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ORGANISED VERMIN CONTROL

By A. R. TOMLINSON, Chief Vermin Control Officer

THE struggle between man and his animal enemies is never-ending. It commenced when our early forefathers battled for existence. It continues now, and no doubt will go on indefinitely. Here in Western Australia, our primary industries would be ruined, and our homes rendered uninhabitable if we did not fight unceasingly against the larger animals and the insects.

In any warfare, carefully planned and co-ordinated campaigns are required. Our fight against animal pests is all-out warfare, and nowhere else are the advantages of such planned and co-ordinated campaigns more clearly shown.

Perhaps the most outstanding illustration of this has been in the Argentine ant campaign here in Western Australia. To commence with, property owners operated individually against the ants on their properties. As is usual under these conditions some did a good job, others made ineffective or token efforts while others did nothing. Just as could be expected following our experience with similar operations against rabbits, the ants continued to spread to an extent which caused general alarm.

CO-ORDINATION GETS RESULTS

Then a centrally organised and completely co-ordinated control plan was substituted for the existing individual efforts. The work was done by teams of trained men who, operating on a front, treated all neighbouring properties simultaneously. The net result—immediate satisfactory control.

Here indeed is a practical example to all farmers and Vermin Boards of the application of a principle which although so well known, is so little used.

For many years the Vermin Control Branch has tried to persuade farmers and local authorities to use this method to control pests such as rabbits and wild dogs, but with little success. It was also recommended by some individuals such as the local inspector in the Manjimup Vermin

Board and the present secretary of the Dowerin Vermin Board. More particularly it was recommended by the Royal Commission into Vermin Control in Western Australia.

RABBIT CONTROL WITH "1080"

The Agriculture Protection Board had already commenced such a scheme from several angles, including the mass spreading of myxomatosis, the rabbit control units using "1080," the rabbit warren destruction units, the Group Vermin Control Officer scheme, and the grasshopper control programmes.

All had the one objective—co-ordinated and organised control which extended simultaneously over neighbouring properties. All have been successful, and never before in the history of this State, have rabbits received such a severe setback from the hands of man.

The Protection Board, with the assistance of many local authorities and farmers, has demonstrated that rabbits can be effectively controlled by organisation and co-ordination.

The poison "1080" is now available to farmers in the form of poisoned bait. This could be a great help if applied properly. If it means that farmers are going to use it as they have used poisons in the past, it will be largely wasted. Some will use it well, but individually. Some of their neighbours may use it just as well but not simultaneously; others will use it inefficiently and others will do nothing. There can be only one result—failure to achieve maximum control.

The most important point which has emerged from our use of the "1080" poisoning units is that, while the poison is better than others, it has a greatly reduced effect without the organised and co-ordinated drives.

ORGANISATION IS ESSENTIAL

In Vermin Board districts where the drives have been well-organised in advance so that all properties and reserves are dealt with simultaneously on a front, by far the best results have been obtained. Where the advance arrangements have not been so well organised, the effectiveness has been proportionately reduced.

Our work has shown that a competent local Group Vermin Control Officer or Inspector is essential to arrange for an organised drive. He must be backed up with teams of men and equipment, preferably to help farmers with control work or to do it for them. Farmers who will not co-operate must be compelled to carry out effective work, or it will be done for them under penalty conditions. The whole keynote is efficient and simultaneous action on neighbouring properties, and by this is not meant within a fortnight or a week, but at the same time.

Despite the remarkable results which have been achieved by organised control work with both rabbits and Argentine ants, some Vermin Boards and farmers have not yet learned the lesson which has been so strikingly taught.

Only recently, the members of one Vermin Board informed me that while the use of our units might be good, it was not always convenient for farmers to destroy rabbits at a given time. They felt it would be better to allow the farmers to operate when it was suitable for them to do so.

This is the method which has been such a failure over the years. It cannot be effective, and until this particular Board is prepared to follow the lead which has now been given in up-to-date control work, satisfactory control of the rabbits cannot be gained.

The same applies to those farmers who have pressed for the use of the poison "1080" solely by farmers individually instead of in organised drives.

PASTORALISTS' PROBLEMS

In other fields of vermin control, organised drives are having equally good effects. In the pastoral areas, I have continually requested Vermin Boards and pastoralists to organise district-wide wild dog baiting drives simultaneously with the Agriculture Protection Board's aerial baiting campaigns.

