



wheatbelt
natural resource
management



Co-ordinated Feral Control is Essential

Introduction

If you're reading this article, chances are that you are already pro-active when it comes to shooting ferals when you get the chance, but did you know that you could be doing more harm than good?

By removing just one component of the feral animal web or relying on only one control method, you may actually be creating an imbalance that could result in outcomes that are the opposite of what you seek. It is essential to take a coordinated response to controlling feral animals.

Removal of foxes only for example, leaves the way open for a population explosion of rabbits. On the other hand, if you only remove the rabbits, cats and foxes will prey switch, and look harder for food amongst the local native wildlife. Even when you do successfully remove ferals from a particular area, often this simply results in more moving into the space that you've created from adjacent areas. This is why it is important to work with your neighbours.

So what is the solution?

Use a coordinated approach, where you put into place control measures for cats, foxes and rabbits at the same time. Use a selection of approaches including warren destruction and fumigation, calici-virus release, baiting, trapping and shooting. This maximises your opportunities of successfully culling as many feral animals as possible. Where possible, do this in conjunction with your neighbours. This minimises the opportunity of ferals reinvading your property after eliminating foxes, cats and rabbits.

Feral Animal Control Approaches

Warren destruction and Fumigation: in conjunction with other control activities, this is an effective method of control for rabbits. Firstly, you fumigate the warren with a substance such as phostoxin pellets. Once the warren has been fumigated, then it is time to bring in the machinery and destroy the warren. Details of fumigation and destruction techniques can be found in the more information section.

Calicivirus release programs: various regional NRM groups in Western Australia have calici-virus release programs. The calici-virus, or rabbit haemorrhagic disease, makes the rabbits ill, and leads to their death. When used at the correct time of year, it can have a significant impact on the rabbit population. See more information section for more details.

Baiting: Western Australia is in a very fortunate position, as the native flora and fauna evolved together. The toxin 1080, or sodium fluoroacetate, is found naturally in the *Gastrolobium* genus. This means many of the native animals have developed mechanisms for coping with 1080, making it possible to use the chemical safely as a bait for rabbits and foxes. In Western Australia it is available as a dried meat bait for foxes, or as an oat bait for rabbits. You can also get 1080 capsules for the canid pest ejector.

Spring baiting is the time of year when you will have the biggest impact on fox numbers. Baiting in late winter/early spring will allow you to remove females before they have given birth to the next generation. Late spring baiting will allow you to remove the young foxes at a time when they are easiest to remove – before they have had a chance to become bait shy and when they are likely to take any easy meal available.

Autumn baiting is also important, as this is when sub-adult foxes are relocating across the landscape.

Hold bait rack days allow the production of freshly dried and attractive meat baits

- Get a group of your neighbours together- all of whom are 1080 permitted
- Arrange a carcass for use as bait
- Hire a licensed pest technician to inject 1080 into off-cuts from the carcass
- Make it a social event to encourage all of your neighbours to get involved – what activities would be sure to bring everyone together?
- Doing this twice a year will allow you and all of your neighbours to have a real impact on your neighbourhood foxes!

Safety tips for your baiting program:

- Lay baits in areas where domestic animals do not have access to them
- Keep dogs tied up or muzzled during your baiting program
- Keep a record of where you lay your baits
- Bury your baits about 5cm in the ground
- allows you to keep track of how successful the baiting program is
- significantly minimises the risk of non-target species taking or relocating baits- crows are one of the worst culprits for moving surface laid meat baits
- replace baits regularly throughout your baiting program
- helps to ensure you don't have baits with sub-lethal doses of 1080 on your property
- ensures that you take out as many foxes as possible during each baiting program – keep replacing taken baits until they are no longer being taken
- Pick up any baits that haven't been taken at the end of your baiting program and dispose of them according to the product label
- when done well, gives you piece of mind that your property is safe for working and pet dogs after the completion of the baiting program

Trapping: takes time to be successful, but patience and diligence can be rewarded. It is one of the best methods for catching cats. In Western Australia, steel jaw traps are illegal. You can use soft jaw traps, but these can lead to injury and death of non-target species. The safest technique to use is cage trapping.

When using cage traps it is still very important that you set the trap in the afternoon and then check the traps first thing the following morning. This will allow you to release any non-target species before harm comes to them and will also minimise animal welfare issues in relation to any target animals caught in the trap. For techniques on how to use a cage trap, see more information below.

Shooting: requires skilled shooters to ensure a humane end to the animal's life. In Western Australia you must have a licence to own and operate a firearm. Diagrams on the best place to aim in foxes (and cats) can be found in more information. Create a plan for canvassing your entire property.

Conclusion

Combining all of these techniques, along with working with your neighbours, gives you the most effective feral animal control, and maximises the protection native flora and fauna.

More Information

“Diffusion Fumigation of Rabbit Warrens”, https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180226_SOP_RAB005_web.pdf

“Fumigation of Rabbit Warrens” https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/180501_RABFS7.pdf

“Warren Destruction (video) www.youtube.com/watch?v=69Wp3Velp1Y

“Rollout of RHDV1 K5 in Australia: information guide https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RabbitRHDVK5_infopack-web-1.pdf

“Fox shooting and Hunting” https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FXFS2_Fox_shooting_web.pdf

“Trapping feral animals in bushland remnants” http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/sites/default/files/knowledge_hub/documents/Factsheet%20-%20Trapping%20feral%20animals%20in%20bushland%20remnants.pdf



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