

MANAGING FOXES AND RABBITS ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

Jacinta Christie, Murrumbidgee Landcare

Both rabbits and European red foxes are declared pest species in NSW. This means it is a legal requirement for all land holders to control them across their properties. Given the impact of these species on biodiversity, it was not surprising that the Murrumbidgee Landcare Cross Property Planning (CPP) project was keen to assist land holders with training and financial incentives to manage these pests.

Foxes are opportunistic predators and scavengers, and have few natural predators in Australia. Evidence from the Invasive Animals CRC suggests that red foxes are a primary cause in the decline and extinction of many rodent and marsupial species, and also prey on many bird species in Australia. Fox numbers are currently high across the Riverina, with up to 312 foxes located within a 5 km radius of any farm house.

Rabbits are the most widespread and destructive environmental and agricultural vertebrate pest, with at least 156 threatened species adversely affected by competition and land degradation by rabbits. There are two broad rabbit control strategies: combination of poisons and harbour destruction.

Training and current developments

In March, the CPP project, in conjunction with Tarcutta Valley Landcare and Riverina Local Land Services (LLS), held a free 1080/Pindone Chemical Accreditation training course, followed by a workshop on Managing Rabbits and Foxes. Presenters were Dr Tarnya Cox from the Invasive Animals CRC and Michael Leane, Biosecurity Officer with the Riverina LLS.

A major recent development in the bio-control of rabbits is the selection of a new, naturally occurring variation of rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus, known as RHDV-K5. This virus is currently being assessed through a national project known as “RHD Boost”. This project is currently seeking release sites for RHDV-K5, so interested land holders are encouraged to express your interest via the PestSmart website: www.pestsmart.org.au/boosting-rabbit-biocontrol-rhdv-k5-national-release, or contact Tarnya Cox (details on following page).

Financial incentives

Whole-of-landscape fox baiting ensures maximum impact on fox populations, and reduces the chance of re-invasion or immigration from other areas. To encourage local land holders to take this coordinated approach, the CPP project and Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group offered free Fox-off© baits to all members. Neighbouring land holders were also offered baits at a 50% discount. Across the area around 1,800 baits were provided to land holders and according to Peter McCallum (Chair of the Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group), there were reports of between 60-100% of baits being taken by foxes.

Best practice fox control recommends baiting be conducted in both autumn and spring, so we encourage everyone to try and implement further control measures this spring.



Above: Dr Tarnya Cox (second from left) and Michael Leane (second from right) led the workshop, providing useful advice to local land holders including David Tooke (far left) and Peter McCallum (far right)

Further information

Dr Tarnya Cox (RHD Boost Project Leader, NSW DPI): tarnya.cox@dpi.nsw.gov.au, or 63 913 952

Michael Leane (Biosecurity Officer, Riverina LLS): michael.leanell@lls.nsw.gov.au, or 0427 002 922