Some pastoralists in the North-West are now co-operating on a large scale. One group covers part of the Port Hedland, Roebourne and Tableland, Marble Bar and Nullagine districts. Another covers parts of the Meekatharra, Ashburton, Upper Gascoyne, and also the Nullagine districts.

Campaign committees, assisted by Protection Board Regional Vermin Control Officers, have been set up, and well-planned campaigns organised with local supervisors co-ordinating activities. Teams of men from the stations operate in conjunction with Protection Board doggers in wholesale baiting drives which have already given excellent results.

The drives have been so successful that they are to be continued, and it is hoped they will be extended. So far the Vermin Boards have not actively participated in their official capacity, but no doubt they will do so. When they do, it will be possible for a more complete coverage to be obtained, and those few stations which do not co-operate will be included.

The general attitude by many pastoralists and farmers has been to leave wild dog control largely to the Protection Board doggers. It is a very encouraging sign to see that those joining in these drives have appreciated that this is not enough, and co-operative action by all concerned is necessary. I congratulate them on their positive and progressive attitude.

KANGAROO POISONING

The Vermin Control Branch has been investigating the problems associated with kangaroo control for some years. It has already been discovered that the wallabies along the Fitzroy River in the Kimberleys are controllable by poisoning under certain favourable conditions. Once again,

however, the same principle applies. Until some method is devised for arranging and enforcing simultaneous drives on all stations concerned, the wallabies will continue to be a menace. Investigations are continuing with other kangaroos, but whatever measures are discovered, the organisation of the application is the ultimate problem.

The employment of Vermin Control Officers to supervise and organise grasshopper control work in the northern and eastern agricultural areas immediately resulted in the most effective control achieved to-date. The contrast between the old style independent efforts of the farmers—no matter how effective they were individually—and the present organised scheme is so striking that no-one

could possibly doubt the superiority of the co-ordinated work.

There has been a great awakening to the necessity to control vermin. It has been shown that rabbits may eat 85 per cent. of the pastures; on some stations there are many more kangaroos or donkeys than sheep or cattle; on other stations the lambing percentage is controlled directly by the extent of fox baiting drives. If every farmer or pastoralist is left to operate as best he can, these losses will continue. That organised control work is essential has already been adequately proved. I sincerely hope that these demonstrations have been closely observed, and the lessons provided learned. Only by well-organised drives can effective vermin control be achieved.

Book Review

SHEEP SHEARING EXPERTING

WOOL, and its production, both for local use and export, has grown from very humble beginnings in the early years of Australian history to such an extent that it is now the greatest single contribution to the economic stability of the Commonwealth. One of the factors that has made wool production, on such a large scale, possible, is the production of modern machinery, which allows the vast army of skilled men, who are employed in the industry, to shear the wool from the 130 million sheep depastured throughout the various States of Australia.

In compiling a text-book on sheep shearing machinery and its maintenance, Mr. L. D. Ryan, Teacher of Sheep and Wool, and Sheep Shearing Experting, at the East Sydney Technical College, has made available a much needed work on the specialised knowledge of how the machinery may be maintained at the peak of its efficiency. In the early part of the book is a most interesting chapter on the teething troubles of the early shearing machines. He then deals extensively with every phase concerning the installation of the modern machinery in general use today.

In dealing with the grinding of combs and cutters, the author has gone to great lengths accurately to describe the technique, and on this score alone the book is well worth the purchase price.

Other chapters deal extensively with maintenance of handpieces, the care of

the transmission belts and their successful operation, together with the power plants.

The book also deals with the new method of shearing sheep, using the shearing table. It is a particularly well-written publication containing a wealth of information on the functional components of the shearing plant, and the rectification of the faults that develop in it from time to time.

It contains a complete index for reference and is amply illustrated both photographically and with "line drawings" and is a book that should prove of valuable assistance to the shearing expert, the sheep-owner, the professional shearer and to those about to take up shearing.

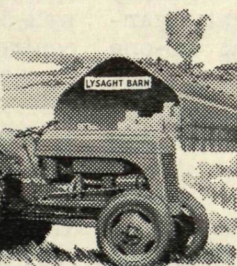
"Sheep Shearing Experting" is by L. D. Ryan, and is published by Angus and Robertson. Price 45s.—M.B.

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