

A pastoralist's view on the value of controlling rabbits

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An interview with Mr Peter Rasheed, Pastoralist, South Australia

RFA: What are the names, the location and areas of your properties in the rangelands?

PR: Minburra, Koonamore and Melton stations. They are located in the northeast pastoral district of South Australia. Total area is 3151.7 sq km — Minburra 1095.9 sq km; Melton 819 sq km; Koonamore 1236.8 sq km.

RFA: What are your main production and conservation interests with the properties?

PR: Main production is sheep and cattle. Since purchasing the properties, one of our main aims is to leave the property in a better state than we found it. Eradicating rabbits will go a huge way in doing this. We plan to eradicate rabbits from the properties in order to develop the country and increase production without requiring increased stocking rates (thus enabling native vegetation to regenerate).

RFA: What threats do you believe rabbits pose to your business?

PR: Rabbits pose a considerable threat to the country. For example, there have been up to 1000 rabbit warrens in a paddock which previously ran 800-1000 dry sheep. Conservatively, the equivalence of one sheep per warren means that there is a

thousand sheep equivalence in the paddock before we stock it.

RFA: When did you begin to control rabbits and what methods do you use?

PR: We started ripping warrens in 1996, but in 1989 the last owners ripped a 40sqkm paddock.

We found that ripping is the most effective method of controlling rabbits, with virtually no warrens re-opening. In 1996, we used a Caterpillar D4E, with 2.5ft wing-boot tines. The method involved two passes over each warren. From 1998/9, we used a 325hp Steiger tractor towing a 12ft single tine blade plough. The blade was pulled through the ground, which proved to be more efficient than the D4, as it required only one pass (up to approximately 18 warrens per hour). Since then, we have purchased a Caterpillar D6R for the sole purpose of rabbit-ripping. This has three tines of 3ft length with wing-boots, which also requires only one pass (see image below).

Calicivirus (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease) has reduced rabbit numbers considerably, so it is an ideal time to be ripping to eradicate rabbits and the problems they present.

(Continued on page 5)



*Peter Rasheed standing in front of the D6R bulldozer getting ready to go ripping!
Image courtesy Jon Rasheed*

NRM Board support for rabbit control in the rangelands

RFA congratulates the SAAL NRM Board for their initiative in controlling rabbits in the Rangelands



The South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resource Management (SAAL NRM) Board views rabbit control as a high priority in their strategic directions. The Rangelands Action Project (RAP), funded through the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust Program began in 2001. It provided resources to control rabbits by ripping warrens mainly in the Flinders Ranges. Funding for the project finished in late 2006 with work still being carried out in 2007 to complete some individual activities.

The project culminated in land managers forming a number of rabbit control groups in the area to tackle rabbit control on a coordinated district basis rather than on individual properties. Land managers recognised that the high mortalities, at

times up to 95%, caused by Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease in the rangelands gave them a fighting chance to wipe out the remaining rabbits. The RAP funding enabled them to capitalise on the low number of rabbits by paying for a ripping contractor who moved from property to property. Thousands of warrens have already been ripped.

Areas with rabbit control are now experiencing regeneration of native bush and grasses, including cover of bare areas around previous warrens. Properties have also been able to retain stock during the dry period over the last couple of years rather than agist them. Further benefits have been achieved with the reduced need for hand-feeding livestock.

The SAAL NRM Board planned to continue support with rabbit control through its current project, Pest Management & Rangelands Rehabilitation, which was funded for 2006/07 and is expecting continued funding for 2007/08. The new works with this project will be expanded to include properties in the North-East Pastoral, Lake Frome and Lake Torrens regions, as well as the central Flinders. Some 2,240 hours of ripping warrens over 30 properties in these regions occurred in 2006/07.

Contact:

Ms Sandy Gunter, Program Manager, SA Arid Lands NRM Board, Pt Augusta. Ph. 08 8648 5982

Ed. Comment:

RFA congratulates the SAAL NRM Board and land managers for their initiative and actions in controlling rabbits in the rangelands.



Rabbits in the wild taken August 2007 4km east of the mail road on the Parakylia / Billa Kalina boundary. Locals report that the numbers of rabbits in the rangelands along the fence are the worst that they have seen for a decade.

Image courtesy Bill Sandow, Dog Fence Board inspector.

Committee Member Profile: Mr. Tim Rogers

Tim joined the RFA Executive Committee in 2005 as the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) representative and has stayed on as an individual member since.

