

DESTRUCTION OF DROUGHT REFUGE RABBIT WARRENS TO CONTROL RABBITS ON BULLOO DOWNS: FINISHING A 20 YEAR LONG PROJECT

David Berman
QMDC 127b Campbell Street Toowoomba Qld 4350
daveb@qmdc.org.au

Bulloo Downs, a large cattle station in south-west Queensland, was one of the first properties overrun by rabbits in Queensland. Even after the introduction of myxomatosis the rabbit population supported over 100 commercial rabbit hunters. The property was believed to have 25% of the Queensland rabbit population in the early 1990s and it was the only arid site where RHDV failed to reduce rabbit numbers within the first three years.

Destruction of 58000 rabbit warrens by ripping within one kilometre of permanent water between 2001 and 2004, coinciding with extreme drought, suppressed rabbit numbers by around 99% and the reduction in damage to cattle production and the environment has lasted now for over 11 years. However, rabbits were found to survive the drought near Jerridah Waterhole. This area had not been ripped thoroughly because Jerridah Waterhole is not a permanent supply of water. Rabbits did survive there and by 2006 even with below average rainfall they had increased in numbers and spread out to 10 kilometres from Jerridah Waterhole. Between 2012 and 2016 a total of 2069 warrens were ripped within 10 kilometres of Jerridah Waterhole completing efforts to destroy all warrens in rabbit drought refuge areas. However, before this work commenced rabbits had moved further than 10 kilometres from Jerridah Waterhole colonising about 1800 warrens. These clusters of active warrens could provide a large starting rabbit population for recovery if left unripped and a run of good seasons occurs.

There is no sign that warrens ripped in the period from 2001 to 2004 have been reopened. Ripped areas are virtually free of rabbits and rabbits should never again survive severe drought on Bulloo Downs in large numbers. Once all warrens within high density clusters are destroyed by ripping, rabbits should no longer be a problem on Bulloo Downs.