



ENRD RABBIT CONTROL TRIAL

Why control rabbits?

Rabbits are having an increasing impact on agricultural crops and endemic plants on the Island. In 2008, the number of rabbits on St Helena was estimated at 30,000, we know this number has increased significantly in recent years in spite of the range of methods used to control rabbits.

Currently there are a number of ways in which we try to control rabbits including shooting, live trapping, rabbit fencing and destroying warrens. There is no experience of using poison before so we are therefore planning a carefully monitored trial between now and the end of the year to see how effective it is. Some of the benefits and issues of the different methods are listed below:

Method	Benefits	Issues
Live trapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humane if done correctly • Rabbit meat can be consumed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If done incorrectly animals die slowly of dehydration • Labour intensive and expensive • Removes small numbers of rabbits
Drop traps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humane if done correctly • Rabbit meat can be consumed • Potential to remove relatively large numbers of rabbits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If done incorrectly animals die slowly of dehydration • Labour intensive and expensive
Shooting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humane if done correctly • Rabbit meat can be consumed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If done incorrectly animals die slowly from wounds • Labour intensive and expensive • Issues of public safety/damage to the environment • Removes small numbers of rabbits
Fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour intensive and expensive • Needs constant maintenance / repair and has negative visual impact • Does not remove rabbits
Poison baiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially very cost effective • Removes large numbers of rabbits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less humane (depending on the poison used) • Rabbit meat cannot be consumed • Issues of public safety / damage to the environment
Rabbit repellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely ineffective and needs regular reapplication • Labour intensive and expensive • Does not remove rabbits
Hormonal/ contraceptive control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially humane (unknown) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very expensive • Still in trial stages and effect on population unknown • High take-up needed to be effective • Slow to reduce population size

Why use poison?

The Environment & Natural Resources Directorate (ENRD) are considering a small **trial** to use poison baiting in very remote areas to compare the effectiveness of poison to other methods currently used on St Helena. Future rabbit control across St Helena is likely to require a mix of methods including shooting and live trapping as well as potentially poison.

There are a number of reasons for trialling poison baiting on St Helena:

- It has the potential to be the most cost effective solution to controlling rabbits
- Other methods have been tried and been relatively unsuccessful in large scale rabbit control
- Some of the adverse effects of poison can be carefully controlled on St Helena in ways they can't in other areas
- Understanding how effective poison is would enable us to make clear decisions on the best method for use in specific areas of the Island in future

When using poison there are two possible options:

1. An acute poison which kills quickly
2. A chronic poison which acts as an anticoagulant (like rat poison) and kills more slowly

Proposals to trial both methods were discussed, however, use of an acute poison presents a greater risk to the environment and the safety of other animals, including pets, and people. Rabbits are more susceptible to the effects of the slower acting poison and ingestion of a fatal dose requires two or three feeding activities. This means it is very much less likely to affect pets or other animals and that the risk to people is very small. If animals are affected there is an antidote available. There is no antidote to the acute poison.

The Trial

The trial sites have been chosen to avoid the chances of other animals taking the bait and also the poison entering the eco-system.

The bait will be laid in carefully monitored stations which are individually fenced to further reduce the chance of any other animal being affected. These stations will be at least 100 metres away from any water source and no bait will be laid during heavy rain. There will be signs posted showing the public where the bait is being used. Pre-baiting activities with un-poisoned bait will take place monitored by camera traps to see what animals are taking the bait. If other animals are seen taking bait the trial will be stopped.



If at any time monitoring indicates that other animals or people are at risk the trial will be stopped immediately.

After the trial we will know more about which mix of control techniques we should be using to better protect crops and our environment. If successful, poison baiting may be

used in other areas on St Helena in future, but it is expected that it would be used alongside other methods, such as shooting and live trapping, and on sites where other methods are less useful or inappropriate.

SHG

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