He has formerly been a member on various SAFF Committees including Natural Resources and The Wool & Meat Executive. He has Chaired the

SA Sheep Advisory Group and more recently the SAFF Wine-grape Growers Committee.

Tim came to South Australia in 1990, farming in the lower South East of SA until 2003. He now lives in Adelaide with his family and has a vineyard and land in the Hills. In a former life he has qualifications in Architecture and En-

vironmental Design and practiced in Melbourne and Darwin prior to coming to SA.



Photo: Tim Rogers

Bunny bites: a bit of Australian history

Let's take the long view. Rabbits have been a serious problem in Australia for nearly 150 years now.

150 years ago, in 1857:

- Some feral rabbits were living in Tasmania and other places, but they had not spread and colonised large areas.

148 years ago, in 1859:

- Thomas Austin of Barwon Park near Geelong imported 24 wild Scottish rabbits, along with 66 partridges and 4 hares. Other people were importing European species, including rabbits, around this time. Rabbits then spread rapidly throughout the

temperate areas of Australia.

100 years ago, in 1907:

- On 30th Sept the 2,023 mile rabbit-proof fence across Western Australia was completed at an average cost of £167/1/0 per mile. Part of the construction and all of the maintenance was under the supervision of the Rabbit Department,

- Rabbits reached the lower Macleay River in northern NSW, and Shark Bay in Western Australia.

50 years ago, in 1957:

- It was clear that after seven years the myxomatosis virus was changing,

allowing more rabbits to survive and also allowing them to develop resistance to the disease. The rabbit mortality due to myxomatosis hit a plateau in 1958.

- The virulent Lausanne strain of the myxoma virus was imported to Australia, and permission received to import the European rabbit flea *Spilopsyllus cuniculi*.
- A rabbit skinner could earn £7 a day. The average weekly wage was about £10.



*Rabbit with myxomatosis.
Image: www.feral.org.au,
courtesy NSW Department
of Primary Industries*

Joint funding for eradication of rabbits on Macquarie Island

RFA has received letters from both the Hon. Paula Wriedt, MHA, Minister for Tourism, Arts & the Environment, Tasmania, and the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources thanking the Foundation for their interest in the eradication of rabbits and rodents on Macquarie Island.

Both Ministers informed us that the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments have agreed to jointly fund the Plan to eradicate the rabbits and rodents there.

The Tasmanian Government is committing \$8million in 2009/10 and in 2010/11, and a further \$2.3m in each of the final two years. The Common-

wealth has also committed to \$12.3 million.

RFA applauds both Ministers, and the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments, for their commitment to protect Macquarie Island for future generations.



*Tussock vegetation
on Macquarie island
destroyed by rabbits.*

Impact of RHD on Raptor Reproductive Success

RFA partly-funded Ian Falkenberg, Department of Environment and Heritage, to investigate the impact of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) on raptor reproductive success along the Strzelecki drainage system in South Australia. Raptor productivity, nesting success, involving 13 raptor species, and level of prey species were measured from 1995 to 2000.

The range of seasonal conditions over the six-year period provided an ideal opportunity to investigate

whether drought or the effects of RHD influenced raptor activity.

In his recently-released report, Ian concluded that the decline in raptor productivity for a number of species along the Strzelecki Creek appeared to be linked to the RHD-induced decline in rabbit numbers. Wedge-tailed Eagles were affected the most, followed by Black-breasted Buzzards, Whistling Kite and Black Kites. However, productivity for other species of raptor appeared to have remained relatively unchanged. The improved vegeta-

tion following good seasonal conditions and sustained rabbit decline in the area during the six years clearly benefited other species of both prey and raptors, particularly the Falcons.

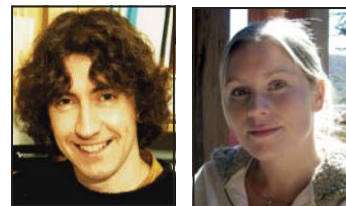
He also concluded that further investigation into this little-known aspect of predator/prey relationship is important for the future preservation of our raptor populations.

The full report will be available on www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au.

Research Seminar 2007: Dr. Piran White & Mrs Maija Marsh

The last issue of *Anti-Rabbit Roundup* featured a summary of the research project of Mrs Maija Marsh, the inaugural recipient of the Foundation's Postgraduate Research grant, which is supporting a visit to Australia by her UK Supervisor, Dr. Piran White.

RFA is hosting a special seminar on Friday October 12, 2007 at which both Dr. White and Mrs. Marsh will present their work.

