

Fox Facts—why you should control foxes

Reactive fox control at lambing has limited impact on the fox population – district baiting is ESSENTIAL to reduce numbers



Foxes & Rabbits

Foxes do play a role in rabbit suppression *BUT* research suggests that in temperate areas fox and rabbit numbers are not as strongly linked as drier areas as there is more alternative prey.

Rabbit control programs may increase fox predation of smaller native species because of the adaptability of foxes to switch prey sources. To avoid this, fox control should be integrated with rabbit control.

Impact of foxes on stock

There is no doubt that foxes predate on lambs, with research showing that the rate of fox predation is between 1-3% of healthy lambs, and the rate is dependent on the density of foxes.

Vegetation cover can result in higher densities of foxes but research shows that the benefit of shelter in terms of lamb survival, subsequent lamb growth rates and pasture growth outweighs the losses from predation.

High densities of foxes persist if there is no effective control program.

Impact of Foxes on Wildlife

Foxes are implicated in the extinction of most of our small mammals in the past 130 years. They either had the direct effect of predation on already reduced numbers from habitat destruction or an indirect effect of competing with them for food.

In the absence of small mammals and reduction in rabbit numbers, foxes are likely predated heavily on small reptiles like Jacky Lizards, turtles and birds eggs.

At times where insects like grasshoppers, large moths, beetles and cicadas are abundant they will also eat them.

Debunking the Myths

“I’ve only got cattle so foxes don’t affect me.”

“I’ve got alpacas/maremmas - I don’t need to do control.”

“Foxes are important to keep rabbit numbers down.”

Even if you don’t have sheep, foxes can impact your farming operation. Foxes spread weeds, especially blackberries and other fruiting weeds or weed that have sticky seeds. They are potential carriers of tapeworm, mange and parvovirus to farm dogs. They need to be controlled at a district level to have any effect on numbers. Foxes switch prey to whatever is abundant at the time. No method is effective by itself.

You have an obligation to your neighbours and to nature to participate in control programs.

Fox Facts - Control

Behaviour of Foxes

Research shows that the average area covered by adult foxes in a night is 383ha, and the distance covered is 4.8 to 16km!

This is why reactive baiting on individual properties does not impact fox numbers – they are highly mobile.

Foxes use roads, creek lines and vegetation corridors to travel and this behaviour can be used to target control locations. Research has shown that baits placed in complex areas (eg. in the tree lots with lots of grasses, bushes) are taken less often, so keeping the baits obvious is important to improve bait uptake. Run-through in fencing can help identify fox paths and help target bait placement or traps also. Taking advantage of landscape features such as linear tree lanes to 'drive' foxes in shooting programs can increase the effectiveness for effort.

Not all foxes have the same behaviour – some are bait-shy and will not be controlled that way. That is why it is important to have a number of control methods if you can.



Fox Control

The aim of the game is to reduce the local population and research is very clear in telling us that in order to reduce the population of anything, at least a 70% knockdown kill of numbers is required in a given area. Local fox drives are more effective than irregular or random shoots but must be done in conjunction with baiting to be most effective. **Trapping** is more to target particular problem foxes and where baiting and shooting is not possible.

Baiting

Research shows that a **regular baiting** program applied uniformly across a region is the most effective in reducing the local population. Bait placement should be on a grid of about 500m. If food is too abundant the foxes may cache the baits.

The Local Land Services in your area undertake coordinated bait programs and can provide advice on a control program suitable for your farm.

There is only a high risk to farm dogs if programs are not designed well and the guidelines not followed.

References

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Shooting

Shooting and local fox drives can be effective, especially if undertaken **regularly** but must be done **in conjunction** with baiting to be most effective.

Irregular or random shoots are ineffective in controlling fox numbers, long term.

Taking advantage of landscape features such as linear tree lanes to 'drive' foxes in shooting programs can increase the effective kill rates.

Young foxes are more likely to be lured into shooting ranges. However, this leaves remaining older populations to breed and while it can reduce fox numbers in one area, it can increase fox immigration from surrounding areas

**REGULAR PROGRAMS WITH YOUR
NEIGHBOURS CAN REDUCE FOX NUMBERS IN
YOUR AREA—ONE-OFF PROGRAMS DO
NOT!!!**



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