

MEMBERS' PAGE

*Pesky fox**John Lambie*

I saw an amazing thing in January. I was working in my big shed on the back block and at about 4.30 pm a roo came bounding down the firebreak on the adjoining property being pursued by a fox.

It was chased into the corner of two fences and was desperately trying to jump over and escape. The fox savaged the cornered roo until it collapsed and then it sat on its haunches about 3 metres away and watched the roo, which lay motionless in a pitiful heap. I frantically searched for the keys to my gun cabinet and after about 5 minutes unlocking the cabinet and the ammo cabinet I loaded up and took aim with my single shot 22.

The fox heard me and repositioned its body behind a strainer post with its head poking out looking my way. Such a small target!! It was about 170 metres away so my rifle was not up to it but the shot kicked up some dust about a metre in front. It jumped away and sat in the open so that I could get a second shot, then it took off. The fox was a dark red colour (similar to a red cloud kelpie colour). Is it possible that a kelpie may have mated with a fox? I think it may have been the fox we saw fleetingly when walking on the ridge area during the LFW revisit. I have also seen it down in the orchard and am concerned as I now have nine Suffolk ewes and five lambs in the front paddocks. What can I do to obtain some bait or have someone bait or trap the errant fox?

The roo was about 3 years old and a doe and as it had no obvious injuries (some blood from the nostrils) I tried to help it stand up. It had no balance and just kept falling over. Later some other roos came close to join it but eventually they moved off and the

roo died. Is it common for foxes to bring down middle size roos?

This story has some very interesting observations that made for some fascinating discussion around the office and a couple of different explanatory theories.

From Penny Hussey, currently Coordinator of Bushland Benefits:

"This is a very interesting event that you witnessed, and it does sound surprising. It is much more likely for the fox to take a young joey, which is not uncommon - you are aware that the mothers throw them out of the pouch as they make their own escape?"

Another interesting fact is that when roos get stressed, they make an enzyme which digests protein, effectively, they can cannibalise their own muscles to get energy (they have almost no fat reserves). The same thing happens to long distance runners - do you remember the person who collapsed as she was entering the stadium at the Montreal Olympics? It is this factor which dictates that roos for meat must be killed instantly, or the meat spoils."

I also asked Christine Freegard, a Technical Officer with Western Shield:

"My first thought is that maybe the kangaroo had been hit by a car and sustained internal injuries, hence the bleeding from the nose, and was therefore less able to escape the fox attack. I think it would be very rare for a fox to successfully bring down even a medium sized healthy kangaroo. A fox of course, wouldn't pass an opportunity if a roo were

caught by surprise, injured, caught in a fence etc."

With regard to the question of whether it is possible that a kelpie may have mated with a fox, I spoke with Peter Orell, the Western Shield Zoologist.

Peter indicated that the fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and the domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) are different species and have different numbers of chromosomes, and that as such interbreeding between the two is probably not possible.

Seek advice from the Animal Pest Section at the Department of Agriculture ((08) 9366 2301) as to the recommended methods of fox control for your particular location and conditions. An Agriculture Protection Officer may be able to visit your property and provide specific advice. It is possible that baiting may not be considered an appropriate method of control in your area. - Ed.

Did you know?

Why geckos are able to grow new tails without the fluid retention and swelling associated with human surgery? It seems they have a special protein growth factor which enables them to regenerate their lymphatic systems. Medical researchers are hoping to develop a similar product for humans.