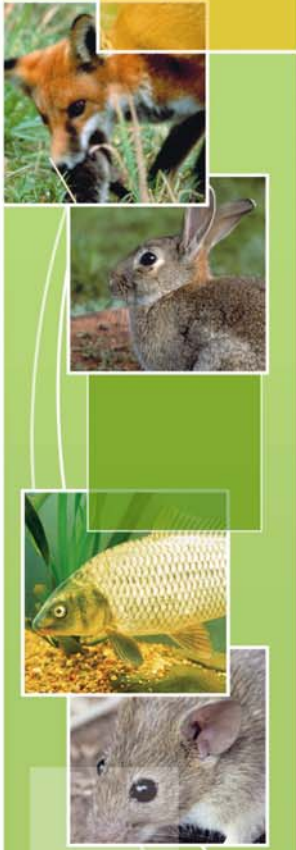


The Fox: Australia's number one predator



The European Red Fox
(*Vulpes vulpes*)

Impact

The European red fox is Australia's number one predator. Native wildlife threatened by the fox include the Rock-wallaby, Numbat, Brush-tailed Bettong and Bilby. Foxes are also predators of livestock, with reports of them taking up to 30% of lambs in some areas. Foxes are estimated to cost Australia more than \$227 million per year in combined environmental & agricultural impacts. Foxes also pose risks as potential hosts of exotic diseases such as rabies, which threaten human and animal health.

Evidence of the benefits to native animals when foxes are controlled is now overwhelming. The most dramatic evidence is from Western Australia, achieved through the large-scale use of poison baits containing 1080 (sodium monofluoroacetate). Prior to fox control, Woylie (*Bettongia penicillata*) populations were known to be at low density and restricted to a few locations. After fox control, the numbers increased to the extent that the Woylie has been removed from the list of threatened species. Fox control programs using 1080 have now been extended by one of the CRC Participants (CALM, WA) to protect over 5 million hectares in Western Australia under Western Shield, the biggest wildlife conservation program ever undertaken in Australia.

Amazing fox breeding facts

- Foxes breed from 10 months of age
- Foxes mate once a year in winter
- Foxes are pregnant for 51-53 days and give birth to litters of 1-10 cubs
- Fox cubs are weaned after 4 weeks and immediately begin to eat prey
- A female fox can produce more than 20 cubs over an average lifetime of 4 years

Fox control

The Pest Animal Control CRC (PAC CRC) is developing new tools and strategies for more effective fox management in Australia. These include attractants and lures as well as a new toxin that may be more species-specific and humane than traditional poisons.

PAC CRC is also investigating a new biotechnology approach to controlling foxes through limiting their reproduction. The program focuses on the development of a fertility control vaccine (or immunocontraceptive) that is spread using a non-toxic bait. Fertility control vaccines could potentially be used in conjunction with other management practices to reduce the numbers of foxes in Australia to a level which has an acceptable impact on Australian native animals and livestock.

Benefiting the environment
through pest animal control



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