

International interest in Australian rabbit data.

The level of interest in data from a long-term monitoring site in South Australia (Turretfield) and the value of international discussions were two highlights from a recent trip to Portugal and France by rabbit researcher, David Peacock. Rabbit-Free Australia was pleased to support David by helping with travel expenses, as part of the Foundation's commitment to building research capability.

David's trip was to attend and present at the 6th World Lagomorph* Conference, and he arranged several side-visits while in Europe, meeting with leading rabbit and hare researchers from France, Portugal, England and Mexico. The meetings provided an opportunity to hear about their studies, to share information from Australia, and to explore opportunities for future collaboration. Topics of interest included:

Rabbit diseases. Myxomatosis, RHDV and immune systems are all being studied internationally, including antibody persistence and the prospect for inter-viral interactions such as between myxomatosis and herpes virus.

Leporid* herpes-virus (LHV). LHV-4 may have prospect as an additional biocontrol for rabbits in Australia. There are no native leporids in Australia that could be susceptible, it is likely that a vaccine could be developed to protect pet rabbits and preventing birth can be a very humane method of pest control.

Factors affecting rabbit survival. Better understanding the keys to rabbit survival includes research into the effect of early-life social and environmental conditions on survival, and the life history and demographics (age and sex profiles) of individual rabbits over time, including the analysis of sex-specific mortality patterns.

A 25 year rabbit monitoring program at the SA Research & Development Institute's Turretfield Research Centre is one of the longest running such sites in the world and its age is matched by the extensive range of data collected. Information is available on social structures, breeding, survival, family trees and genetics, including sera and tissue samples, and data on virus activity. David met several researchers that were very interested in the data and tissue samples, and collaborations may follow.

David came away from the trip with a wealth of new ideas and information, new and renewed contacts, and the prospect of collaborations between Australian researchers and international leaders in their fields.



David with researchers from Mexico and Germany at the World Conference.

* Lagomorphs include Leporids (rabbits and hares) and the closely related pikas.