


Film Judas Collar captures camels' plight



A camel in a Judas collar in a still from the film.

By **VICTORIA LAURIE**, SENIOR REPORTER
5:47PM NOVEMBER 24, 2018  63 COMMENTS

The plight of a camel wearing a Judas collar so captured the imagination of a West Australian filmmaker that she trucked camels up to a remote Midwest location to film the lonely fate of a radio-tracked animal that brings death to any herd it joins.

Alison James had crisscrossed the outback many times as a director on the popular *Outback Truckers* series about long-distance truckies. She rarely saw any wild camels but she learned about the Judas collar, a gadget used periodically to track large herds that cause damage to remote stations, wrecking fences and muddying water holes in times of drought.

Outback helicopter pilots she spoke to told her they would fly in aerial shooters to kill them.

READ NEXT



Abbott faces nightmare scenario

BRAD NORINGTON

“I learned that they tranquillise an animal, put the Judas collar on them and then track the animal as it returns to its herd,” says James. “Then the helicopter goes in and shoots them all, except the camel with the collar. The animal wanders alone until it finds a new herd, where it all happens again.”

In 2009, an intensive government culling program saw around 160,000 camels tracked and shot using Judas collars.



A Judas collar.

“There are anecdotal reports of camels becoming self-aware and realising that they were the cause of destruction so they became solitary,” she says. “You can’t prove it’s a real thing but it was interesting to explore from the camel’s perspective.”

James’ haunting short film *Judas Collar* has just won an award at the Austin Film Festival, qualifying it for entry into the Academy Award judging process in 2020. It is also nominated in the short film category of the AACTA Awards, which will be announced on Monday.

Feral camels are a declared pest under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act, a far cry from their valued role as pack animals introduced to Australia’s arid interior in 1840.

In 2013, a National Feral Camel Action Plan described a problem of one million wild camels roaming across Western Australia, South Australia, parts of Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The Plan estimated that damage by wild camels cost \$7.15 million annually across all pastoral properties within the feral camel range.



Camels are tracked from the air before being shot en masse.

In WA, aerial shooting of wild camels and donkeys is conducted several times each year. A Department of Primary Industries spokeswoman said Judas collars were used during the Action Plan but have not been used since the program concluded.

The team that helped James in the logistically nightmarish animal shoot say there must be a better way to deal with camel numbers than leaving thousands of carcasses to rot.

Chris O’Hora, who runs Calamundda Camel Farm outside Perth, helped James truck eight of his camels 500 kilometres north to film in goldmining country around Mount Magnet, resulting in eight flat tyres and two bogged vehicles.

O’Hora uses his camels for tourist rides but also supplies camel milk for selected customers. He says the livestock resource should be used “in a more managed way, rather than destroying it. You could farm them for meat, for milk, for leather.”



A still from the film.

The film’s camel consultant Kamahl Druesne says that until the government and landowners recognise the value of Australia’s camels, the largest population in the world, “we’re going round in circles with the culling argument.”

He says *Judas Collar* tells a unique story. “It’s a fantastic film and it touches on how sensitive and emotional camels are. They are smart, they know what’s going on, and that the thing around their neck is a death sentence.”

VICTORIA LAURIE, SENIOR REPORTER

Victoria Laurie is a senior reporter and feature writer in the Perth bureau of The Australian newspaper. A former TV and radio journalist, she has also been a freelance writer for The Bulletin, The Monthly, HQ,... [Read more](#)



Share this article

