

Controlling rabbits in urban areas

Fact sheet



Wild and escaped domestic rabbits can establish themselves in urban areas and become pests. Rabbits can cause significant damage such as burrowing under buildings and the destruction of garden plants.

It is the legal responsibility of the landowner to control rabbits on their property, and penalties can be imposed for failing to do so as set out in the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.

Controlling rabbits in an urban setting can be difficult as the range of options available is limited. The aim should be to remove the rabbits from the environment and also to modify that environment so that it is less attractive to rabbits in the future.

The first step is to identify the location of any warrens or above ground cover such as plant beds or woodheaps etc. that provide rabbits some refuge. Rabbits are territorial and generally don't travel more than 200 metres from these sites, with most of their feeding done within 25 to 50 metres. Look for signs of where rabbits have been active, such as burrows, fresh scratches in the soil, scattered or piled dung and damage to vegetation.

Locate the refuge being used and make an estimate of the total area that the rabbits move within. This area is where your control program will need to concentrate. Rabbits do not respect property boundaries so it may be necessary to take joint action with your neighbours.

Choosing your Control Methods

There are a number of methods that can be used to control rabbits. To achieve good results it is best to use a number of approaches.

Note: Rabbits can be pests in the wild but they must still be controlled in a humane manner. If in doubt seek further advice from the RSPCA.

Removal of their refuge

Rabbits look for a sheltered place to provide protection from predators and as a safe environment to breed. They will either build warrens or shelter in thick vegetation or other materials such as wood piles.

To destroy a warren or burrow, collapse it in on itself with earth moving machinery or hand tools and then fill and level the area. If this is not possible (e.g. burrow is under a concrete slab) then block the entrance to the warren with material that will prevent the rabbit from reopening it.

Any vegetation or materials that provide a refuge area for rabbits to hide in should be removed. Thick ground-hugging vegetation and shrubs should be trimmed to around 50cm above the ground. Any materials such as wood, bricks, hard rubbish etc. should be removed or stacked at 50cm above the ground and in such a way that there are no cavities for rabbits to enter.

Baiting

Currently, Pindone is the only poison bait that can be used in urban situations for rabbit control. Its use is restricted to properties larger than 1000m², and it can only be used in accordance with label instructions.

There are two types of Pindone bait available in the Hills and Fleurieu region.

- Pindone coated oats is available commercially in various size packages through most agricultural supply retailers. It is supplied in a plastic bucket with a sealable lid and may be stored at room temperature.
- The Board produces Pindone coated diced carrots during the summer period. The bait is supplied in 3kg plastic bags and needs to be kept frozen until ready for use. Urban landowners may be able to obtain this bait in certain circumstances.

Whichever type of Pindone bait is used, it needs to be laid on three separate occasions, about five days apart, to be effective. One dose of Pindone bait is not lethal. Prior to laying the Pindone-baited food, it is critical that the rabbits are 'trained' and encouraged to eat the unbaited food during the week prior. The baited food can then be laid as a trail through the feeding area. Check the product label and accompanying information for full directions of use and safety.

Fumigation

If a rabbit warren has been located and it can be easily accessed, fumigation may be an option. Fumigation will only control those rabbits present in the burrow at the time of fumigation, but it can be useful in situations where baiting is not an option.

Nearly all available rabbit fumigant products are schedule 7 poisons and therefore are restricted to purchasers who have specific chemical safety accreditation. In urban situations it is recommended that fumigation be carried out only by a suitably qualified person or contractor.

Trapping

There are two types of cage trap that may be used in urban areas. One type is placed in the entrance of a burrow and traps the rabbit by having one way door flaps that allows the rabbit to enter but not leave. The other type is usually placed where the rabbits are eating and relies on a food attractant such as carrots to entice the rabbit into the cage where it sets off a trigger mechanism closing the cage door. While trapping may be an alternative where baiting and fumigation cannot be used, it is not an effective way to reduce high numbers of rabbits quickly as it requires a significant amount of time and effort. Traps must be checked regularly and trapped animals must be destroyed humanely.

Some local Councils hire out cage traps to residents for the trapping of pest animals. These traps may be suitable to trap rabbits if they have a base plate or pedal type trigger. Traps can also be purchased through hardware or agricultural product retailers or from the manufacturers. Note that the use of steel jawed traps is prohibited.

Ferreting

In some circumstances, the use of ferrets may be an option to remove rabbits from warrens. Check with ferret clubs or organisations.

Biological Control

There are two types of biological control agent present in Australia, Myxomatosis and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease. Their effectiveness varies considerably from year to year as they are dependant upon a range of environmental factors.

There is no reliable method for accurately predicting the timing or impact of Myxomatosis or Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (Calicivirus) on rabbit populations. However, if the control agents do occur in an area it may be useful to implement additional control measures to capitalise on their effects.

Exclusion Fencing

Wire exclusion fences can be used to keep rabbits out and prevent damage in certain areas, but they do not reduce rabbit numbers. The fence should be 60cm high, fixed securely to posts and buried into the ground to a depth of 30cm.

Repellents

Substances that repel or discourage rabbits may be useful in reducing damage, but they do not offer long-term control. There are commercially available products as well as various home-based preparations containing substances such as pepper, chilli, lime and sulphur.

Preparation and Planning

Rabbit control can be complex. To achieve the best results, plan and prepare your control program in advance so that the chosen control methods can be carried out at the right time and in the appropriate sequence.

Select methods of control that are suited to your situation.

If you require advice or assistance with preparing and planning your control program please contact your nearest Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board Office.

Further information

Rabbit control information is available through the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board.

Mount Barker Office: Cnr Mann & Walker streets, Mount Barker, 5251 (08) 8391 7500

Email: hf.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au



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