Researching blind 'roos

Pictured are CALM Goldfields Regional Wildlife Officer Warwick Roe (left) and Wildlife Conservation's Senior Zoologist Peter Mawson.

Here, Warwick had just delivered several pairs of eyes from western grey kangaroos that had choroid blindness. (See page 2, 'Public report on 'roos', *CALM NEWS*, January-February 1996 issue)

The animals were put down on humanitarian grounds, and tissue samples taken for analysis, as part of a nation-wide investigation into the disease.

Peter's role is to keep track of results of tests carried out by Agriculture WA who will examine the eyes for indicators of inflammation of the choroid, the part of the eyeball to which the retina is attached.

He also arranges for blood samples, collected from the animals by Warwick and other CALM regional staff, to be sent for testing at the Australian Animal Health Laboratories in Geelong.

Peter said that while blind kangaroos could now be found thoroughout most of the south-west agricultural region and the Goldfields, the disease would not have a significant impact on the species.

"The blindness is caused by a virus, which is believed to be spread by biting midges. Most of the kangaroos will develop a natural immunity to the virus, with only one to three per cent of the population becoming blind," he said.

Peter recently flew to Canberra to attend a national task force meeting on kangaroo blindness, co-ordinated by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA).

A one-day workshop on March 14 allowed scientists from several diverse fields of research (ecologists, pathologists, virologists, entomologists and veterinarians) to exchange information on the disease and assess the impact that it has had on kangaroos.

The workshop was very successful and the results of the investigations will be prepared for publication in scientific journals during the next few months.

A synopsis of the findings will also be put on the Internet to allow a wider readership to learn about the disease.


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