

Abridged version of the e-newsletter for print.

Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia

Newsletter Volume No 39, October, 2023.

Foundation Matters

Updates and notices for Foundation members and partners.

AGM 2023

Our annual AGM will be held at the Plane Tree Centre, Adelaide Zoo, on **Thursday November 9th**, at 2:00pm. Patron, **Dr Brian Cooke**, will present the Greg Mutze Oration this year speaking on 'The illustrious history of rabbit control'. It promises to be a uniquely informative and entertaining session.

If you would like to come, please register on-line ([here](#)) or contact the [Administration Officer](#) by October 24 to ensure you receive meeting papers and permit adequate event planning. Further details are in the Meeting Notice, available below.

Nominations for Committee membership are now invited and are due by October 24, 2023.

For more information please see:

- [Meeting Notice & Invitation](#)
- [Committee Nomination form](#)

Welcome to Melba's Chocolates

Rabbit-Free Australia is delighted to share the news that [Melba's Chocolates](#) will be joining forces to promote Easter Bilby as of next year.

The Foundation aims to keep growing the number of Easter Bilby producers, and the range of products they offer, to raise awareness of the harm caused by rabbits and the need for their control so native plants and animals can reclaim their place in Australian landscapes.



Recently completed projects

A couple of Rabbit-Free Australia projects have recently concluded. Both were modest but important cash investments by the Foundation enabling travel and field work and providing specialist equipment.

- **Neil Ross** studied **long-term grazing exclosures** in NSW and SA rangelands concluding that, even in post-calici densities, rabbits can still inhibit the recruitment of palatable plant species and result in more weeds like horehound; keeping Australian **rangelands suspended in a degraded state** with increased weeds and inhibited recruitment of woody species.
- **Katherine Moseby** monitored rabbit and bilby **responses to heatwaves**, finding that rabbits were consistently exposed to higher temperatures than bilbies while their humidity levels were consistently lower. It seems rabbits will go to burrow entrances to escape humidity, even at the risk of predation. The results beg questions of whether changing rabbit behaviour could lead to new options for rabbit control under a warming climate.

More information and project summaries are available via the following links:

- [Neil Ross - Rabbit grazing](#)
- [Katherine Moseby - Responses to heat](#)

Spreading the Word: Conference Presentations

Rabbit-Free Australia has a policy of taking the 'rabbit story' to people in their patch and two recent conferences have provided such opportunities, thanks to the speakers getting there under their own steam:

- Patron, Dr Brian Cooke, presented at the **World Conference on Ecological Restoration (SER2023)** in Darwin.
- Executive Officer, Peter Day, presented on 'Passing the Baton. Engaging the next generation in rabbit management' at the **Australian Rangeland Conference** in Broome.

How to identify RHDV

During a recent meeting of the Australian Rabbit Managers Network, Amy Iannella offered to develop a simple field guide showing how to determine if a rabbit has died from RHDV. The brochure is available [here](#). It illustrates the external and internal signs to look for to diagnose calicivirus.

Images: David Peacock



RHDV liver with characteristic pale reticulations.



RHDV spleen – darker and swollen.

Rabbit News & Views

Stories about and from Foundation members and partners.

Pro bono volunteers

Meet two of our 'pro bono volunteers'; Paul Tanti and Neil Wallace.

Paul Tanti

Paul provides **legal services** pro bon to the Foundation. He is a Partner in Thomson Geer's Tax team, and has a broad range of experience providing specialist taxation and commercial advice to a wide variety of clients. He was recognised as South Australia's Lawyer of the Year for Tax Law (2020, 2024) and Trusts and Estates (2021).

Thomson Geer is a major Australian corporate law firm, trusted by companies, governments and institutions to act for their interests. With more than 650 people, including over 140 partners operating out of offices around Australia, Thomson Geer are one of the 10 largest firms in the nation. They have provided exceptional service to the Foundation on several matters in recent months..

Neil Wallace

Neil has audited the Foundation's accounts for many years and works with people from backgrounds as diverse as medicine, agriculture and private investment. He was a founding Director with Wallace Vroulis Bond which commenced operations in 2013 as an **accounting and business advisory service**, focused on providing a personal approach.

Wallace Vroulis Bond (WVB) specialises in partnering with business owners, professionals, and individuals, who aim to grow, protect and transition their wealth. WVB can provide professional help for everything from business start up, to business growth strategies and development, superannuation and retirement, and selling a business, to estate and succession planning.

If you need legal services (including taxation advice), or accounting and business or estate planning services, please consider Thomson Geer or WVB for assistance and work with firms who provide valuable voluntary services to Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia.

