

Rabbit Patrol Karridale Olive Farm fights back

CASE STUDY

RABBIT PATROL
KARRIDALE
OLIVE FARM



PROJECT DURATION

March 2013 to May 2013

PROJECT TITLE

Rabbit Patrol
Karridale Olive Farm fights back

PROJECT AREA

Lower Blackwood Region, less than 1 kilometre east of Karridale. See attached Map of Locations and works carried out.

PROJECT LEADER

Sarah MacPherson (landholder)

PARTNERSHIPS/

National Trust of WA

PROJECT MANAGER

Sarah Molloy (SWCC)

BENEFICIARIES

Remnant bushland, landholders and local community

TOP: *Bossiaea* sp. in understorey
(photo: Sarah Molloy)

INSERT: A typical rabbit warren on the property (photo: Sarah Molloy)



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This project is supported by the South West Catchments Council, through funding from the Australian Government's Program, Caring for Our Country and the Government of Western Australia.



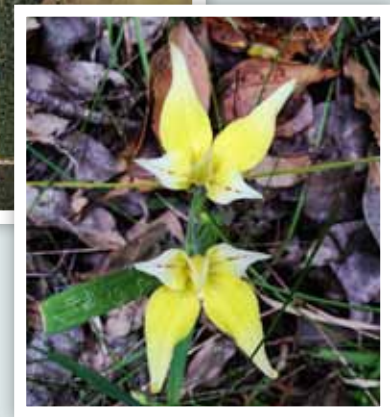
Rabbits had become a serious problem at Karridale Olive Farm. Left to run rampant they were literally breeding like rabbits and impacting on the 24 hectares of remnant Karri/Jarrah forest on the property.

Adopting an integrated, multi-faceted approach to rabbit control allowed the landholders, Sarah and Stewart MacPherson, to effectively manage their rabbit population and give their bushland a chance at natural regeneration.

The involvement of the landholders in the project design and implementation contributed immensely to the success of this project. Just two years prior to their Community Groundworks project, the MacPhersons had tried to eradicate rabbits on their property using conventional baiting, fumigation and even shooting.

Unfortunately, after a brief success the rabbits returned in increased numbers. The MacPhersons approached SWCC for assistance in October 2012 with the hope of getting on top of their pesky rabbit problem. They bought the farm in 1994 and since that time have undertaken a number of environmental projects. This included fencing the 24 hectares of high quality remnant Karri/Jarrah forest to exclude cattle and revegetating a creek line and a former fire break.

Although the condition of the vegetation at this property had been identified as being in good to excellent condition by the National Trust of WA in 2011, the MacPhersons were concerned that the rabbits were competing with native wildlife for food, particularly with quendas. They also thought that the fragile understorey and in particular, a number of orchid species, were



being impacted by rabbit predation.

The MacPhersons successfully obtained funding through SWCC's Community Groundworks Project for an integrated approach to pest management. SWCC worked closely with them and a pest control contractor to develop an audacious plan of attack, involving an integrated, multi-faceted program to eradicate rabbits at this property. This includes traditional 1080 and Pindone baiting at targeted sites, fumigation of warrens with aluminium phosphide, warren destruction with a mixture of propane gas (LPG) and compressed oxygen (O2) and follow-up control with Rabbit Calicivirus.

The MacPhersons willingness to try innovative approaches to rabbit management, as well as their role in the collection of monitoring and survey data, are what made this project really successful. They are

both priests in the Anglican Church and work on call 24/7 for the St John of God hospital service, demonstrating their commitment to the community. All profits from their olive oil sales go to the St Boniface Anglican Cathedral, to support church operations and community programs.

It then comes as no surprise that they offered their own time and resources to the rabbit control project. They undertook the majority of the survey work required to identify 30 warrens across their 87 hectare property, and invested in a GPS device to accurately mark and plot the location of rabbit warrens and diggings.

“We would love to see more orchids on our property, but unfortunately the rabbits are so prolific here that most seedlings don't stand a chance. I am really looking forward to seeing how the bush regenerates after the rabbits have been controlled.”

Sarah MacPherson



TOP LEFT: Extent of rabbit activity on the property (photo: Sarah Molloy)

TOP RIGHT: Cow slip orchids (photo: Sarah Molloy)

RIGHT: Karri/Jarrah forest and tiger snake (photo: Sarah Molloy)

“I hope that the passion and commitment demonstrated by the MacPhersons will encourage other landholders to get more involved in biodiversity conservation on their properties.”

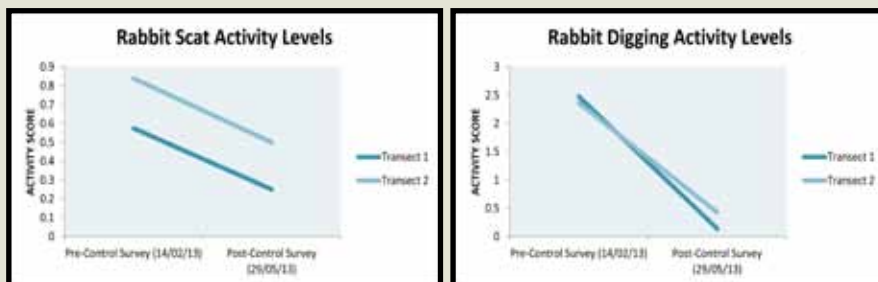
Sarah Molloy, SWCC
Community Engagement Facilitator

The involvement of the MacPhersons in every stage of the project demonstrates how funding can be used as an incentive to engage landholders in on-ground natural resource management and how important this involvement is to the success of the project.

Pest animals like rabbits have successfully established in WA because of their adaptability and resilience under what can be considered harsh conditions. Successful control programs therefore adopt multiple lines of attack and this project was no exception. Four control methods over a specified timeframe were chosen with the aim of significantly reducing rabbit numbers at this property. Rapid assessment monitoring found that the site went from having an unacceptable number of rabbits to a level requiring close monitoring. A more detailed assessment showed that rabbit scat activity had reduced by 61.5% and rabbit digging activity had reduced by 88%. This preliminary data indicates that the approach taken to minimise rabbit numbers at this property has been successful.



ABOVE: *Conostylis* sp. in understorey
(photo: Sarah Molloy)



The key lesson learnt from this project was the benefit of an integrated, comprehensive approach to rabbit control. Although this project was limited to just one property, it has improved the knowledge and skills of the MacPhersons to be able to provide advice to their neighbours on the best methods of rabbit control in future. The project successfully addressed the Landscape Scale Conservation Caring for our Country target.

Sarah and Stewart are currently in the process of protecting their bushland into perpetuity through a National Trust conservation covenant and are committed to ongoing monitoring to assess rabbit activity and natural regeneration. As winners of the 2012 Royal Perth Show *Best Boutique Olive Oil in WA*, they also plan to continue making quality olive oil!

Steve Edwards, Managing Director at Wild Things Animal Solutions, has seen the destruction that rabbits can cause. “The thing that stuck out to me was how old some of the rabbit warrens were. Not only were they causing issues for the bushland, the warrens close to the homestead had the potential to cause damage to infrastructure.”



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