

RABBIT ERADICATION - "MISTAKEN ISLAND" ALBANY

At the request of the Fisheries & Wildlife Department to the APB Research, we undertook the task of attempting to eradicate rabbits on the above island.

A preliminary inspection was carried out on 2 January 1980 to assess the rabbit population and materials required to carry out the operation. The island of approximately 30 hectares, has a dense growth of shrubs and small trees on steep rocky inclines, with a few open areas covered with moss, reed tussocks and small shrubs. The infestation was widespread and evidence of damage to vegetation was severe over a large area. Reedlike tussocks growing on sandy slopes are being stripped and exposing these areas to wind and water erosion. Sea birds which once favoured these areas as nesting sites, are now reported to be rarely seen.

Ring barking of shrubs and small trees is more evident at the crest of the hill, adjacent to where numerous warrens were located under shelter of peppermint trees. The area is quite difficult to walk over and coverage will be a deciding factor in achieving the desired result.

Strategy:

It was decided to commence the eradication attempt at the end of summer, when rabbits were stressed and foraging for food and water.

Feeding areas were fairly well defined and scatter baiting was chosen, thus providing a better coverage of rabbit territories. This method was preferred as it prevents gorging, reduces competition and improves the chances of subordinate animals feeding undisturbed. The bait material to be used is carrot and 1080 poison, which has been used successfully for eradication projects in the past. In the event of hot weather, bait will be laid as late in the day as possible to reduce dehydration.

Baiting:

Preliminary free feeding was commenced prior to my arrival by District Officer, Ray Smith, of the Fisheries & Wildlife Department. A total of 75 kg of carrot was used over a 3-day period. On my arrival on 25 February 1980, I contacted Ray Smith for discussion and to arrange transport to the island, but due to weather conditions, we were unable to use the boat. The following day I inspected the area and there appeared to be only a trace of carrot left. We then increased the amount of carrot and expanded the area to get a complete coverage.

This was continued for the next two days, by which time, bait consumption was at a peak, on the third day a light free feed was laid in areas where most activity was evident. It was decided to spell the area the following day and prepare bait for poisoning. Poison was laid on 1 March 1980, details of which are set out overleaf.

Date	Free Feeds	Carrot	Vials 1080	Comments
21.2.80	1st	25 kg		
22.2.80	-	-		
23.2.80	2nd	25 kg		
24.2.80	3rd	25 kg		
25.2.80	-	-		Rough weather
26.2.80	4th	120 kg		Previously laid Carrot well taken Increased rate of lay and coverage
27.2.80	5th	170 kg		- ditto - est. 70%
28.2.80	6th	20 kg		- ditto - est. 90%
29.2.80	-	-		- -
1.3.80	Poison	180 kg	20	Very little carrot left - dehydrated
2.3.80	Inspection	-	X .044%	11 carcasses picked up plenty bait left

Summary:

Free feed was taken readily and an estimated 90% was consumed on the 5th day. This was followed by a light feed on the 6th day and spelled for a day prior to laying the poison bait. Normally the amount of poison bait laid is less than the average amount of free feed taken, but due to the large area to be covered, and to allow for any miscalculation in the distribution, it was necessary to lay the extra.

On the day of poisoning we started at 6 a.m. and took two hours transporting carrots and equipment to three vantage points around the island. Weather conditions deteriorated and strong winds and showers delayed starting for about one hour after which the weather pattern altered and became hot and windy.

Unfortunately, it took 10 hours for two of us to complete the operation, and some carcasses were picked up during baiting. Due to this, it is feared some rabbits may have been disturbed whilst feeding, resulting in a sub-lethal dose.

On the following day, the area was inspected and 11 carcasses were found. They were hard to find and most were found under dense cover, one rabbit was seen to run down a burrow where there was still plenty of bait in the vicinity. An estimate of approximately 50% of the bait had been taken and apart from one sighting, the results appear to be very good.

I suggest that another inspection be made later in the year, about November, by which time all old signs will have weathered making easier detection of any rabbits that may have survived.

C.E. Hadley
FIELD TECHNICIAN

CEH:jh
12 May 80

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