

RABBIT PROBLEM ON CARNAC ISLAND

Research workers under the direction of Dr. A.A. Burbidge have been attempting to combat the rabbit problem on Carnac Island.

During November last year, Mr. T. Evans, Mr. D. Mell and Mr. J. Lane accompanied Dr. Burbidge to the island aboard the P.V. "Vlaming".

From 8 to 11 p.m. attempts were made to capture rabbits using spotlights and hand nets. Many rabbits were seen but none were caught as they were all very wary and entered burrows immediately after being spotted.

From 4 to 7 a.m. the next day attempts were made to run down the rabbits in daylight but this method also failed.

The rabbit population on the island was large and appeared to be on the increase. There were a large number of burrows mainly on the northern side of the island. It is feared that the high rabbit density could easily interfere with the nesting of mutton birds and fairy penguins.

Another trip to the island was made during December and different trapping methods were employed.

At 10 a.m. 22 rabbit traps were laid in warren entrances. The traps were visited and shifted during the day and through the following night until 12 midnight and again at 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. A total of eight rabbits were captured and infected with Glenfield strain Myxomatosis.

No rabbits were caught during the first daylight hours; most were caught at dusk, during the night, and at dawn.

The rabbits were spread throughout the island and burrows could be found anywhere where there was enough soil. A fair amount of erosion had taken place due to the burrowing.

Myxomatosis would seem to be the only practicable way of controlling the rabbit population on the island since poisoning methods would harm the indigenous fauna. The situation is aggravated by the presence of two species of burrowing birds, the fairy penguin and the wedge-tailed shearwater.

A squatter's shack on the island had been rebuilt since the last visit. It was destroyed, the wood burned and the metal dropped out to sea. Cooking fires had been lit and snares were found on the island.