 108
c. 1898	Near Lake Preston, WA	Bronzewing pigeons killed by domestic cats gone wild: 'are now more numerous in the bush than is generally supposed'	T. Hayward in <i>The West Australian</i> 4.3.1898: 3
1898	Swan Hill, Vic	House cat killed seven welcome swallows during six weeks	Hall 1900
1898	South Gippsland, Vic	Domestic cats perished during February wildfires	TJ Cloverdale in South Gippsland Development League 1920: 353
1898	Golden Valley (Balingup), WA	15 cats present in farmhouse	Honniball 1968: 78
1898	South Lead, Kanowna, WA	Cat found fallen 18' down a shaft- famished	<i>The North Coolgardie Herald and Menzies Times</i> 16.7.1898: 2
1898	Mt Morgan, WA	Numerous tracks of cats which have gone wild and taken to the bush	<i>The West Australian</i> 16.8.1898: 3
1898	Mt Magnet, WA	Cat found fallen 30' down a well	<i>Magnet Miner and Lennonville Leader</i> 24.12.1898
1899	Eucla district, WA	Cats which were let loose to destroy rabbits have apparently succeeded	<i>The North Coolgardie Herald and Miners' Daily News</i> 20.10.1899: 2
1899	Pelsaert Island, Houtman Abrolhos, WA	Noddy terns have been made more sensitive by the depredations of wild cats, once introduced to subdue the rats. Cats are wild in the adjacent group [Easter Group]	Hall 1902: 201, 204
1900	Newmarracarra, WA	c. 60 cats: 'the nucleus of an army to confront the rabbits when they invade Newmarracarra'	Fry 1900: 258
1900	Minilya station, WA	Cat killed a snake in kitchen	Brockman 1987: 174
c. 1901	Eyre's Sand Patch and Eucla, WA	200 tabby cats released c. 6 years ago	HA John in Anon. 1907: 309
1901–4	Eucla, WA	'the consignment of a 100 or more cats brought on a ketch from Port Adelaide. Their mission was to keep down the growing rabbit population. These cats, I was told, were purchased for a shilling a head from small boys in the Port Adelaide district'	V Hopewell in Jeffery 1980: 89
1902	Vlamingh Head, WA	'Several wild cats (domestic variety) were seen about here'	Carter 1902: 83
1904	Day Dawn, WA	Three cats and one kitten, domestic situation	Tyler 2002: 254
1904	Western side of Rabbit proof fence (between Burracoppin and south coast), WA	'The domestic cat grown wild is very plentiful...where cats...are found in the traps, the boundary riders release them'	[Crawford] 1904: 487–8

Year	Locality	Notes	Reference
1904	Eucla west almost to Balladonia and Israelite Bay, WA	Some time ago Government purchased (at £1 per head) a large number of cats, which were distributed throughout the Eucla and Israelite Bay districts. These multiplied. Now that kangaroo hunting for skins is now almost unpayable, the hunters are eking out a livelihood by destroying the cats and exporting skins for sale	CD McLauchlan in <i>The Kalgoorlie Miner</i> 28.9.1904: 2
1905	Near Cocklebidy Rockhole, WA	One tabby and 4 kittens. Dead rabbits found. 'cats are doing valuable work'	HA John in Anon. 1907: 309
1905	Webb Patch out-camp [Mt Magnet district], WA	Cat taken there and lived there until its death in 1927	<i>The Murchison Times</i> 2.7.1927(unpaginated)
1905	Near Baldina [?Burra district], SA	'a beautifully marked tortoiseshell cat, of exceptionally large growth...a large number...in the hills...It measures 2ft. 8in. from ear to tip of tail, and stands about 1ft. 2in. high, its weight being 10lb. Barring its marks it looks like a young tiger'	<i>The Kalgoorlie Miner</i> 1.4.1905: 4
1905	Nangeenan, WA	'The wild domestic cat...is...a perfect pest to the poultry-keeper, far worse indeed than the native cat'	<i>The Western Mail</i> 25.12.1905: 85
1906	Nangeenan, WA	Pet cat on farm	<i>The Western Mail</i> 20.1.1906: 9
1907	Near junction of Waroona Road and Bunbury-Mandurah Road, WA	Woman lived with 12 cats	Hasluck 1967: 9
1907	Rabbit proof fence south of Burracoppin, WA	'wild cats...very plentiful'	<i>The Western Mail</i> 25.5.1907: 5
1908	Rabbit proof fence north of Burracoppin, WA	Cats very numerous. Great many tracks seen. One cat found in a trap but Sub/Inspector Craig on his last trip liberated 45 on this portion of fence	Crawford 1908: 516
1909	Between Caloola Creek and Langawirra, NSW	'a wild black cat was put up from the undergrowth... These cats were met on all our rambles. They grow to a larger size than the ordinary domestic "Tom", and kill many birds'	Macgillivray 1910: 89