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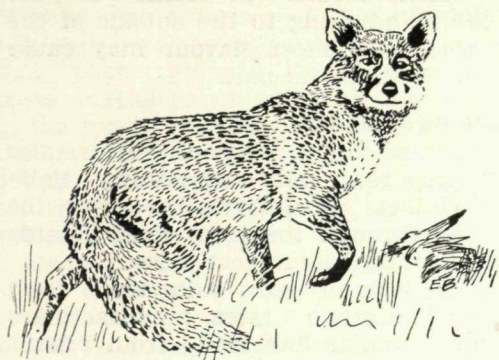
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Organised Drives Will Control Foxes ...

By J. S. CRAWFORD, Assistant Chief Vermin Control Officer, and
A. G. VEITCH, Supervising Vermin Control Officer

UNTIL 1916, there were no foxes known to exist in Western Australia. One was reported as having been seen at Esperance in that year and there are records of a fox being shot at Sandstone in 1917. Within a few years of the first recordings, foxes had spread almost throughout the State, and although bonuses have been paid on over 893,000 fox scalps during the past 30 years, we still have a large and thriving fox population which takes a heavy annual toll of young lambs and poultry besides contributing to insect damage of crops and pastures by the destruction of insectivorous birds.

Foxes have been declared vermin throughout the State and despite large sums paid out in scalp bonuses—sums ranging from £3 to 2s. 6d. per scalp—the scalps submitted increased to a record total of 50,000 a few years ago. Numbers declined when the rabbits were reduced but there is still a formidable fox population.

Foxes are not difficult to destroy. They are greedy creatures and gulp down an amazing variety of foodstuffs ranging from beetles to seaweed, so that poisoning is a fairly simple matter. Shooting, aided by decoy whistles and spotlights, hunting with dogs, trapping and poisoning account for thousands of foxes every year, yet the fox population continues to increase.

Why does this happen? The vixen usually breeds only one litter a year with an average of five cubs to the litter, so we are not faced with the almost astronomical multiplication potential of the rabbit.

The answer seems to be that our fox destruction campaigns have invariably been piecemeal affairs. One landowner or one small group of landowners will do

really good work and wipe out most of the foxes in a small area, but meanwhile the pests are breeding unchecked all around the area and the relief is only temporary.

ORGANISED DRIVES ESSENTIAL

The effectiveness of wholesale baiting—not of single farms but of large areas—has been proved many times by large-scale fox-poisoning drives organised by officers of the Agriculture Protection Board. So effective were these organised drives that the Board has been inundated with requests for similar campaigns to be instituted in other districts.

Unfortunately the season at which the fox drives are most likely to be successful is the period during which many of the A.P.B. personnel are busily engaged on the "1080" rabbit control drives. Consequently it is seldom that officers are available for organising work, although local Group and Regional Vermin Control Officers assist wherever possible, particularly on the instructional side.

Groups of farmers, road boards, Farmers Union branches, Junior Farmer clubs, progress associations and other bodies could organise systematic, whole-

sale baiting campaigns throughout their districts. All farmers should thoroughly bait their own properties at the same time, and the A.P.B. will carry out a simultaneous baiting of as many adjacent Crown lands and reserves as the available poisoning units and staffs can cover. In areas where this method was employed in 1958, lamb losses were negligible and individual farmers reported highly effective kills. In districts where incomplete co-operation was received, lamb losses continued despite conscientious baiting by a few farmers.

STRYCHNINE

Strychnine gives excellent results in fox and wild dog poisoning. It is commonly available as tablets, crystals or powder—and may be in the soluble or insoluble (alkaloid) form.

Strychnine Alkaloid is practically insoluble in water and may be obtained in half-grain tablets, as pink or white crystals, or as a pink or white powder. Half a grain is a lethal dose for a fox or wild dog.

Soluble Strychnine has been treated with acid to make it water-soluble. It is always sold as a white or pink powder. Because of the additives, it is less poisonous—bulk for bulk—than the insoluble strychnine, and three-quarters of a grain is recommended as the lethal dose.

