

Winter months generally herald a lull in the activity of rabbit caliciviruses as the principle insect vectors are less active during this time. Nevertheless reports of effective knockdowns by the newly released K5 strain combined with the RHDV 2 strain continue to filter into the Canberra based Centre for Invasive Species Solutions. Prompted by the release of the new strain of calicivirus, fresh stories are also being told and retold of the positive response in some of our precious native species as a result of the 1995 release of calicivirus. These things sometimes take a long time to emerge.

It has been 25 Years since the Foundation for a Rabbit Free Australia was established to work towards the eradication of wild European rabbits across Australia. The RFA committee is keen to recognise this milestone and the important contribution members have made over that period of time. In recognition, we are planning to write to and thank our members for their continued support.

To those who have supported us throughout this journey or for a significant portion we are grateful. Much has been achieved over those years. For those who have recently joined, we are also thankful because there is much more to be done in the years ahead.

The Foundation was established in 1992 when: rabbit numbers were rising alarmingly across their range; the Myxomatosis virus was waning in effectiveness; in some areas, rabbits were reaching plague proportions not seen since the 1940's; our precious natural environments and productive landscapes were under siege from this voracious pest; and every day Australians were becoming so immune to the presence of rabbits in just about every corner of the country that they were prepared to accept the rabbit as part and parcel of Australian environment.

Today we have rabbit numbers much contained via a suite of biological control mechanisms and many heroic individual efforts supported by Landcare groups and Natural Resource Management groups across the country. But we are far from declaring success.

The European rabbit has proven to be an extraordinarily successful animal in Australian conditions. To stand a chance of long-term success, we need to learn much more about existing and potentially new biological control agents and how to use them to their best advantage

Working towards eradication, as promoted by RFA, will take us to a much more productive future than simply looking for the next biological control whenever the wild rabbit becomes resistant to the last. The history of rabbit control in Australia is littered with tales of how perceptions, in the official, scientific and public arenas, quickly adapted to accept the current situation as the new normal and cease to work towards better outcomes. We can do better than this by continuing to invest in strategic research, innovative management, improving public awareness and sponsoring new generation champions of the vision we have to eradicate rabbits from the wild in Australia.

Peter Alexander