

Fox Control

Fact Sheet series for the
Small Rural Landholder

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The Issue

Foxes are an established pest animal in Victoria. Landowners are responsible for the control and, where possible, eradication of, established pest animals on their land.

Given feral rabbits are a major prey animal of foxes, control methods of both foxes and rabbits should be considered where both pest animals are found to be active within an area.

If fox numbers are controlled without any rabbit control, rabbit numbers will continue to increase.

Conversely, where rabbit numbers are reduced through eradication methods, foxes will replace rabbit prey with other mammals and birds, posing a threat to native bird and animal species.

In agriculture, fox activity poses a significant threat to the lamb and poultry industries. However the impacts on environmental factors are far greater than those impacts on agriculture. Foxes are a keystone predator of many native bird and animal species and contribute to the spread of weeds through their faeces. They are carriers of diseases transmissible to wildlife, humans and domestic animals, such as mange, leptospirosis and hydatid tapeworm.

Fox cubs commence hunting at approximately 3 months of age, and reach reproductive age by around 9 months. On average, an adult fox will consume approximately 400g of food per day, commonly consisting of small mammals and insects. Their diet may also include grain, vegetables, fruits, lizards, frogs and birds.

Rabbits and mice are readily consumed when available, in addition to poultry, lambs and other young livestock. Foxes will often display surplus killing, where, even after they have had enough to eat, will continue to kill and often stash the remains.

Fox populations are proportional to the food supply available. Foxes will live anywhere where sufficient cover and food sources are readily available. This includes densely vegetated areas adjacent to farmland, where prey animal numbers are plentiful, and built-up urban areas where scavenging opportunities are greater.

Control methods

Methods selected to eradicate foxes must be chosen for maximum effectiveness. The aim is to ensure minimum suffering and pain to both the target species and any potential off-target species. Fox control is best carried out where a number of control methods are employed.



COMMON
GROUND

A strategic control plan, preferably in conjunction with neighbouring properties, will yield a more successful outcome if multiple methods are utilised. Most importantly, care must be taken to ensure all control strategies are carried out by persons experienced in humane pest control techniques.

Common fox control methods are:

- Baiting;
- Fumigation; and
- Shooting.

Baiting

Poison baiting with Strychnine is being phased out in all Australian states and territories due to it being an inhumane method of control. Poison baiting with 1080 is the preferred method, however there is some debate as to how much the animal suffers in the initial stages of poisoning.

Fumigation

Fumigation of dens using carbon monoxide is the only fumigant registered for use in foxes. Provided the concentration of carbon monoxide is high enough to cause rapid death, and cub age and den temperature are considered acceptable, this method is considered relatively humane.

Carbon monoxide poisoning should occur during the summer months (Nov-Feb), when vixens still have cubs in the den, but cubs are old enough (older than 4 weeks) to be killed quickly by concentrations of carbon monoxide.

Shooting

Shooting is a commonly used control method, and is considered relatively humane so long as the shooter is experienced and the animal is dispatched quickly and effectively (i.e. with one shot).

Key Management Points:

- Landowners are responsible for the control of declared plant and animal pests on their properties
- Control methods should be humane, effective and target specific
- Employ an experienced contractor with relevant licenses and a good reputation
- Plan a multi-faceted approach by considering a range of control methods
- Consult your neighbours and relevant local authorities regarding local laws
- In some cases the eradication of foxes may need to be carried out in conjunction with other pest animal control, for example, rabbits.



Control tips

- **Employ experienced contractors** with the appropriate machinery and any relevant licensing for chemical or firearms use;
- **Check with local authorities** regarding any permits or permission required before undertaking any control works; and
- **Inform your neighbours** of any baiting, shooting or works being undertaken prior to commencing control methods.

aware this may potentially remove habitat for non-target species (e.g. native birds and animals). Aim to replace woody weeds with alternative native or indigenous plant species.

Additionally, you may need to check your responsibilities regarding any vegetation to be removed that may be protected, or pest plant and animals you have a responsibility to control or eradicate from your property (rabbits, gorse and blackberry). Their classification will depend on your catchment region.

Eradication plans

Dens

A staged eradication plan where foxes are living in dens during the summer months may include:

1. Den fumigation using carbon monoxide; and
2. Shooting remaining foxes by experienced contractors

Weaned cubs

A staged plan where vixens are likely to have weaned cubs may include:

1. Using the poison bait 1080 on the ground to reduce numbers; and
- Shooting remaining foxes by experienced contractors

Other considerations?

Woody weeds

If woody weeds are harbouring large numbers of foxes on your property, they will need to be addressed concurrently. Be

Further reading and resources:

- Sharp, T. and Saunders, G. (2012) Model code of practice for the humane control of foxes, accessed via <http://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/foxCOP2012.pdf>
- <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/pest-animals/a-z-of-pest-animals/red-fox>
- Information on landholder legal rights and responsibilities with regard to noxious weeds and pests: <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-victoria-from-pest-animals-and-weeds/legislation-policy-and-permits/noxious-weed-and-pest-animal-management-your-legal-roles-and-responsibilities>



This project is supported by Bass Coast Landcare Network through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

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