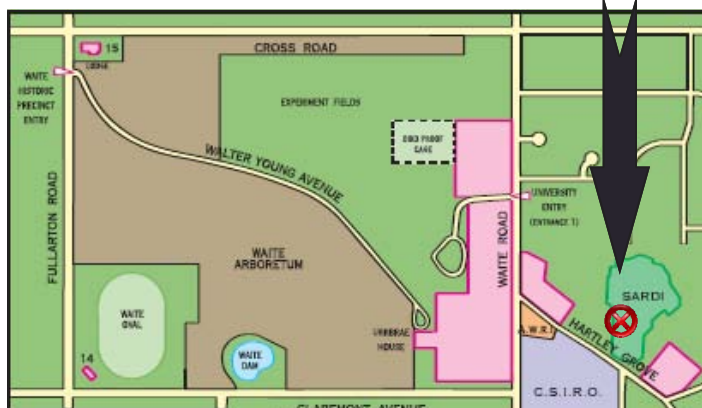


Dr. Piran White Ms. Maija Marsh

Date: Friday 12 October 2007
Time: 9.30am - Morning Tea
 10.00am to 12 noon -
 Speakers' presentations
Place: Ground floor conference room of the
 SARDI Plant Research Centre, Waite
 campus of Adelaide University, Hart-
 ley Grove, Urrbrae.

All members and other interested people are invited to attend the seminar.

Please RSVP by Friday 5 October to:
 Keryn Lapidge. Ph: 0414 600 878
 Email: admin@rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au



For more information see the flyer on our website:

<http://www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/Seminar2007.pdf>

RMAG proposes biological control for rabbits

Effective biological control is critical to the economic and sustainable control of rabbits in Australia

The national Rabbit Management Advisory Group (RMAG) further developed and agreed to their proposal for a national Centre for the Biological Control of Rabbits in Australia at its meeting in July. RMAG is promoting this proposal with governments and industry.

The Group strongly believes that effective biological control, either with new agents or improved current agents in Australia, is critical to the economic and sustainable control of rabbits here, especially with rabbits occurring over vast areas of Australia now being managed with few people and having low financial returns.

RMAG was informed of current research developments, including the development of genetic resistance to Czech

strain-351 RHDV in rabbits in intermediate rainfall zones in Australia (300-600mm annually); statistical review of the epidemiology of RHD to provide advice on how RHD may be used more effectively on its own or integrated with other control methods; development of a rapid survey method to assess of the impact of rabbits on biodiversity — 2-3 rabbits per hectare can prevent the regeneration of many native shrub and tree species; and a comprehensive estimate of the environmental cost of rabbits.

RMAG supported:

- the Animal and Plant Control Group in Adelaide to prepare a budget to maintain a bank of RHDV reference samples necessary to explain changes in the virus and rabbit resistance

- the Australian Department of Environment and Water Resources with their initiative to prepare regional rabbit control extension information for natural resource management (NRM) boards and catchment management authorities (CMA) — an initiative following on from RFA's preliminary work,
- the view that there is little call to initiate the manufacture of a new strain of myxoma virus at this point in time (mainly because myxomatosis still kills 40% of the rabbits it infects, and this is at no on-going cost to the land manager), and
- the need to improve links with NRM boards/CMA's on rabbit control.

Foundation for Rabbit-free Australia Postgraduate Research Grant 2008



The Foundation invites grant applications from suitably qualified students in agricultural science, natural resource management, agricultural economics or social science who are intending to commence or have started approved Australian post-graduate tertiary studies (Masters or Doctorate degrees) that relate to the management and control of feral rabbits or to the species or ecosystems that are affected by feral rabbits.

Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis and may provide up to \$5000 to support:

- overseas travel for a study tour; OR
- attending and presenting research results at a relevant international or national conference; OR
- a visit by an eminent overseas scientist, working on rabbits or in a related field, to Australia to mentor the student and address Australian and/or regional conferences; OR
- the purchase of essential equipment required for the post-graduate, rabbit-related research and development project.

The Grant is open to Australian citizens or students that have been continuously resident in Australia for three years immediately preceding the closing date for applications.

How to Apply for an RFA Postgraduate Research Grant

Details are on the RFA website at
<http://www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/grants.htm>

Applications close Friday 26 October 2007

Applications can be e-mailed to

admin@rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au

or posted to

Mrs Keryn Lapidge
Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia
48 Oxford Terrace, Unley, SA 5061

Interview with Peter Rasheed

(Continued from page 1)

RFA: *Over what area have you treated rabbits?*

PR: Since 1996, we have ripped a total of 13,698 warrens covering a total of 350.5sqkm on Minburra. We have owned Minburra since 1992 but recently purchased Koonamore, May 2002, and Melton, May 2005.

