

About Rabbit-Free Australia



Who we are

The Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc. is a publicly subscribed fund to support research, raise awareness and encourage on-ground action to eradicate European wild rabbits from Australia. It is Australia's only Foundation focused on wild rabbits and their impacts on the environment and primary production. The Foundation is a registered not-for-profit charity and has Deductible Gift Recipient status so donations are tax-deductible.

Our vision for Australia

Australian landscapes that are free of their most notorious pest – the European wild rabbit. Productive landscapes that support abundant native wildlife are feasible in Australia. Places like rabbit-free Kangaroo Island, and Macquarie Island once rabbits were eradicated, are examples. Rabbit Free Australia is committed to rebuilding Australian landscapes. The eradication of feral rabbits is a crucial step to that end.

What we aim to achieve

To promote the eradication of wild rabbits from Australia by:

- Supporting research projects, researchers and research organisations, contributing to the eradication of wild rabbits in Australia.
- Increasing awareness and understanding of the nature and extent of degradation caused by rabbits, the continuing threat they pose to Australia's economic and environmental assets, and the need for research into integrated control measures.
- Encouraging measures directed at the local eradication of rabbits, such as integrated control programs applying current knowledge on the ground.

The bilby emblem

The Bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) is an Australian native animal that has faced extinction due, in large part, to European wild rabbits. Integrated programs involving breeding bilbies and controlling rabbits and other pests are helping the recovery of bilby populations.

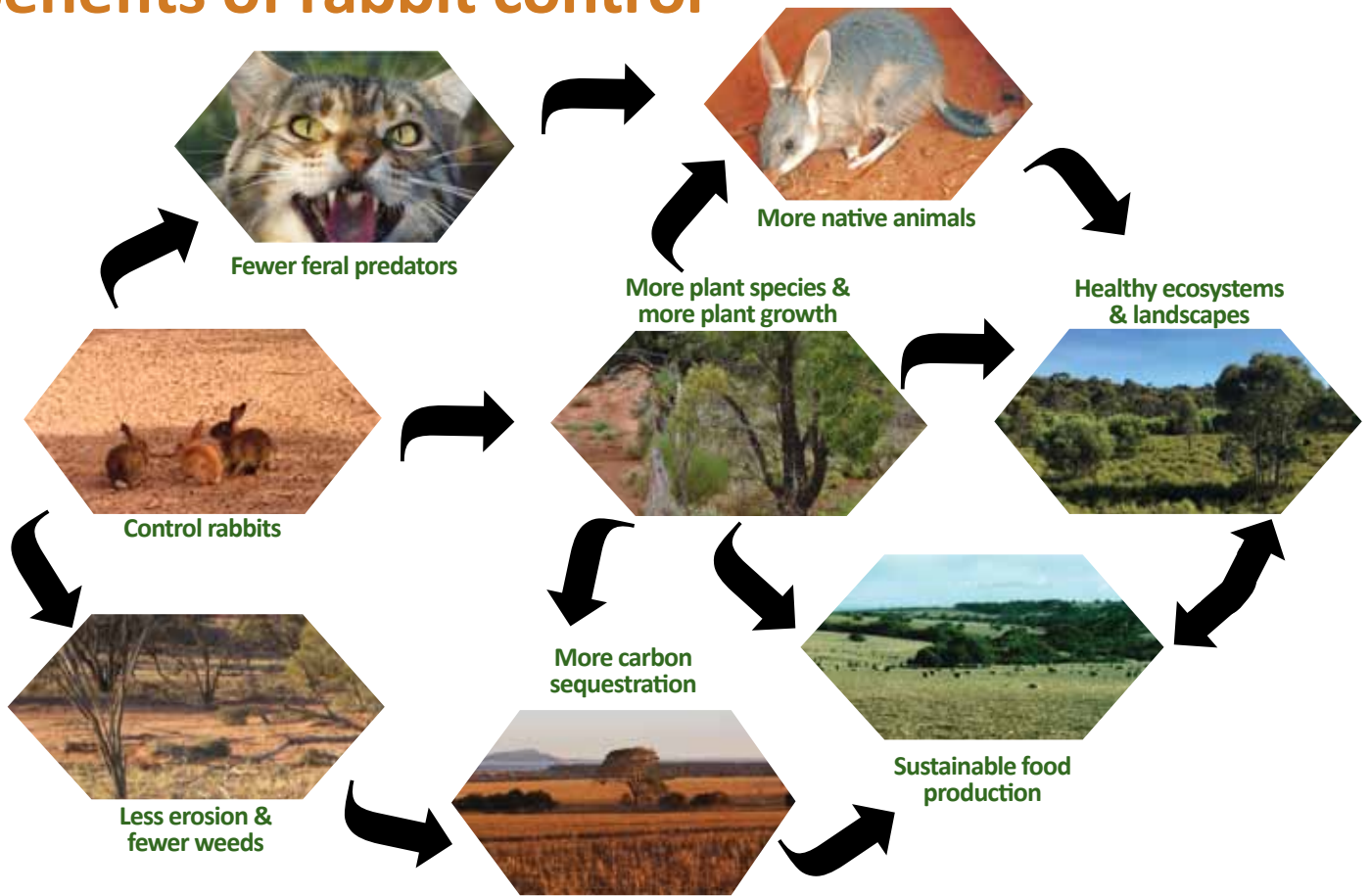
The Easter Bilby (over which the Foundation holds a trademark) champions the cause of Rabbit-Free Australia – fighting back against rabbits and reclaiming a place in the Australian environment for native plants and animals. The Easter Bilby promotes the rabbit control cause and a theme of **'Bilbies Not Bunnies'**.



Haigh's Chocolates are great supporters of Rabbit-Free Australia and promoters of the Easter Bilby.



