



Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia

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Foundation Matters

New Research Projects: 2022

Following a call for proposals, the Foundation has invested in several new projects that will help investigate potential rabbit bio-controls, trial better bait delivery options, and ensure recent research findings are available to everyone:

- **Viral Bio-controls.** Rabbit researcher, Dr **David Peacock**, will be assisted to attend and present a paper at the 6th World Lagomorph Conference in France, July 2022. Attendance will assist in his aim to assess the feasibility of a herpes virus as a form of rabbit bio-control. Additional funds have been earmarked to support modelling of how a herpes virus would operate in Australia, should that look prospective.
- **Alternative Baiting Trial. Bush Heritage Australia** is testing alternative methods and timing for the delivery of baits and RHDV, as part of an integrated rabbit control program in SW WA, with assistance from the Foundation to cover some costs.
- **Open Access.** Spreading the word. Funds have been allocated to ensure important published research papers are readily available to everyone at no further cost. A paper by **Graeme Finlayson, Pat Taggart & Brian Cooke** has been published in [Restoration Ecology](#) and similar support is planned for publications that rabbit geneticist **Amy Iannella** is preparing.

They join three existing projects (Gene-Drive technology, Ground-layer impacts, and Heatwave impacts) that carry on from last year. More information on all projects is at [Current Research](#).

Membership Options

With June 30 fast approaching, a membership renewal email will soon be appearing in your inbox. This year, the Committee has made two changes to the range of membership options available:

- **Student.** Students will now able to join for **FREE**, down from the previous \$20.
- **Family.** Two adults and up to three children (or grandchildren) will now have a \$90 membership fee, down from \$120.

If you would like to know more or seek assistance in changing your membership level via your [membership profile](#), please email our [Administration Officer](#).

The [Donations](#) section of the website has also been updated, and information is now available there for anyone interested in making a **Bequest** to the Foundation.

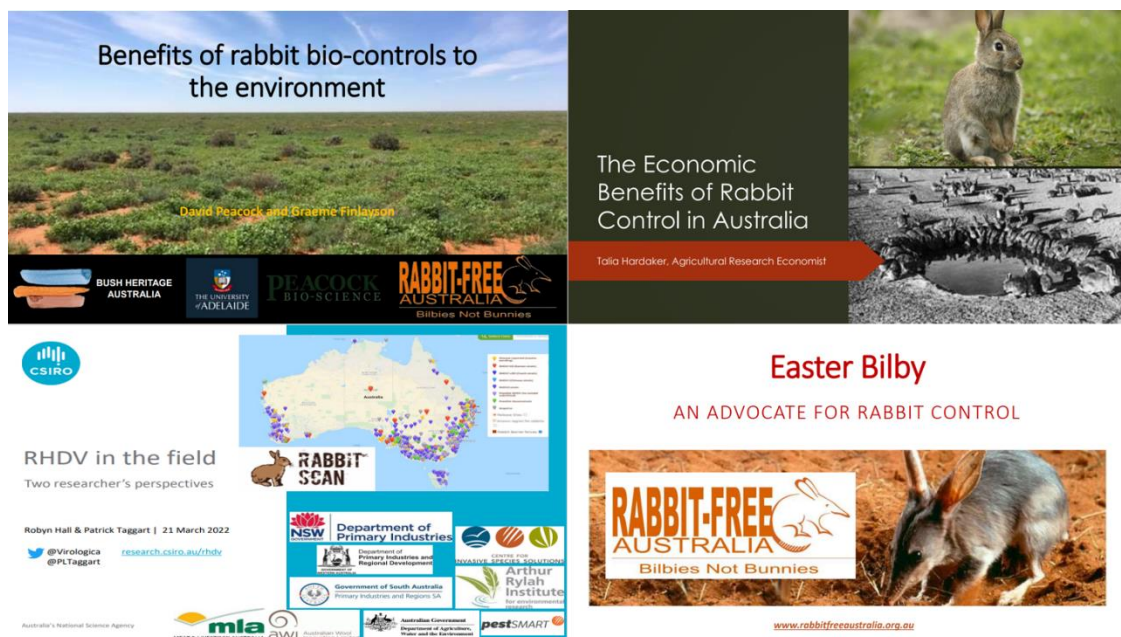
R&D Update Webinar

In conjunction with CISS (Centre for Invasive Species Solutions) the Foundation convened a very successful webinar presenting the latest news from researchers. With nearly 180 registrations from across Australia it included:

- Environmental benefits of rabbit control, by Graeme Finlayson and David Peacock.
- Economic impact of rabbits, by Talia Hardaker.
- RHDV in the field, by Pat Taggart & Robyn Hall
- Easter Bilby - an advocate for rabbit control, by Wayne Meyer.

All presentations and key references are available at our website:

- [Presentations and references.](#)
- [Videos of presentations.](#)



Rabbit R&D Funding: Critical gaps.

A change in Australian government funding arrangements to back individual projects rather than comprehensive programs, and the lack of a budget allocation for rabbit control research, has raised concern that Australia will face resurgent rabbit infestations in years to come.

