

DAINTREE LIVING FACTSHEET

Animals



Animals in the Daintree fall into three basic livestock, native animals, animals, and introduced animals (including feral pigs and - us, if you want to get picky about it!). All feral animals are introduced species (including the dingo, which is commonly thought of as a native animal).

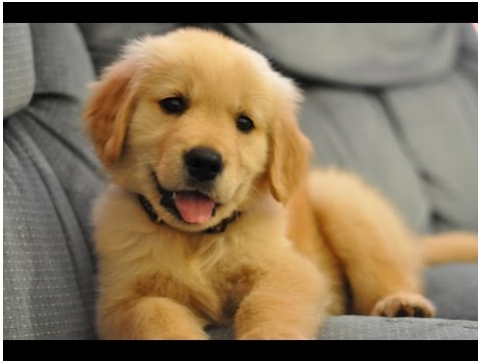
Related Factsheets

Erosion *Land clearing and habitat fragmentation; weather, wind and rain; regeneration.*

Water Sources *Water table and rainfall fluctuations; contamination and filtration; water conservation and recycling, Water system installation and maintenance issues for rain, stream/creek, and bore sources.*

Weed Control *Weed locations, identification, herbicides, and control methods.*

Household Pets



“Household pets” to most people usually means dogs and cats but people also keep birds, small mammals like ferrets, rats, mice, and the occasional pot-bellied pig, reptiles, fish, and even more-exotic creatures like tarantulas and giant cockroaches as pets.

Cats and dogs are still the most widely-kept companion animals here in the Daintree though, as they are in most parts of the world. People keep cats and dogs in their homes for a variety of reasons – companionship, household protection (the word “dog”, unique among European languages, is said to be an acronym for **Duty Of Guardianship**), social status, and hunting or mousing. In the Daintree, however, cats and dogs can be a significant threat to the environment (as well as being at risk themselves) if not well cared for and managed. Domestic cats and dogs are natural hunters and will kill native birds and small mammals. Owning a dog appears to be a necessary status symbol in the area.

They are also vulnerable to predation by hawks, owls and pythons, and may be attacked by feral pigs. Moral of the story: keep your cats and dogs safely inside, especially at times when they can’t be supervised.

Outdoor Fish



Outdoor ponds are going to overflow during the wet season and anything in them (including fish) will make their way to the waterways - use indigenous plants and fish. While at present there are no known feral fish here, *Telapia* are south of the Daintree and irresponsible recreational fishers have been known to spread this species to other catchments.

Livestock

Horses



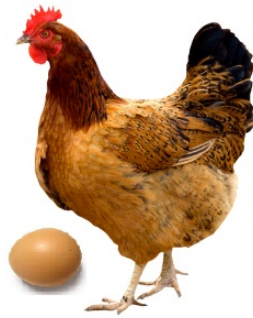
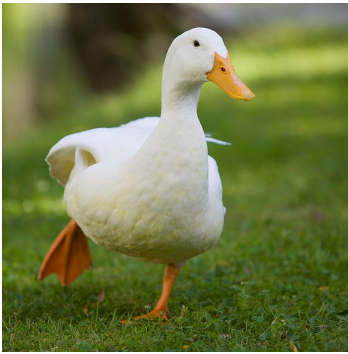
Keeping horses here is very difficult here and not recommended; horses don't cope well with the Far North Queensland rainforest environment. They are highly vulnerable to heat stress and are prone to humidity-related skin and hoof conditions like mange and thrush. They also require extra shelter during the wet season. Furthermore, as you probably won't be permitted to clear a paddock, you will have to either agist it nearby or stable and hand feed it. Horses can, simply by being large, hooved grazing animals, encourage the erosion of the area in which they are paddocked. They can also spread weeds such as sickle pod by dropping seeds in their faeces. Horses can also be destructive to local waterways by encouraging erosion, so you will need to provide them with an alternative source of drinking water such as a trough.

Goats, sheep, llamas, etc.



Goats, in particular, being curious, lively, and intelligent, make excellent pets, and being smaller and lighter than other, larger animals, tend to be less destructive to their immediate surroundings. Also, because the ancestors of today's sheep and goats come from hot, dry areas, they tend to suffer less heat stress in tropical conditions like those of Far North Queensland. In general, though, some of the factors involved in keeping smaller hoofed animals are similar to the factors involved in keeping horses – access to adequate food, water, and shelter. In addition, goats, because they are adept climbers and jumpers, need to be provided with extra-secure fencing.

