



Mick - The real story of deer

What was your goal and what did you achieve?

I'm a Year 7 and simply put my project is on feral deer - what the feral deer do, what's their impact, a little bit about them, but moreover what's the management plan for deer, how do people deal with the problem and is there any management plan at all and how can the community that we have today help with this ever growing problem.

What made you interested in deer?

When I first thought about my project, I was thinking about waste, how people can refuse waste in the first place, do some lessons in my school, blah blah blah, but if I'm being entirely honest I wasn't entirely enthusiastic about that, it didn't appeal to me too much, I just thought it's the right thing to do. It all changed one day when I was riding home from school.

So I live around Belair National Park and I have to ride through the park every day before I go to school, and riding home one day by the side of the track there were three female fallow deer on the side of the track, chomping on these endemic orchids. It was the time of the year when the orchids start springing up. They were eating them all, it wasn't a pretty sight to look at, and I was pretty worried. So I went up ahead to try and scare them off a little bit, they saw me and bolted off

towards the side of the track, and as I approached it and I looked across to where it came from, I could see where the three deer ran across there was an actual path that was flattened out because of the hooves of the deer and all of the plants they'd run across. And there was a lot of dirt, deer are very strong animals so they can kick up a lot of dirt. Walking home, pushing my bike up the really steep hill, I was thinking about that all day, and I said I really want to do this for my YEC project, this is a really important problem that we need to think about.

At first what I was most interested in was getting info on deer to build up my own knowledge, however I did that in about a day, so I needed to do more and I wanted to do more. I was thinking particularly about Belair National Park - what are the numbers? How much damage do they do? What is the management plan for deer? How can we as a community help? So I spoke to Brent, he's the Senior Ranger for Belair National Park, about this and I asked him these questions. For the management plan, the information I got from him was there is no management plan.

The way deer issues are being dealt with at the moment (that is, if someone is bothered enough to report a deer sighting!) is that the Parks unit will pass the sighting details on to a team which will go to the sighting location, see if they can find

them and potentially shoot them at night. That's the only thing we've got at the moment. It isn't very effective because the deer are a very mobile animal, they're not very communal, they don't like to stay in one spot so it's very hard to track them.

How did you feel after that?

If I'm being honest, disappointed. I was kind of expecting for there to be this big program, that I could go, 'Wow, it's amazing, what can I do to help spread this to people to help make it really big?' and I just got 'there's nothing, there's not really much'.

Do other states have plans?

Yeah, they've come here and we can't really deal with them, not at the moment at least. Apparently the Minister is thinking about getting more plans, so in the mean time the main way that we can actually deal this is get people to understand that you have to report the deer sightings. That's the only way we can get information and work out how to get the deer. I designed an infographic for the community boards, so I'm going to do that now to try and spread the word and on social media, so hopefully that will get the point out to people about what their effect is and how you can help this problem.

One of the problems with this is, you have to be careful what you say as well, because if I went out and said 'If you report this to the Parks unit, they'll send it to a team of shooters who will go out and try and get the deer', people will think 'Shooters! They're going to go out and shoot this really cute animal, I don't want this animal to die, I'm not going to report it'. So you have to show the stats and then say this is vital to be able to manage them, and this will help get more people on board generally.

Where do you want to take this now?

I'm going to put the infographics up on community boards to try and spread the message, and the information that I've got is going to be vital for me later in life, sharing with people about this and I was brainstorming, and it's a bit of a big idea. I was thinking of advising the Government to make an app, an app that makes it very easy to report deer sightings wherever they are, a Citizen Science thing, and then the Parks unit can easily access the information, so I'm thinking about trying to get that set up.

Your biggest positive so far?

After I heard that there wasn't a management plan, that there wasn't anything done, I was feeling sort of..the most happy thing is that I can make the best out of this, there's a lot of things I can do to actually make this better for everyone, that was quite a confident feeling that I got. Also the fact that the Government is going to come up with another plan which is really good.

Do you have any advice for other students?

If you're going to do a project on deer, don't rely on the internet a single bit. Go out and try to find some Rangers who are experienced and can speak to you about it, because sometimes on the internet to get some more specific information on deer in your area, it would be very hard. I had a lot of trouble doing that. Make sure you get out and about and speak to people.

This case study was transcribed from an interview. These are Mick's words and opinions.

Deer photo courtesy of Steve Walker