Both the move to project-by-project funding and the lack of clarity about future investment are a concern to Rabbit-Free Australia. Stop-start, short-term, piecemeal research isn't going to deliver the comprehensive programs of effort required for success, and nor will it prove effective in developing and retaining skilled researchers.

The issue is well reported by an article in [The Land](#), and Rabbit-Free Australia will continue to raise awareness of these concerns.

Rabbit News & Views

RHDV - Timely releases to avoid immunity

Pat Taggart et.al. have released a paper outlining the possible need to regulate the timing of releases of RHDV to avoid generating immunity in rabbit populations. See our [Post](#) for links to the paper and an article in 'The Conversation' explaining their concerns. The practical application is summed up in the following 'Rule of Thumb'.

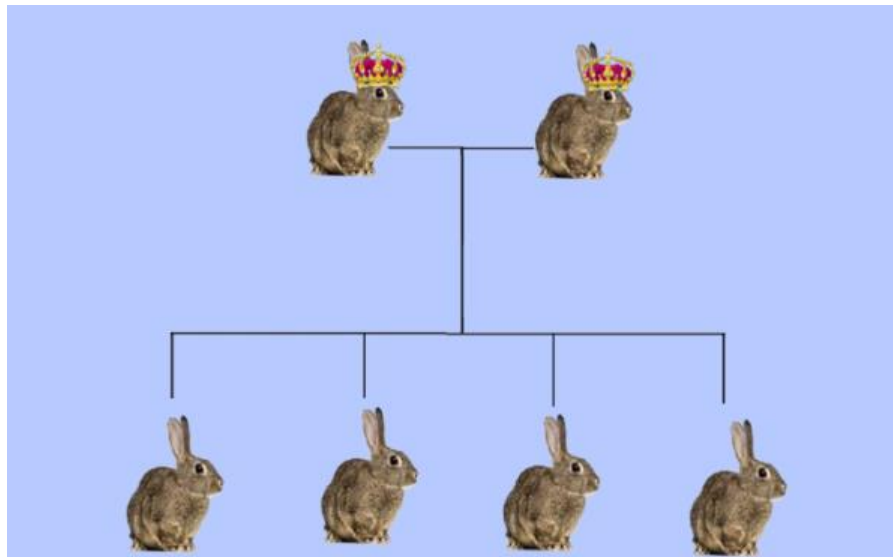
RHDV-K5: Rule of Thumb

RHDV bio-controls should not be released following major rainfall or if green grass is present, because protein rich green grass stimulates breeding and rabbits can develop life-long immunity to RHDV if infected when young.

In much of Australia young rabbits can be expected to be present during July-December, hence the release of RHDV should only occur in drier months between January and June, if it is not present already.

Social Hierarchies vs Inbreeding

A couple of recent articles have highlighted how social hierarchies ('pecking orders') in animal populations help to avoid inbreeding - often by forcing males to leave the 'family' unit. The articles, one by PhD student **Isabelle Onley** concerning stick-nest rats and one by geneticist **Amy Iannella** regarding rabbits, are both available by via our [website Post](#).



Benefits of rabbit control

CISS (Centre for Invasive Species Solutions) has released two reports highlighting the benefits of rabbit bio-controls.

- [Benefits of Rabbit Biocontrol](#) by David Peacock et.al. (which is inscribed, 'in memory of Greg Mutze') covers the environmental benefits of rabbit control. A related media story is available [HERE](#) and further information is in a CISS [article](#).
- [Evaluation of the impact of RHDV1-K5 in Australia](#). A report by AgTrans Research (Talia Hardarker & Peter Chudliegh) concluding that caliciviruses will benefit Australian primary production to the value of \$4 billion over 30 years.

Together with the [Finlayson et al, publication](#) they provide a tremendous record of how Australian landscapes have been, and still are being, transformed thanks to myxo and calicivirus.

Snippets

News items from various sources. Follow the links to the original information.

Rural Fence Histories.

A PhD thesis by John Pickard on the history, impact and heritage of Australian rural fences., including [rabbit proof fences](#).

Soils eat feral-proof fences

[Arid Recovery](#) is working with the University of Adelaide and Waratah Fencing to trial alternative fencing that avoids rusting in desert soils, as reported by Kath Tuft.

The Rabbit Industry History - SE Australia

An interesting, and informative, history of the rabbit industry in Australia, it's role in regional economies and associated issues of class, from Warwick Eather & Drew Cottle; [Labour History Melbourne](#).

CISS unveil a new Trust

The [Invasive Species Solutions Trust](#) is now operational and open for support. It is hoped the Trust will attract new investment to supplement that to CISS from governments and industry, and give more security for long-term research programs.

Blind dates for Bilby's

An [ABC News](#) story by Melanie Groves about the Save the Bilby Fund's breeding program.

Quolls thrive in Flinders Ranges

Quolls are now thriving in the Gammon Ranges after being relocated from the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park. Rabbit-Free Australia helped start the initial introduction program. See the [ABC News article](#) by Christian Cominos.

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#BilbiesNotBunnies

