



RABBIT CONTROL ON YOUR PROPERTY

European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are one of Australia's most prolific and destructive feral species resulting in considerable losses to agriculture, horticulture and damage to native vegetation.

Rabbits cause damage through:

- Grazing on vegetation preventing seedlings from establishing or regenerating.
- Compete with native fauna for food and shelter.
- Diggings and warren construction lead to loss of vegetation cover resulting in soil erosion.

Management of rabbits in Western Australia

Rabbits are a declared pest under the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act (2007)* and are identified as a Pest animal species under the City of Greater Geraldton Pest and Weed Management Framework (2022). Under this framework, rabbits are classified as requiring management actions from the landholder to control identified populations.

All control activities must comply with requirements under the *Animal Welfare Act (2002)* and Animal Welfare Regulations (2003) to ensure that animals are handled and killed humanely (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development).

The management tools available for rabbit control depends on the number of rabbits, the level of damage, and the land use/type of the affected area. Rabbit control can be achieved effectively through a combination of control measures, the two main options of rabbit control are:

- Prevention and limitation – prevent rabbits from entering the area, limit damage through removal/limitation of habitat or refuges.
- Elimination e.g. trapping, poisoning, fumigation and biological control.

Seek further advice from local pest control operators and authorities to decide on the most appropriate method for your property. Links are provided below outlining where you can find more information.

Prevention and limitation

Preventing rabbits from entering your property or removing/eliminating rabbit habitat may reduce rabbit numbers on your property without the need to undertake costly rabbit control measures such as baiting.

Monitoring rabbits on your property is crucial to identify rabbit feeding/living areas on your property and assess rabbit numbers. Make observations of rabbit populations in the morning and dusk, make note of any indicators that rabbits are present, e.g., droppings, scratchings or footprints.

Some appropriate preventative methods include:

- Constructing rabbit proof fences around your property, or particular areas that you want to protect (such as garden beds, vegie patches)
- Eliminate potential rabbit habitat through the removal of weeds and waste piles.
- Use tree/plant guards to protect newly planted trees and shrubs.





Baiting

The most effective rabbit poison for residential rural areas is Pindone oat bait. This is an anticoagulant, similar to the poison used to control rodents. In the case of accidental ingestion by livestock or pets, the antidote for pindone is available from vets. Ready to use pindone bait is available through farm and rural supply stores.

- Baiting to take place at the end of summer, late January/ February over a 4-6 week period
- Baits to be placed at night when the rabbits are most active. This also reduces the risk to non-target native species and pets.
- Pindone to be mixed with oats and laid down 5-10 days after free feeding in freshly made furrows.
- To achieve the best outcomes most rabbits warrens are then fumigated and destroyed

Note: Baiting can pose a risk to native wildlife. Bait stations can be used to restrict access from non-target species, and any dead rabbits should be removed immediately.

Fumigation

Fumigation of warrens is an effective method of rabbit control during the breeding season, and as a follow up to poisoning. It is suitable where poisons cannot be used because of the risk to non-target species.

Fumigants containing phosphide gas are available from farm supply stores. The pellets are positioned in the burrows, and all burrow entrances are sealed to allow the gas to permeate the warren.

Note: Extreme caution must be exercised to ensure operator safety. Engage a professional licenced pest control operator if you are unsure.

Biological control

Biological control involves using a biological agent such as an insect, predator or disease to control a pest species.

Two biological control methods for controlling rabbits include myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD, formerly known as calicivirus). Results vary due to some rabbit populations being genetically resistant to the disease. As with any disease, effectiveness of the control measure can reduce over time, therefore new strains are continually researched and released. Council are currently researching options for biological control.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

City of Greater Geraldton:

<https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/european-rabbits.aspx>

Northern Biosecurity Group:

<https://www.nbg.org.au/>

Rabbit Free Australia:

<https://rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/category/about-rabbits/>

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development:

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pest-mammals/european-rabbit>

Pestsmart:

<https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkits/european-rabbits/>

Rabbit Scan App:

<https://www.feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan/default.aspx>