Poultry



Domestic poultry species have been kept by humans in a wide range of climatic conditions, including the wet tropics (the backyard hen house is a common sight in Far North Queensland). Domestic chickens are small, low-maintenance animals that are cheap to feed, require little space, and provide their humans with eggs and companionship. Ducks and geese are also kept, both as pets and as farm animals; they are lively, intelligent, social animals that enjoy the company of other ducks and geese as well as people. Geese are particularly alert and intelligent animals – the Chinese have traditionally kept them as guard animals to warn of intruders.

One thing to bear in mind if you have ducks and/or geese or are considering getting some: Ducks and geese are waterfowl who prefer to spend at least part of every day in the water and should be provided with a trough, pool, or pond deep enough to swim and splash in. They also need at least a litre a day per animal for drinking and grooming.

Housing: all these birds are vulnerable to predators like hawks, dingoes, dogs, and cats, and will require secure housing and fencing which includes a run enclosed at the top with mesh to stop your birds becoming hawk dinner). The fenced run will also give some nighttime protection from pythons, especially if electric fencing is used. Pythons are clever, observant animals, who are quite resourceful when it comes to getting into places they shouldn't be in. (Here at the Cape Tribulation Tropical Research Station, several pythons have been observed lying in wait on the top of the bat cage so they could slither in when the electric fence got turned off.) In addition, chickens and other domestic fowl will need a safe, indoor place where they can be housed if there is a cyclone or major thunderstorm with flooding and/or high winds.

Ask your local council



Most local councils have very specific regulations about pets and domestic livestock – what kinds of animals are permitted in your area, how they are to be housed, where they must be kept, how many you're allowed to have (it usually depends on the size of your property and the species of animal), and what registration fees and/or vaccinations are required (cats and dogs). If you have pets, or are thinking of getting some, *check with your local council*. If you live around here, that's Douglas Shire Council. They have a large, well-laid out website with a wealth of information on local living, including whom in Council to contact for help with your particular question or problem. Here's the link: <https://douglas.qld.gov.au/>

Native Animals

Cassowaries



When anyone mentions “birds” and “Far North Queensland”, the first thing everyone thinks is “cassowary”. This large, iconic bird is a ratite (a flightless bird whose breastbone lacks a keel), and is related the emu, the ostrich, the kiwi, and extinct birds like the moa and the elephant bird (*Aepyornis*). Although cassowaries are popularly perceived as vicious killers who readily attack and kill humans by disemboweling, these giant birds are actually quite shy and tend to avoid humans whenever possible. They are, however, potentially very dangerous and should be approached with caution, if at all; each foot bears a large, backward-pointing, razor-sharp claw (think: velociraptor) and are capable of delivering a killing kick if they feel threatened. Environmentally, cassowaries are known as a “keystone” species – of prime ecological importance because of their role in seed dispersal.

According to the Daintree Futures Study the individuals that inhabit the Daintree Coast are essential to the survival of the remaining population; as few as 1000 adult individuals left in Australia. The remaining population faces many threats. These native birds are long-lived and slow to reproduce, with high chick mortality rates and must travel great distance to forage and breed. The Cape Tribulation and Noah Creek areas, and Cow Bay, Forest Creek and Cape Kimberley include some of the most important cassowary habitats. Check to see if your block is one of them.

Other birds



The Daintree rainforest is home to many more kinds of native birds besides cassowaries, of course. These include owls, hawks, and other raptors, sulphur-crested cockatoos and other parrots, magpies, currawongs, and other corvids (crow-like birds), kookaburras, butcher birds, jungle fowl and brush turkeys - plus many pigeons.

