

PRACTICALITIES

RABBIT numbers are on the way to plague proportions again. The Rabbit Calicivirus Disease, as with any biological control, had its limitations; lack of follow-up by farmers and development of immunity has meant that RCD did not meet the high community expectations. Obviously we can't sit back and wait for the next wave of RCD, myxomatosis or whatever to do the work for us - rabbits are a major agricultural and environmental pest and it is everyone's business to keep them under control. Almost every property has rabbits to different degrees - and the degree is often how hard you look for them!

Autumn is a good time to effect control, as feed is scarce and the rabbits are already under stress.

What are your options for rabbit control?

1 BAITING AND POISONING

Agriculture Protection Officers will work with groups and individuals to eradicate rabbits. They supply Pindone and 1080 poisons which they mix with oats on site free of charge. Farmers are expected to supply their own oats. Pindone is used when domestic animals could be affected, as it is safe for them but fatal to native animals. 1080 is safe for native fauna.

At the start of 1998, charges are:-

- \$84.00 / hour for bait laying operations
- \$6.50 / mix for Pindone
- \$4.00 / mix for 1080 one shot
- \$12.00 / day hire of trail-laying equipment.

Obviously it is cheaper to get your neighbours together so that the officer can do several clients at a time and you can share the trail-laying equipment.

RABBIT CONTROL - OR BLAST THE BUNNIES!

by Eliza Dowling



2 WARREN AND HARBOUR DESTRUCTION

Deep ripping is the usual method on open ground. Most local governments use their earth-moving equipment to destroy warrens, and some are prepared to do the same on private land for a fee. Dozed up piles of rubble and heaps of dead trees all provide excellent safe harbour for rabbits and should be removed or burnt.

Using heavy machinery in remnant vegetation is very destructive of the bushland. Cuballing farmer, Scott Young, has been experimenting with the use of explosives to destroy warrens (and their inhabitants) with much success. At each warren, small charges of an ammonium nitrate and diesel mix are placed in some of the burrows and all the others are filled in and compacted. The charges are joined together with a length of detonator and ignited using a slow-burning fuse. The resulting blast implodes the burrows, causing them to collapse but causes negligible damage to the surrounding bush.

Trials of this technique in 1988 at Pingelly and Brookton showed that remnant vegetation improved after the blasting due to the destruction of the rabbits and possibly also to an increase in soil nitrogen. The smell of gunpowder

in the soil discourages the rabbits from reinvading the area.

The use of explosives is a relatively inexpensive tool for removing warrens. It promises to be most effective in rocky outcrops, river sand and areas of remnant vegetation. However, it is most important to keep in mind the following:

- small charges only are required
- the work must be done by an experienced person with a shot-firer's licence
- success of the blasting operation relies on soil types and the amount of moisture in the ground. Ideally the soil should be dry and/or sandy, so big plugs of clay are not blasted out of the ground.

3 FUMIGATION AND GASSING

This you can do yourself using Carbon monoxide from a pre-'76 vehicle exhaust or phostoxin tablets. Make sure that all the burrows are sealed properly.

4 FERRETING, SHOOTING AND TRAPPING

In the context of a major rabbit problem these have little impact but are highly suitable to mop up individual rabbits causing damage.

More information

Contact your local Agriculture Protection Officer for more detail, including up-to-date pricing. For more information on using explosives to blow up warrens, contact David Lund at AgWA on 08 9881 0222. (Also, read 'Managing Your Bushland' pp122-125. - Ed.)

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