RFA: *How effective has the treatment been in terms of reducing the number of rabbits on your properties?*

PR: Across the paddocks we have ripped, rabbit numbers have been reduced to almost none.

RFA: *What benefits do you believe you have gained from rabbit control?*

PR: During the drought of the past few years, the paddocks where we have eradicated rabbits have shown considerable increases in pasture growth, due to regeneration of native pastures. Consequently, we have not de-stocked any paddocks, whilst sheep have maintained good condition and lambing percentages have been high. Wool production and quality has been above-average during this time, even considering the below-average seasonal conditions. Not increasing

sheep numbers in these paddocks has also contributed to these results.

RFA: *Can you please explain the future needs that you believe are required to implement successful rabbit control in the rangelands?*

PR: We have recently received support from SA Arid Lands NRM Board to rip warrens, which will help supplement the high running costs (eg diesel, labour, plant). This support is invaluable to people who aim to control rabbits during these tough times with low commodity prices and minimal profit margins in farming. It can be difficult to justify spending money on issues such as rabbit control, but we have found we have been better equipped and more able to deal with dry and unpredictable times in farming through these practices (such as rabbit ripping). It is not only beneficial for the environment, but it also increases the 'bottom line' of our farming enterprise.

RFA would like to thank Peter and Jon Rasheed for their valuable contribution to this edition of Anti-Rabbit Roundup.

FOUNDATION FOR A RABBIT FREE AUSTRALIA Annual General Meeting



Notice is hereby given that the FIFTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held in the Board Room on the first floor of the Administration Building at the Adelaide Zoological Gardens, Frome Road, ADELAIDE SA on TUESDAY 20th NOVEMBER 2007 at 2:30 pm.

Mr. David Lord (from Thackaringa, Broken Hill) will be guest speaker at this year's meeting addressing the current situation with wild rabbits in Australia.

**Membership and donation form is on the next page of your Newsletter.
Membership fees for 2007 are due by the AGM.**

For catering purposes, we would appreciate it if you could let us know if you plan to attend the AGM.

*All members, feel free to attend whether or not you have notified us.
Non-members, please let us know so that you can enter the zoo without charge.*

*RSVP to Keryn Lapidge on mb 0414 600 878, e-mail admin@rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au
If you have a problem on the day ring Keryn on her mobile phone 0414 600 878*



RFA / RZSSA RESEARCH GRANT 2008



ROYAL
Zoological
SOCIETY
of SA Incorporated

The Foundation for a Rabbit-Free Australia (RFA) and the Royal Zoological Society of South Australia (RZSSA) will once again be offering a Research Grant to encourage research into the control of Australia's worst feral pest – the rabbit. These grants will be administered by the RZSSA and the Committee of the Foundation for a Rabbit-Free Australia.

The RFA rabbit control research grants are intended for researchers who are just starting out in their respective fields of study (Honours, M.Sc, PhD students) and will only cover minor costs. Applications are not restricted to members of the RZSSA.

Up to two grants valued of \$AUD 1000 each will be awarded each year. Applicants are free to re-apply for funding regardless of whether they have been successful or not in previous years in approaching the RZSSA.

RFA rabbit control grants may be used in conjunction with other grants, to bridge a gap in existing funding, to instigate pilot studies, for travel costs in the field, for important conference travel, or to purchase equipment. Grants may not be used for wages or institutional on costs, but there are no other restrictions on how the grant may be used in contributing to the nominated research program.

How to Apply for an RFA / RZSSA Research Grant

Details are on the Adelaide Zoo website at
<http://www.adelaidezoo.com.au/research/rzssa-student-grants.php>

Applications close Friday 29 February 2008



Membership and Donation Form - 2007

Details for Membership or Donation

Title _____ Surname _____ Given Names _____

Organisation _____

Address _____

_____ State _____ Postcode _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ Mobile _____

E-mail Address _____

DONATIONS OVER \$2.00 TO THE FOUNDATION ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

I would like to contribute/pledge \$_____ to support RFA's funding of rabbit research programs

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FOUNDATION FOR RABBIT-FREE AUSTRALIA

I would like to become a member of the Foundation for the period 1 November 2007 to 31 October 2008

<u>Subscription Fees</u>	<u>Tick Box</u>	
Student	\$5.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
General	\$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corporate	\$100.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL	\$_____	

SEND PAYMENTS TO

Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia
 c/- 48 Oxford Terrace
 UNLEY SA 5061
 Mobile 0414 600 878

Subscriptions for 2007/08 RFA membership are due by the AGM (20th November 2007).
 Thankyou to those members who have already paid their subscriptions this year

Office Use Only	
Membership fee paid on	/ /
Amount	\$
Membership receipt number	
Donation amount	\$
Donation receipt number	
Receipt(s) posted	/ /

WEBSITE UPGRADE

We are currently in the process of updating the design of our website. RFA would like to thank our website sponsor, The Mutooroo Pastoral Company Pty Ltd, for their continued generous support.