Soluble strychnine is suitable for use with fatty baits, but when inserted in lean meat or other moist baits, the dissolved strychnine often permeates the bait making it bitter and unattractive.

Tablets Preferred.

Because of the ease of handling and the pre-measured doses, the half-grain tablets are strongly recommended for large-scale bait-making. By using some instrument such as a small sharp screwdriver to make a hole in the bait, it is a simple matter to insert a tablet in the centre and close the hole by pressure of the fingers.

Measuring the dosage of crystals or powder is largely a matter of guesswork—as much as will thinly cover a three-penny-piece or half an inch of the small blade of a pocket-knife, is the usual measure of half a grain.

Spillage of crystals or powder is almost unavoidable and—apart from wastage—

this often results in some of the strychnine adhering to the outside of the bait where its bitter flavour may cause the fox to drop the bait.

Obtaining Supplies.

Strychnine in its various forms, also ready-prepared baits containing half-grain tablets of strychnine may be obtained through the local Road Boards or Vermin Boards at cost price.

A local firm prepares baits made from suet, and Eastern States manufacturers put up a similar line made from brisket fat. These prepared baits are individually wrapped in paper and are convenient to handle and distribute.

PREPARING BAITS

The ideal bait is one that is attractive to foxes mainly by reason of its odour. It should be small in size so that it can be gulped down readily. A bait that has to be chewed will be rejected if the bitter flavour of strychnine is detected.

The bait should be made unattractive to ants, if possible, as ants swarming on a bait make it unattractive to foxes. Field experience has shown that whale oil, which is attractive to foxes will often repel ants.

As previously stated, foxes will eat almost anything so that a wide variety of baits may be used. Fatty substances such as suet, caul fat, dripping, butter or brisket fat are particularly popular and lend themselves easily to large-scale bait manufacturing.

Meat should preferably be cooked as this makes it firmer and dryer and easy to handle. Cooked corned beef cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ in. cubes, whale meat, beef, mutton, liver, kidneys, eggs, sardines, small birds, the heads of poultry killed for the table—all have given good results. Where wild camels exist on pastoral properties, the fat from their humps is widely used for fox and wild dog baits as it cuts up into neat cubes.

Where the material is firm enough to be cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ in. or $\frac{3}{4}$ in. cubes, it is a simple matter to make a hole with a sharpened screw-driver and insert a half-grain strychnine tablet.

Suet, dripping and similar materials should be previously scorched if possible

and then softened—but not melted—and mashed into a paste. Cut a number of 4 in. squares of toilet paper or apple wrapping paper, place a teaspoonful of the paste on the paper which is held cupped in the hand. Flatten the paste and insert the strychnine tablet, or the required quantity of crystals or powder in the centre, then roll the paste into a pellet enclosed in the paper.

About 100 baits can be made from 1 lb. of fat or dripping. When preparing bulk quantities, the paper-wrapped baits are placed in a bucket and sprinkled with a little whale oil. The baits should be turned over occasionally until all the papers are impregnated with the oil.

WHEN TO LAY BAITS

The obvious time to lay baits is whenever the foxes are plentiful and preferably before they are likely to kill young lambs.

For most people in the agricultural areas, the best time would be during February, March and April. At this time, when natural food is scarce and surface waters limited, the foxes tend to move into the settled areas and they are there in force when lambing commences. Plan your concerted drives during the most suitable period and follow this up where necessary with a heavy baiting around the lambing paddocks just prior to the drop.

HOW AND WHERE TO BAIT

In selecting the best places to lay the baits, one must be guided to a large extent by tracks and other signs of the presence of foxes. Well-defined travel areas such as sandy creeks and gullies, waterways cutting through paddocks, old tracks and sheep pads are often used by foxes which like soft ground and smooth surfaces.

Baits should be placed in the vicinity of outback water-points such as mills, dams or soaks. Carcasses in paddocks should be poisoned by inserting strychnine in deep slanting cuts especially in the tongue, liver or butt of the tail. Baits should also be dropped round the carcass.

It is a good idea to establish a "depot" at some outlying part of the farm where carcasses, bones, offal, etc., can be dumped

to establish a regular feeding-place for foxes. When foxes are using the depot regularly, a few baits will obtain good kills.