Paul Tanti (Thomson Geer) & Neil Wallace (Wallace Vroulis Bond)



In memoriam: Dr Russ Sinclair

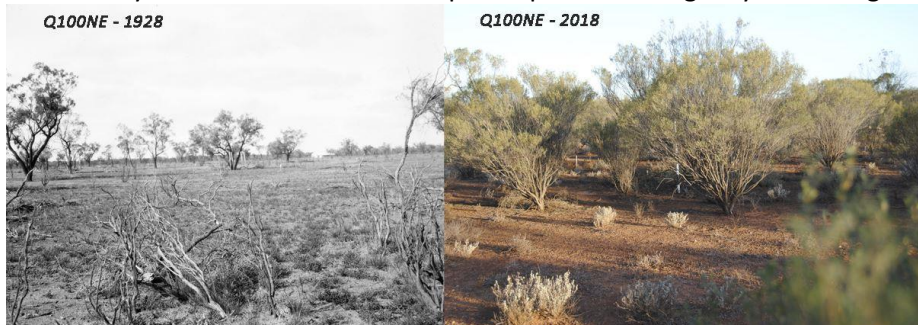
The following memoriam comes from Bob Hill, Head of the School of Biological Sciences at University of Adelaide, regarding long term Foundation member and researcher, Russ Sinclair. *We are sad to announce the passing of Dr Russ Sinclair, who worked in the School of Biological Sciences. He embraced life with positivity, kindness, and an exceptional intellect veiled behind a modest demeanour. As our plant ecophysiology instructor, he enthralled us with innovative gadgets uncovering arid-adapted flora's secrets.*

*Russ's enduring legacy, the **Koonamore Vegetation Reserve**, stands as a vital resource for our University, especially amidst the challenges of climate change. A gifted poet and advocate for progress, Russ will be dearly missed, and his impact will be forever cherished.*

Rabbit-Free Australia has helped with projects at Koonamore and several journal papers authored by Russ are key references on our website.

A memorial piece prepared by **Jose Facelli** and **Brian Cooke** is available [here](#), reflecting on the significant contributions Russ made to ecology and our understanding of how rabbits affect plant communities.

Image: University of Adelaide. Koonamore photo-point showing 90 years of regeneration



Australasian Vertebrate Pests Conference

The **call for Abstracts is now open** for AVPC 2024, with a closing date of Feb 24th. The conference, 'Translating Science to Effective Management', will be in Sydney from July 29 - August 1. The aim is 'to not only promote outstanding research and on ground management successes but also to demonstrate the techniques and strategies that are employed to translate research outputs into effective and long lasting on ground impacts'.

Cat & Fox Control

It is good to see new **CISS/PestSMART** fox and cat control guides both mention **controlling rabbits** to help control feral predators as part of integrated control plans. For more information see the:

- [Cats Guide](#)
- [Fox Guide](#)

In addition:

- Videos of the recent series of Feral Cat and Fox Management **on-line forums** run via CISS are now available on their YouTube channel, available [here](#).
- **Presentations** from the recent **National Feral Cat Symposium** are now available on-line - see [here](#).

Feral Cats: Threat Abatement Plan

Draft updates for the **Feral Cats Threat Abatement Plan and Background Report** have been released for public comment by Dec 11, 2023. They are both available from the Australian Government (DCCEEW Consultation Hub); see [here](#).

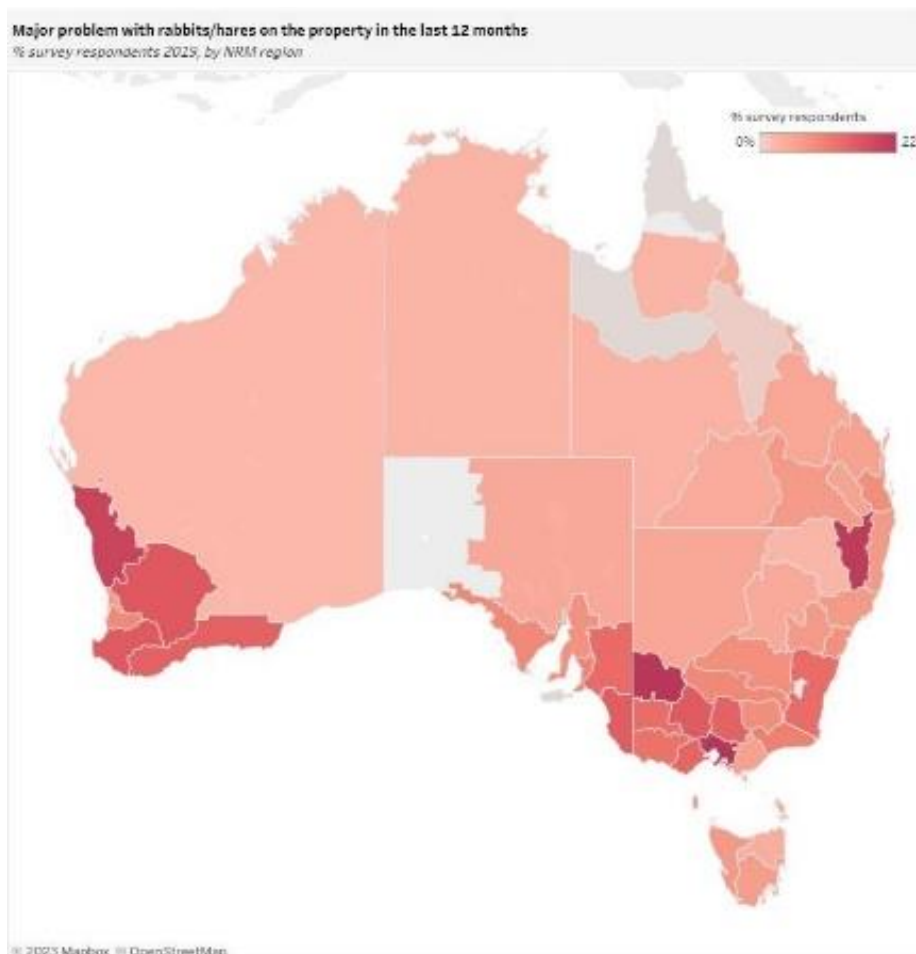
Relationships between **rabbits, feral cats and predation** are recognised in both documents, with Action 8.1 in the Plan being '*Manage rabbits and introduced rodents to reduce cat populations and impacts*'.