Marsupials and bats

Many kinds of mammals live in the Daintree, both marsupial and eutherian (placental). The main types of marsupials in the Daintree rainforest are possums and bandicoots, bettongs (and the elusive quolls). Bennett's tree kangaroos are also known to occur here, but they are extremely uncommon. In the Cooper Creek area, you will find the day-active musky rat kangaroo – *Hypsiprymnodon*. The main types of native placental mammals are bats and rodents, and the Daintree has many species of both. The bats include both megabats like the spectacled flying-fox and various types of microbat, like horseshoe bats and freetail bats. The spectacled flying-fox is one of the rainforest's noisiest and most personable residents. Large, personable, and intelligent, the nectar- and fruit-eating bats gather together by the thousands; their chattering and squabbling can be heard from a good distance away, particularly around sunset when they fly out from their daytime roosts to feed, and again around sunrise when they return home and Mum collects the kids from the crèche tree (No, humans didn't invent daycare centres!) The microbats are much quieter. Being solitary insectivores who hunt by echolocation (sonar), the only sounds they make are over 60,000 Hz in frequency, well beyond the range of human hearing. The only way you even notice a microbat is around is if you spot a small, dark shape zipping past you as you sit on the veranda at night – if you're a quick looker.

Rodents



Rodents include native rats such as the white-tailed rat (Introduced rodents such as the black rat, (*Rattus rattus*), the Norwegian rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) and the house mouse (*Mus musculus*) are surprisingly rare here.). Native mice are also common and are mostly species of *Melomys*. Note: while most of these rodents represent no danger to humans, they can be incredibly destructive, as they will gnaw on *anything* from stale bread to wiring, to seat belts (inclusive). So even if they *are* incredibly cute, it's probably best not to let them move in with you. Move them along by live trapping and releasing them into the forest or bush. (It is illegal to use killing traps or poison baits, as they are protected animals.)



Reptiles



Reptiles of the Daintree rainforest range from tiny geckoes, whose birdlike chirps can be heard most nights in the Daintree, to saltwater crocodiles and enormous amethystine pythons, which can reach 10 metres in length. There are many species of lizards, including several types of skinks, various types of goanna and other monitor lizards, and many species of snake. Although the snakes of the Daintree theoretically include some venomous snakes (taipans and death adders), they tend not to do well in the wet tropics and are seldom if ever seen in the Daintree area. The only really dangerous snakes here are the pythons; even a medium-sized python can kill pets and small children by constriction. (The captive colony of spectacled flying-foxes at the Cape Tribulation Tropical Research Station is housed in a cage equipped with electric fencing, kept on 24/7 to discourage pythons – and we have lost lots of bats to pythons.)

Amphibians



Frogs, frogs, frogs, more frogs – and cane toads. You guessed it – frogs are the Daintree's and Australia's only native amphibians, and there are many different frog species in the Daintree area alone. The two most common ones are the white-lipped tree frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*) and the chorus frog (*Litoria gracilenta*), so-called because of its unusual massed call, produced in slightly staggered synchrony – like humans singing rounds in a choir. They can be heard all over the rainforest on rainy nights.

Invertebrates



The invertebrates of the Daintree rainforest are abundant and comprise a high proportion of the area's species diversity. There are insects, including some of the world's most beautiful butterflies and moths, crustaceans, both marine and land species, arachnids (spiders, mites, ticks, scorpions, and centipedes), and various species of worms (including Queensland's giant earthworms, some of which are bright blue), and leeches. The invertebrates that most visitors to the rainforest worry most about are, of course spiders. The truth is that there are more genuinely dangerous spiders in the Sydney suburbs (i.e. the notorious Sydney funnel web) than there are in the Daintree. Most spiders here are mostly non- or only mildly-venomous and nearly all of them are shy animals who would rather run than bite. Even the big, scary-looking huntsman spiders are timid and seldom if ever bite. And many of the local spiders are quite beautiful, featuring bright colours, patterns, and fancy webs that are seldom seen in more-urbanised areas. Golden orb spiders are a great example. Not only are they spectacularly large and colourful in their own right, they spin golden webs – webs whose strands shine in the sun like actual, metallic gold.

Marine life



Abutting the Daintree rainforest just offshore is, of course the Great Barrier Reef, which is home to a spectacular array of array of living creatures, from simple coral polyps to Great White sharks. Animal life of the reef include whales and dolphins, marine reptiles like turtles and snakes, tropical fish, marine molluscs including marine snails, bivalves, and cephalopods (octopi and squid), and echinoderms (spiny animals) like starfish and sea cucumbers.

Feral Animals

The term “feral” is commonly misused. Many people think it simply means “wild” and can refer to any wild animal, but it actually refers to a species which has reverted to a wild state after having been domesticated. Some feral animals in the Daintree area are a major problem as they can be dangerous to humans as well as being a potential threat to native wildlife.