Baits should be laid on a scent trail made by dragging a sheep's paunch or other offal, or a carcass (sheep, kangaroo or emu) that has been scorched over a fire. It is a good idea to attach a tyne to the vehicle so that it scratches a shallow furrow in which the baits can be buried just below the surface of the loosened soil. This tends to reduce the risk of domesticated dogs picking up the baits and also prevents the baits from being taken away by crows and magpies. If whale oil has been added as previously described, it will soak through to the surface of the soil and foxes will scratch out the baits quite readily.

Baits should be dropped at five to ten yard intervals, using more or less according to the estimated degree of fox infestation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sodium fluoroacetate better known as "1080" has been approved for rabbit poisoning by the Department of Public Health but is not available for other types of vermin at the present time. Strychnine, used as described in this article will give good results. The main point is to keep the outside of the baits free from strychnine and to keep the baits small.

Do not expect to find dead foxes on the trails. While a few foxes may die near the trails, the majority will travel some distance before the bait takes effect. An animal which takes a bait on an empty stomach will usually die very soon after swallowing the bait, but where the stomach contains other food, death may be delayed until the fox has travelled some miles from the trail.

Fatty baits usually take longer to digest than raw or cooked meats. Strychnine tablets, probably because of the binding material used, usually take longer to act than the powders or crystals, but whatever form of poison is used, half a grain of the strychnine alkaloid or three-quarters of a grain of the soluble strychnine is sufficient to kill the animal.

Strychnine is a deadly poison. Never forget this fact. Take every precaution

to prevent children and domestic animals from having access to the poison or the baits.

In case of accidental poisoning of humans or animals, the first step should be to induce vomiting by giving emetics. A dessertspoonful of mustard or two tablespoonfuls of salt in a cup of warm water are suitable household emetics, and the rather crude method of poking a finger down the patient's throat should not be neglected. A crystal of washing soda, about the size of a little fingernail will usually induce vomiting if swallowed.

Medical or veterinary attention should of course be obtained as soon as possible.

A common "bush" method of inducing vomiting in dogs is to push a wad of chewed-up tobacco down the animal's throat.

Scalp Bonuses. The uniform scalp bonus of 4s. per scalp was discontinued on

December 31, 1958, and the money saved is to be expended on increasing the Agriculture Protection Board's fox-poisoning units from two to six. These units are not available for work on private properties but confine their activities to Crown lands and reserves. The success of the initial units has fully warranted their extension.

Aerial Baiting. Aerial baiting is carried out periodically over the fox-infested coastal strips within the Road Board districts of Ashburton, Roebourne and Port Hedland. Thousands of baits have been dropped in these areas with outstanding success.

Remember that the fox menace lends itself to successful control by organised large-scale baiting drives. Why let foxes reduce your profits when a concerted effort can reduce the fox population to negligible proportions.



Book Review

"STUD CATTLE IN AUSTRALIA"

"Stud Cattle In Australia" fills a unique place in the recorded history of dairy cattle breeding in Australia. Mr. P. G. Hampshire or "P. G." as he is widely known, one-time Superintendent of Dairying in Western Australia, is well qualified by his experience to tell this story.

His contacts in all States with many of the early breeders as well as with those still interested, have enabled him to write at a level which could be matched by only very few.

Intertwined in the sundry recollections there are recorded various incidents which are of very great interest and many with a special value.

The book contains excellent descriptions of the breeds and a background of their early history in Australia. To Western Australians the references to our own early stud masters are of particular interest.

The book also contains many other interesting discussions such as herd and progeny testing, exhibiting in Shows, and a large series of plates of outstanding animals of the breeds. The quality of reproduction of some of his plates however, leaves a lot to be desired.—M. C.

("Stud Cattle in Australia" by P. G. Hampshire, Price 37s. 6d. from the publishers, Beatty Bros., Perth.)



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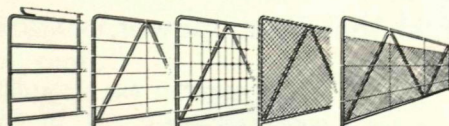
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