

Rabbits

Stat attack

It is estimated that a pair of rabbits could in three years breed to 12 million.

In the pipeline

Rabbits from Central Otago could soon be on the menu in homes and restaurants. Bendigo Game Birds is conducting a trial, processing wild meat for sale on the New Zealand and international market.

The first rabbits were released in the South Island as shooting game less than twenty years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. They soon outnumbered sheep.

Thriving in the semi-arid Central Otago climate to such an extent that they competed with stock for grazing, rabbits led to disaster for many rural properties. Despite the introduction of ferrets to help control their numbers, they had reached plague proportions by 1890. Attempts to control them by spreading phosphorus-poisoned oats proved ineffective.

From the beginning of the 20th century, some runholders who were unable to graze sheep because of rabbit numbers turned the tables. In 1915, a rabbit-canning factory opened in Cromwell with an intake of 10,000 carcasses a day.

In 1948 the Government passed legislation designed to completely exterminate rabbits throughout New Zealand. As the first form of attack, carrots laced with the new poison, 1080, were dropped all over Central Otago by light aeroplane. This was followed by night shooting and trapping, but in time, many of the animals developed immunity to the poison or became bait shy. In the 1980s the dismantling of the Rabbit Boards meant the pest threatened to overwhelm the area again. Local farmers took it into their own hands in the 1990s to illegally import the rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD) from Australia. This proved very effective in the short term. Immunity to RCD has been developing, however, and the rabbit population seems sure to increase again unless some other method of control is found.



Rabbits – an all too frequent sight in Central Otago!



The Great Alexandra Easter Bunny Hunt