On our website you will find information on:

- The history of RFA
- Rabbits in Australia and rabbit control
- Our Awareness Strategy, Strategic Plan
- RFA grants and scholarships
- Submissions and reports
- Download our latest newsletter

www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au

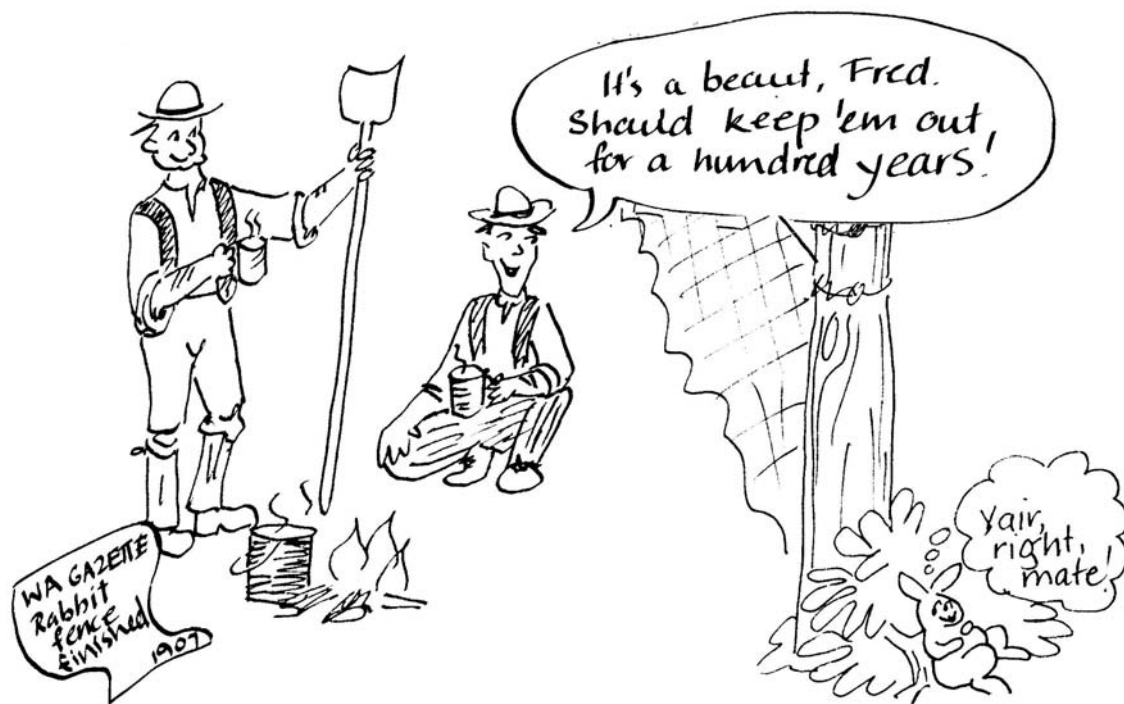


THE MUTOOROO
PASTORAL COMPANY PTY LTD
INCORPORATED IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The rabbit fights back...



Thanks to Brian Cooke for sending in this picture of some graffiti he saw in Strasbourg, France.



RFA Influences Senate Committee Inquiry

RFA's submission to the recent Senate Inquiry into *Conserving Australia* — *Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas* contributed to conclusions on feral animal threats to the reserve system.

The Standing Committee quoted RFA in their report leading to several conclusions including:

- "...the management, funding, community understanding and political

will to address issues related to invasive species across all tenures in Australia remains fragmented and insufficient."

- "Increased funding is required to support existing pest control measures within national parks in all jurisdictions."

The full report is available on the Senate website at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/nationalparks/index.htm.

CONGRATULATIONS

RFA is delighted that the science communication skills and commitment of Dr. Rob Morrison were recently recognised with the award of the 2007 Australian Government Eureka Prize for Promoting Understanding of Science — congratulations.

Rob is a previous Chair of RFA.