Benefits of rabbit control



Why rabbits are a major pest in Australia

The European wild rabbit is Australia's worst vertebrate pest. Rabbits adversely affect more than 300 threatened native species, change landscapes, and cause agricultural production losses of more than \$200 million a year.

If you see rabbits then they are already present in numbers sufficient to cause environmental harm.

Rabbits can breed quickly and damage crops, pastures and plantings, undermine infrastructure and invite weeds and erosion. At very low numbers (one per 0.5 ha), their selective grazing can prevent the recruitment of whole generations of palatable plant species, and severely impair revegetation efforts and the establishment of commercial plantings. In high numbers, their grazing pressure and warren construction can devastate crops, pastures and native vegetation.

A national 'threat abatement plan' has been developed for rabbits because they:

- Compete with livestock and with native wildlife for food and shelter.
 - Selectively graze preferred plant species – stopping regeneration and putting the local survival of whole species (and any animals reliant upon them) at risk.
- The mere presence of rabbits can threaten the survival of entire species of plants and animals.*

- Reduce vegetation cover and the protection available for small native animals that are susceptible to introduced predators like feral cats and foxes, and increases the risk of soil erosion and invasion by weeds.
- Support pest predators like feral cats and foxes. As food they sustain predator numbers, which increases the threat to small native animals like bilbies. Rabbit warrens enable feral cats and foxes to survive the extreme summer temperatures of inland Australia.



Rabbit-Free Australia activities and grants

Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia invests in a wide range of projects, in its own right and in partnerships. The Foundation adds value to existing projects, invests in blue-sky science, and puts a lot of effort into retaining a critical mass of rabbit researchers. Since 2015, the Foundation has invested nearly \$100,000 in rabbit-control research and education.

The Foundation has a long history in promoting 'Bilbies Not Bunnies' through our trademarked 'Easter Bilby' and is especially thankful to Haigh's Chocolates for their ongoing support. Projects in which the Foundation has been involved include the following.

Understanding wild rabbits and their impact:

- Investigating the impact of rabbits on ground layer plant communities.
- Understanding how rabbits respond during heatwaves.
- Exploring the family trees of wild rabbits and the role of genetics in their susceptibility to biological controls.
- Analysis of rabbit genetics from across Australia, the subsequent identification of six genetic clusters, and assessing genetic differences as prospects to influence resistance to diseases.
- Radio-tracking wild rabbits to better understand their behaviour.
- Radio-tracking bilbies as part of an investigation of competition between rabbits and bilbies.
- Fencing assistance at the TGB Osborn Vegetation Reserve, Koonamore Station, to record the long-term vegetation benefits from the removal of rabbits.

Researching rabbit controls:

- Studies contributing to the release of the European rabbit flea in Australia.
- Investigations into the effectiveness of different strains of calicivirus, and fieldwork to better understand the factors affecting variability in calicivirus impacts.



- Exploring the role of flies in the spread of calicivirus and the development of techniques to sample and analyse flies as a way of tracking the spread of calicivirus.
- Exploring the interaction between myxomatosis and calicivirus (e.g. the increased susceptibility of rabbits to calicivirus after experiencing myxomatosis), using data from the long-running Turretfield monitoring site; and capturing the understanding in a model of rabbit populations.
- Developing rabbit population models demonstrating the influence of genetics and environmental factors on the susceptibility of rabbits to different diseases.
- Exploring the emerging field of gene-drive technology as a potential control mechanism.

R&D Capacity building:

- Travel grants so Australian researchers can attend overseas conferences and visit international research facilities; and overseas research experts can visit Australian counterparts.
- Convening, and contributing to, national workshops to identify research priorities and stimulate increased investment.
- Advocating for, and assisting in, coordinated national investment for research into wild rabbit control.

Information delivery, promotion and communication:

- Easter Bilby – promotional celebrations with long-term collaborators Haigh's Chocolates and the Adelaide Zoo.
- Easter Bilby books, pantomime, and a children's 'Action Pack', telling the story of why we promote 'Bilbies Not Bunnies.'
- 'Those Wild Rabbits', the award-winning book about the impact of rabbits on Australia.
- Publication of rabbit control guidelines at national and regional levels.
- Rabbiting-On – a program by the ABC to mark 150 years since the introduction of European wild rabbits to Victoria.
- Innumerable submissions to government inquiries, national strategies, reviews and summits.
- Our website and regular posts on social media.

Promoting on-ground action:

- Supporting the control of feral animals (rabbits and cats) as a precursor to the re-introduction of quolls, bilbies and other native animals.
- Collaborating with ACRE – a program by Rotary Australia encouraging on-ground control of wild rabbits – and promoting citizen science, such as RabbitScan.
- Encouraging governments to support coordinated, community-driven, rabbit control programs.

More information: 'Our Projects' at:
www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au



Rabbits degrade land through grazing and burrowing.

Be part of the solution

Individuals and organisations can be part of the solution to Australia's rabbit problems through membership of Rabbit-Free Australia. Members get special access to the latest news and informed commentary about all manner of rabbit matters, help fund research and communication programs (including advocacy for research and on-ground action), and become part of a network of like-minded people. Collectively, members add purpose to the aims of the Foundation.

Visit the Membership page at our website for an application form:
www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au

Memberships help:

- Maintain the Foundation's status as an environmental charity and a 'Deductible Gift Recipient' – meaning that donations are tax deductible; an important enabling factor for many projects.
- Give the Foundation a voice – the more members, the more weight there is behind the Foundations 'Bilbies not Bunnies' message.
- Bring in new ideas, encouragement, advice, information, contacts, and volunteered services to the Foundation – shaping the character of Rabbit-Free Australia.



Landscape recovery following rabbit control: the same scene in 2000 and then 2012.

More information about Rabbit-Free Australia

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