

ERADICATE

definition: (v) to completely remove a pest from an area

a newsletter for the Fox Eradication Program

ISSUE 5

SPRING 2011

ISSN 1838-0417



G.Saunders

www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/fox

Fox Eradication Branch

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Stage 2 update

On ground operations for Stage 2 of the Fox Eradication Program commenced in May 2010 and significant experience has now been gained in management of one of the largest pest eradication programs ever attempted in the world.

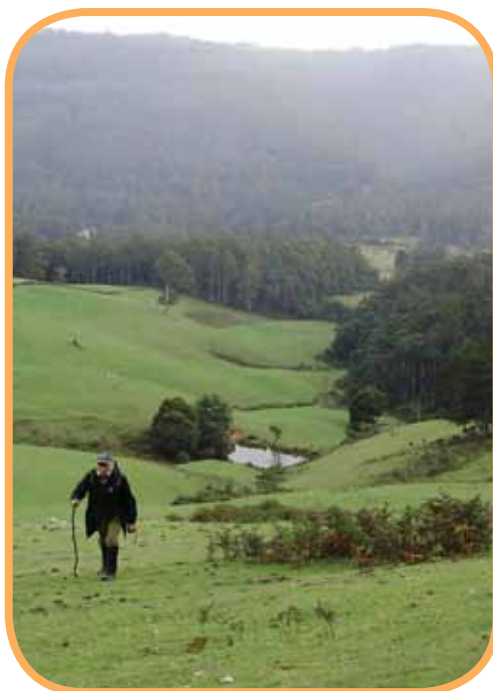
As of 30 September 2011, strategic fox baiting operations had completed treatment of over 90,000ha of core fox habitat in the south and northwest of Tasmania. Operations in the south involved 529 properties between Southport and Hobart with 3,723 fox baits being laid, while operations in the northwest involved 121 properties between Arthur River and Montagu River with 4,039 fox baits laid.

Baiting operations were halted during much of winter and spring as weather conditions made property access difficult and rainfall had the potential to reduce lethality of fox baits. Operations resumed in both regions during early November.

Baiting is set to progress through the Derwent Valley, Central Highlands and Circular Head council areas during summer 2011/12 and community consultation is underway in those regions. Managing the volume of contacts required to be made in the consultation process continues to provide a significant challenge, with around 1,000 landowners needing to be contacted to sustain the operations planned during that period.

Post-bait monitoring operations, which commence 3 months after baiting (the detection lifespan of fox scats under prevailing Tasmanian conditions, refer Eradicate Issue 4), have to date identified no physical evidence of fox activity in any baited region. Investigations of fox sighting reports have similarly identified no recent physical evidence of fox activity.

For further information about current operations visit www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/fox and select the 'Information for Landowners' icon.



Staff member undertaking monitoring survey in northwest Tasmania

IN THIS ISSUE

- Foxes prefer bachelors!
- IACRC extension bid
- Searching for fox dens
- Going feral in schools

REPORT FOX SIGHTINGS & POSSIBLE FOX ACTIVITY

1 300 369 688

This project is partially funded through the Tasmanian Government and the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.



Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY



Foxes prefer bachelors!

Foxes are an elusive and extremely adaptable animal that is found in many suburban and metropolitan areas in Australia and around the world.

A study of urban foxes in Melbourne by Marks and Bloomfield (2006) found that, contrary to what happens in the United Kingdom where foxes use other animals' burrows, foxes in Melbourne excavated most of the dens they lived in.

When denning beneath buildings, the majority of foxes in the study (75%) chose buildings occupied by a single person or where people were not living on a permanent basis, indicating that they preferred areas with low human disturbance.

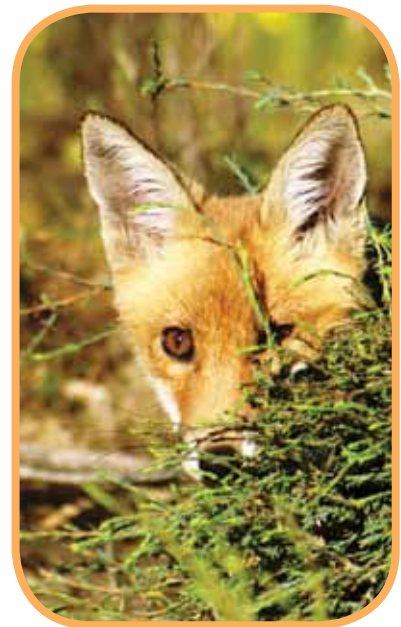
Similarly, foxes selected areas infested with exotic weeds (fennel, blackberry and African thistle) as shelter during the daytime and this may also be related to these areas also having low human disturbance.

As found previously in the United Kingdom, foxes also preferred buildings without domestic dogs. Interestingly, weatherboard constructions appeared to be the preferred building type selected by foxes in Melbourne for their natal (birthing) dens.

“Foxes selected areas infested with exotic weeds (fennel, blackberry and African thistle) as shelter during the daytime.”

No active fox dens have ever been discovered in Tasmania. However, if you are single, live in a weatherboard house, don't have a dog and haven't mowed the lawn in a while it might pay to check under the floorboards!

Further reading: Marks, C.A. & Bloomfield, T.E. (2006) Home-range size and selection of natal den and diurnal shelter sites by urban red fox (Vulpes vulpes) in Melbourne. Wildlife Research 33, 339-347.