ABARES Land Management Survey

Results from the 2022 Australian Land Management Survey are now available via the ABARES website - see [here](#) for the report. The graphic dashboard (see the 2019 map below) will be updated with the 2022 data in due course.

Interesting information regarding rabbit management in 2022 includes:

- Rabbits are a problem for 53% of managers
- A few managers are reporting rabbits for the first time as 'new arrivals'
- 24% of managers invest in rabbit control, with 5% engaging contractors
- 51% felt their rabbit control efforts were ineffective or were unsure.



Snippets

A smorgasbord of news. Please follow the links to the original source.

Invasive species drive biodiversity loss

An international assessment has concluded that biological invasions contribute to 60 per cent of all species extinctions and caused \$423 billion in losses globally in 2019. Andy Sheppard of CSIRO notes that in Australia:

- Invasives are THE number one cause of biodiversity loss.
- Feral cats are the most impactful on biodiversity, but **rabbits** have the biggest cost to agriculture.
- Australia's greatest invasive alien species management success has been the biological control of European rabbits. Since the 1950s it has cut rabbit numbers by a factor of seven and saved Australian agriculture over \$70 billion, but still, rabbits are Australia's number one most costly pest.

See the CSIRO statement [here](#).

Bottom-up Predator Control

Grant Norbury, from Predator Free NZ, is an advocate for what he terms 'bottom up' predator control - controlling rabbits to control foxes and cats. A few web-posts are:

- [Rabbit control towards a predator free future.](#)
- [What about the rabbits?](#)

Related papers are:

- [Pests controlling pests: does predator control lead to greater European rabbit abundance in Australasia?](#)
- [The case for 'bottom-up' pest management.](#)

Interesting observations include:

In Australia, rabbit numbers are driven primarily by climate and its effects on food abundance and quality, and by disease. However, where rabbit numbers are low following drought or major epizootics, predation can limit population recovery.

In Australasia, abundance of predators (especially rabbit specialists) can usually be predicted from rabbit abundance, not vice versa.

Plains mice, feral cats and rabbits: Connections

An entertaining Blog by ecologist John Read reveals the dedication of researchers, sheds light on how **rabbits sustain feral cats and foxes** resulting in hyper-predation of native fauna, and shows how tricky it can be to understand why species are where they are.

Read John's Blog, 'Sharing the secret. Better than KFC' [here](#).

Novel RHDV delivery

A recent paper in 'Viruses' by Tshewang Dorji et.al. reports on laboratory trials to compare four RHDV delivery methods (**carrots, oats, soil burrow spray, and meat bait**; via fly vectors), concluding that:

- Oats remained infectious for the longest period (20 days),
- Meat baits and burrow sprays could be effective alternatives when rabbits are not consuming baits, and
- The development of fly larvae (maggots) appears critical for prolonged transmission by flies from meat baits, and presumably infected rabbit carcasses.

Find the article [here](#). The authors recommend field studies to confirm the findings.

Deen Maar Island rabbit eradication

A project to eradicate rabbits from Deen Maar Island, of the south coast of Victoria, is using helicopters to drop baits over steep terrain and will rely on detection dogs for total eradication. See the ABC News story [here](#).

1080 doesn't affect quolls

A paper by Claridge et.al in Wildlife Research (see [here](#)) concludes that **aerial 1080 baiting** programs had **no observable impact on female quolls**, or their ability to raise and wean young. The findings are consistent with results from previous field-based experimental studies, which show no population-level impacts of 1080 baits on spotted-tailed quolls.

1080 provides biodiversity benefits in NZ

Studies over ten years in New Zealand have found no significant negative impact of 1080 poison on bird and insect populations, but do indicate subsequent biodiversity benefits of widespread pest control. I haven't been able to locate the initial publication referred to, but a news story is available [here](#).

VRAN's FAQ's re Biocontrols

Victorian Rabbit Action Network recently invited people to lodge any questions about biocontrols for rabbits. Their questions and the answers can be found [here](#).

Feedback

Any thoughts on this Newsletter, technical difficulties with links, things you'd like to see in future editions, or any matters to do with the Foundation - please [let us know](#).