

Rabbit

Rabbits were deliberately released for hunting in Australia in the 1880s. The rate of spread of the rabbit in Australia was the fastest of any invasive mammal in the world.



The South Australian Arid Lands Landscape Board is committed to reducing the impact of rabbits to native wildlife, the region's biodiversity and agriculture.

European rabbits have spread throughout the temperate zones of Australia, including the SA Arid Lands. Their successful establishment is attributed to their ability to survive without free water, their remarkable capacity to breed and the use of warrens to provide protection from predators and extreme weather conditions

Rabbit control is about overcoming the rabbits' tremendous breeding potential and not simply about killing rabbits. The number of rabbits and rabbit warrens left behind to repopulate determines the effectiveness of a control program.

Where do they live?

Where plants have at least 60 per cent moisture content, rabbits do not need to drink. When food and water is scarce, rabbits respond by eating less and losing weight, and they can lose up to half their body weight before dying. This enables them to survive extended droughts periods. They have small manoeuvrable mouthparts which allow them to be selective feeders and to graze plants to ground level.

Rabbits will breed as soon as conditions are favourable. It is not unusual for populations to increase five-fold during an average breeding season.

What is their impact?

Even in low numbers, rabbits can suppress vegetation regeneration and growth. The grazing impact of twelve rabbits is equivalent to one dry sheep (Dry Sheep Equivalents or DSE). Vast areas can be denuded of vegetation, reducing the sustainable stock grazing capacity and often leading to increased erosion, especially in areas with light sandy soils. Rabbits also provide a food source



for foxes and feral cats. This enables these pest animals to maintain high numbers with an associated impact on native animals and stock.

How can you help?

Rabbit control is about overcoming the rabbits' overwhelming breeding potential and not about killing rabbits. The number of rabbit warrens and rabbits remaining after implementing your program (those left to continue breeding) is the measure of successful rabbit control.

Rabbit control is best done in summer when numbers are naturally lower and feed is not abundant as this leads to good bait uptake. Also, as rabbits are not breeding and the soil is dry, warrens are more likely to collapse when ripped. Without the protection of the warren, rabbits are more susceptible to heat stress and dehydration and predation.

Your rabbit control program is made up of five steps:

- Plan
- Poison (to further reduce numbers)
- Rip warrens
- Fumigate (as follow up)
- Monitor effectiveness (re-rip and refumigate if necessary).

While rabbits are pests, they must still be controlled in a humane manner. If in doubt seek further advice from the Pest Smart website at

www.pestsmart.org.au/animalwelfare/

What are the options?

Plan

Seek assistance from a SAAL Biosecurity Officer to help with planning. Plan in advance, as timing is critical. Include an assessment of warrens and number of active holes and mark them clearly.

Poison

You can access 1080 treated oats from the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board.

1080 is a naturally occurring substance that is highly toxic to rabbits and relatively safe for native wildlife. **WARNING: 1080 is toxic to dogs.** There is no antidote available for 1080. Directions for use must be followed carefully and remove livestock before baiting.

Pindone is an alternative poison which is less toxic to dogs and has an antidote available.

Train rabbits to take the feed by applying at least three feeds of untreated oats (free feeds) in a trail.

The SAAL Landscape Board can provide you with rabbit baits. Lay the trail where rabbits are active and feeding, three or four clear days apart. Lay the 1080 poisoned oats at 2.8kg per km in the late afternoon. Collect carcasses the following morning and bury them.



Rip warrens

Start the program a few days after poisoning. Complete the ripping in as short a time as possible and to a depth of at least 90cm. Ensure that full width of the warren is ripped to ensure destruction of the entire warren structure. Cross ripping is considered to be the most effective method.

Your situation may require Native Vegetation Clearance approval, or you may wish to notify

the Department for Environment and Water of your intention to undertake a ripping program. This can be done at:

www.environment.sa.gov.au/

You may also wish to notify your local council and landscape board of your intentions.

Contact 'Dial Before You Dig' to check for underground cables, pipes and other services before carrying out ripping on roadsides or property.

Fumigate

Any re-opened holes can be fumigated as follow up.

Fumigation can be used in sensitive areas that are unsuitable for ripping and as a follow up after ripping.

- Use Phostoxin tablets which release poisonous gas when exposed to moisture.
- Holes to expose the tunnel should be dug back and two tablets (wrapped in moist paper) placed as far back into the hole as possible.
- Fill the holes to prevent gas escaping.

Monitor effectiveness

Be persistent in checking for reopened holes two to six weeks after poisoning and / or ripping. You can re-rip reopened holes but it is often more practical to fumigate them.



Landholder responsibility

In South Australia, rabbits are declared for control under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. It is the legal responsibility of the landowner to control rabbits on their property.

Disclaimer

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More information

Email: saal.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au

Phone: 08 8429 9666

www.landscape.sa.gov.au/saal