Fox cub (courtesy of Daryl Panther)

IACRC extension bid

The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IACRC) is Australia's largest integrated pest animal research and development initiative and involves 41 partner agencies and tertiary institutions. A funding bid to support the IACRC has now passed through to the final stage of the assessment process for funding under the Australian Government's CRC Program.

If successful, this will see the IACRC continue past the current end date in June 2012 and continue to 2017. The IACRC has an excellent

track record of delivering results and achieving significant levels of collaboration in applied research that includes improving the effectiveness of rabbit biocontrol and traditional control techniques, development of rapid predator scat DNA detection techniques, completing initial evaluation of a carp biocontrol measures, and introducing the first manufactured feral pig bait.

The next round of funding proposes four key projects involving the FEP including:

- Development of a 'Transition Strategy' to identify at what point the eradication effort moves to an ongoing monitoring program on eradication of foxes or to a management program if eradication is no longer feasible,

- Assessment of alternative toxins and delivery mechanisms, including efficacy, cost, species specificity and non-target species risks, legal considerations and social factors of alternatives to 1080 use in Tasmania,
- Assessment of the ability to detect foxes at very low densities, and
- University of Canberra led project to develop improved DNA analysis procedures.

The successful CRC applications will be announced in late December 2011. The Tasmanian Government is supporting the extension bid as it recognises the results that have been achieved by the CRC to date and the value of this collaborative approach.

Locations of Fox Activity in Tasmania



PHYSICAL EVIDENCE
(1998 to 30 September 2011)

	Carcasses	4
	Skull	1
	Blood	1
	Footprints	2
	Scats	58

www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/fox

2011 evidence update (as at 30 September)

One (1) item of physical evidence of fox activity has been confirmed during 2011. Results received on 14 April 2011 confirmed that a fox positive scat was collected near Spreyton on 26 February 2010 during investigations in the area in response to a fox sighting report received from a member of the public.

The most recent physical evidence of fox activity remains the fox positive scat collected near Forth on 24 March 2010.

245 hotline reports were received from members of the public during January – September 2011. 339 reports were received for the same period in 2010.

Fox Behaviour

Summer: rearing of cubs

Autumn: juveniles disperse

Winter: mating

Spring: cubs born

Foxes are largely nocturnal. During the day they may shelter in enlarged rabbit or wombat burrows, hollow logs or dense vegetation.



Detector dog locates fox scat on dead bull in Victoria

Searching for fox dens

Foxes use dens as resting sites and for raising their young (the latter being called 'natal dens'). In terms of fox control, the use of dens represents a vulnerable point in the fox lifecycle as parent animals and their offspring are somewhat tied to an area for 4-5 months. This provides an opportunity for the effective targeting of lethal treatment...if den locations can be identified.

Fox dens are often difficult to locate even where foxes are found in high densities. The Fox Eradication Program (FEP) hopes to help unearth the mysteries of fox dens through a new project that will look at using scat (fox poo) searches as an indicator of possible den locations in the landscape.

Natal dens are used by foxes following mating in winter, with cubs being born in spring and dens being vacated in early summer when juvenile dispersal begins. The vixen (female fox) only remains in the den for the first few weeks with the cubs and the dog (male fox) rarely inhabits the same den. When weaning starts, the adults will lay up away from

the cubs, returning at frequent but short intervals with food.

The new study will be undertaken using field sites in Victoria. In a preliminary survey it was found that scat densities were greater around den sites, with higher numbers of scats being found around active rather than non-active den sites. Scats located around active dens were commonly placed above the ground on logs, stumps, rocks, animal carcasses and grass clumps. Patterns in deposition of scats may assist in identifying the proximity of active dens in these areas.

Further information from the study will be useful in the Tasmanian situation where any dens, if present, may be widely dispersed in isolated regions of the state. Results of the study will be released on the FEP website as they become available.

Keeping an eye out for possible fox dens is something that all members of the community can help with. Active den sites may have a distinct 'musky' smell and may be identified by fox tracks, scattered remains of carcasses brought for the cubs, freshly dug soil and, of course, scats. It is important that any suspected den sites are not disturbed and are immediately reported to the 24 hour fox hotline on 1300 369 688.

Going feral in schools

Pest Tales and Feral Focus are curriculum based educational resources developed for primary and secondary school teachers and their students.

Pest Tales provides primary school teachers with a complete and up to date resource which highlights pest animal species in Australia, their impact and current ways of managing the damage they inflict on the environment, economy and people. A list of lesson plans, activities and interactive scenarios present teachers with strong links to curriculum profiles, including the new National Curriculum in science. Pest Tales is designed specifically for year 5 and 6 students.

Feral Focus provides teachers with a web based education resource which explains the characteristics of pest animals and the complexities of dealing with them in Australia. This resource has been developed for high school students specifically years 8, 9 and 10.

A ready to use teacher guide power point presentation introducing the issue of pest animals in Australia is now available from the homepage of both Pest Tales and Feral Focus. It comes complete with notes that teachers can talk to and can be used in the classroom setting.

Pest Tales website:
www.pestales.org.au

Feral Focus website:
www.feralfocus.org.au

Fox Eradication Branch

PO Box 46 Kings Meadows TAS 7249

T: 03 6336 5320 F: 03 6336 5453

E: fox.enquiries@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au

W: www.dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/fox