

QUEENSLAND GOVT CONSIDERS DECLARING DEER A PEST

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Reporter: Ian Townsend

PETER CAVE: Here's something for Santa to consider when his sleigh arrives in Queensland tonight.

The Queensland Government has been reviewing the status of deer, and it's about to decide whether to declare them a pest.

Ian Townsend reports from Brisbane.

IAN TOWNSEND: On a hot, drowsy summer evening in Brisbane's western suburbs, the wild deer come out to graze. They look nice, with their spotted coats and antlers, but these deer have been very naughty.

VALERIE BENNETT: Well, we had an accident up on the corner of Moggill and Grandview Road, was swerving to avoid a deer and hit a tree.

RUSSELL BENNETT: We do know the damage that one deer's caused, which spooked a horse that broke its leg, actually, and had to be put down.

VALERIE BENNETT: One fellow up on O'Brien's Road's had all his trees ringbarked, he reckons, by the deer.

IAN TOWNSEND: This is the semi-rural suburb of Pullenvale, down Old Farm Road and past the deer crossing sign...

VALERIE BENNETT: Although someone has neatly pinched the deer crossing bit, so all it says now is 200 metres.

IAN TOWNSEND:where Valerie and Russell Bennett are torn between fondness for the deer, and annoyance at their bad behaviour..

VALERIE BENNETT: First time I saw them here, I went out onto the back verandah here and saw five deer - two stags, three does - in the paddock. I grabbed a broom, ran down the hill looking like the local witch and the deer took off down the hill too. The horses thought they were being chased, and so there were deer galloping round and me running around waving a broom, and ...

IAN TOWNSEND: Your first thought was to take a broom and chase them off?

VALERIE BENNETT: Well yes.

RUSSELL BENNETT: In actual fact the horse was so traumatised that the vet proscribed valium.

VALERIE BENNETT: After two or three weeks of seeing the deer, he still was very upset.

IAN TOWNSEND: Is there any indication about how they got here?

RUSSELL BENNETT: There are sort of several schools of thought, one of them is that somebody was breeding them, and he and his wife had an argument, so she let them all go.

IAN TOWNSEND: So what was Mrs Claus alleging that Mr Claus did?

RUSSELL BENNETT: I have no idea, and they've just gone wild.

IAN TOWNSEND: These aren't reindeer, of course, but temperate climate fallow and red deer, two of five species of deer which have escaped from farms and run wild over Queensland, from the border to the tropics.

There are thousands of feral deer in Queensland, and they spread ticks, eat native plants, and compete with other grazing animals such as kangaroos. So the Queensland Government's now considering whether to declare them a pest. It'll make that decision in the new year, but this could be the last Christmas for many of Brisbane's feral deer.

VALERIE BENNETT: And they are beautiful, they're lovely, and I guess the question just basically is whether they can be absorbed into the local area without causing too much damage.

PETER CAVE: Valerie Bennett, a resident of Pullenvale in Brisbane's west, speaking to Ian Townsend.