Pigs



Australia's feral pigs, including those in Far North Queensland are a genetically mixed population descended from three main introduced sources – Asian wild pigs, including *Sus celebensis* and *Sus papuensis*, European wild pigs, and European domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*). Because of their mixed ancestry, there is some variability in their size, colour, and physical traits such as bristles on boars or tail shape. They are distinct from domestic pigs, being smaller and leaner with coarser, longer snouts, smaller ears, and straight, tufted tails rather than curly ones. Juveniles are sometimes striped – whitish stripes on a fawn background. The first recorded importation of pigs was in the late 18th and early 19th century with the arrival of the First Fleet, but the pigs' mixed ancestry suggests multiple introductions.

Environmental Impact: Feral pigs in the Daintree area are incredibly destructive, both in the rainforest and in agricultural areas. In the rainforest and bush, they damage waterways and river banks, eat the eggs of many native animals like crocodiles, turtles, and birds, and will prey on chicks that have fallen from their nests. In human-inhabited areas, they damage fruit, vegetable, and grain crops, prey on young lambs, compete with livestock for food and water resources, carry diseases affecting both humans and livestock, and damage areas of cultural significance like cave art sites. In both types of habitat, they spread invasive weed species by distributing undigested seeds in their faeces.

Control: Limiting the damage caused by feral pigs in the Daintree area is of paramount importance in preserving the rainforest and protecting human habitations and agriculture. In

Far North Queensland, feral pigs are controlled by hunting, trapping followed by shooting, and poisoning. Each method of control has both advantages and drawbacks.

Hunting: Hunting, when carried out by an efficient, well-trained professional hunter (often employed by a local council) can be a very effective method of pig control. On the other hand, left in the hands of local sport hunters accompanied by dogs, hunting is a far less effective means of control. If dogs are used, they often race ahead of the hunter and inflict massive injuries on the pig without actually killing it, leaving the pig in agony until the hunter arrives to shoot it. Furthermore, sport hunters have a serious conflict of interest when it comes to pig control; they sometimes refrain from killing sows and piglets, the most fertile members of the pig population in order to ensure their own future game supply. This can significantly impair their efficacy in reducing feral pig numbers. Finally, pig hunting and all of its accoutrements (especially pig dogs) have become an entrenched part of Far North Queensland culture – one which tends to condone violence and nurture negative social values such as cruelty and exaggerated masculinity.

Trapping: Trapping *can* be an effective way of controlling feral pigs, assuming an effective trap design can be found - one which traps *only* pigs and spares native wildlife the current design works but could be improved. Even so, pigs are extremely intelligent and quite adept at avoiding traps, often stealing the bait while they're at it. Furthermore, even if trapping successful, there is still the problem of what to do with the pig. While feral pigs are good, lean game animals, few people have the skill or the desire to do their own butchering and meat preservation.

Poisoning: Poisoning is probably both the most effective method of feral pig control and the one which is the least ethically acceptable to most people. Only two poisons are legal in Queensland for feral pig control. There is sodium monofluoroacetate, commonly known as 1080, and there is CSSP, a mixture of carbon disulfide and yellow phosphorus. Neither poison is instantaneous; 1080 may be more effective, often killing the pig within four hours if the dose is high enough. Both poisons can cause a pig to endure days to weeks of increasing pain and debility before dying. (1080 and CSSP are general antimetabolites which disrupt the glucose cycle (the chemical process which provides cells with energy)). The main problem in using poison to control feral pigs is that neither type of poison is specific to pigs; native animals, domestic pets, and humans are extremely susceptible to them, and if they are used at all, they must be handled with extreme caution to avoid accidental contamination. From time to time, various new types of pig bait appear (such as sodium nitrite) – but none has been adopted

Physical exclusion: Pigs are a major issue for vegetable gardens; overnight, one pig can reduce your precious garden to ruins. However, if you are a Buddhist, a vegan, or just tender-hearted and find the idea of killing the pigs unacceptable, you can try keeping the pigs out by using appropriate fencing. Pigs are very allergic to electric fences - and there are now several solar powered systems available. Or you can run one off your RAPS system (they don't take much power). I would suggest using electric fence tape rather than cord as it's highly visible.

Other feral animals



Other feral animals in Australia include dogs, cats, goats, camels, and of course, dingoes (which are actually a type of feral dog, *Canis lupus dingo*). None of these appears to be a major problem in the Daintree rainforest.