

# Wallaby curse: farmer refuses to

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Wallabies have been marketed as a cute local attraction in Waimate, but farmers curse the day they crossed the Ditch.

The problems began soon after Bennett's wallabies from Tasmania were taken to the Waimate district's Hunter Hills in 1874 for recreational hunting.

Their population boom led to damaged farm pasture, crops and fencing, and native bush and forestry plantings.

A 2017 Ministry for Primary Industries report predicted the cost to the economy of not controlling wallabies in the South Island could be \$67 million within 10 years.

Anecdotal reports say the numbers are increasing again in the Waimate area. Many farmers are upset about it, but few would go on the record.

Walter Cameron had no such qualms. He has been dealing with wallabies at his family's 3900ha Wainui Station, near Hakataramea, for most of his life and knows how to keep them in check.

"The family has been here for 110 years," he said.

"The wallabies turned up in about the 1950s."

The pests were known to be in the Waimate Gorge when he was a child, and had since spread into a much wider area.

A Wallaby Board used to be responsible for managing the marsupials and landowners were charged a specific wallaby rate.

But circumstances changed.

The board was disbanded in the 1990s, and once calicivirus arrived to control rabbits, use of the 1080 poison that was used to kill them diminished.

"That's when the wallaby population started to explode," Mr Cameron said.

Wallaby numbers had been "way down" in the board's days, and he was worried all the expertise its members had built up was lost. They had become experts on the wallabies' habits and breeding patterns, and therefore on when and how to cull them.

Mr Cameron said he had picked up a lot of knowledge from his father, Bob, who was on the Wallaby Board. He believed he now knew more



Goes with the territory . . . Walter Cameron has been battling wallabies on the family farm for decades.

PHOTO: SALLY BROOKER

than most others on the subject.

About 3000 wallabies were shot on his land each year. He hired a professional shooter with heat-seeking technology to kill wallabies and rabbits.

"We started off using rig shooters. It wasn't working. We used a chopper but it wasn't making any hole in them."

Mr Cameron said he spent \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year on wallaby control.

A poisoning programme for his area was set up about five years ago, but the situation was "very tricky", he said.

One neighbour was not keen on the use of 1080 poison and did not want part of his farm taken out of use for several months as part of the programme.

"We tried Feratox [encapsulated cyanide] and

other poisons, but the wallabies still increased. That's why we went to 1080."

Mr Cameron said he and one neighbour went ahead, with consent from Environment Canterbury — the authority responsible for wallaby control.

The 1080 needed to kill wallabies was 10 times stronger than that used on rabbits.

When the rabbit poisoning was still in force, it used to kill the juvenile wallabies, Mr Cameron said.

"One of the biggest issues is the right development of the right-size pellet, so it could break down quicker.

"It's like a big sheep nut. We're getting 99.9% kills. It's blown them out."

He believed the neighbour who participated in the 1080 programme would continue to do so, having seen the benefits.

"1080 gets the resident population."

There was now "real danger" of wallaby numbers becoming uncontrollable, Mr Cameron said.

He had made repeated submissions to ECan saying a co-ordinated kill was needed for an effective drop in numbers.

"It is a futile exercise for one property to undertake a poison unless neighbouring/adjacent properties undertake the same."

He said ECan should encourage the formation of farmer cluster groups and punish those who did not control wallabies on their land.

"They're not strong enough on compliance."

He was encouraged by the Otago Regional Council's eagerness to stamp out its

wallaby incursion while it was still small. The council asked him to speak to it, and he showed members around his property.

He estimated 3000 wallabies on the farm were the equivalent of about 1400 sheep.

"They foul it and take all the best stuff."

Wallabies were also prolific breeders — they could have a joey in their pouch and be pregnant with another. And when their population dropped to near extinction, they bred even more abundantly.

Getting rid of wallabies was an economic necessity for Wainui Station, Mr Cameron said.

"We had to do it. It was costing us money."

It was more economic in terms of return per hectare to pay for the poisoning than not

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# be caught on the hop

“If we don’t address the problem now, it is conservatively estimated that approximately a third of the North and South Islands will be populated with wallaby in the next 50 years.”

to, he said.

“We can run more stock.” Mr Cameron wanted the Wallaby Board to be brought back as a specialist group that could act where populations were getting out of hand.

He appreciated the subsidy available from ECan and felt it was money well spent.

“It actually does affect everyone. There are environmental issues with tussocks and scrubs and there’s s... in the waterways.”

ECan biosecurity regional leader Graham Sullivan said the status quo approach to managing wallabies had to change — “as identified by Walter Cameron”.

## Hunters bag 4000 in annual competition

GEORGE CLARK

MORE than 4000 wallabies were shot during the 30th annual wallaby hunting competition organised by the South Canterbury Recreational Sportsman’s Club.

The event, which was held the week before the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions came into effect, is the longest consecutively running public hunting competition in New Zealand.

Entries were received from 124 adults and 38 children and several hundred people attended

the weigh-in and prize-giving at the St Andrews domain. A total of 1730 wallabies were handed in, while a further 2325 were not recovered.

Club president Zack Bennett, who described it as a “fantastic community event”, said a large number of loyal shooters attended every year and entries from children were increasing.

“As regular pest shooters we have all seen the increase and effect of the wallaby population.

“Recreational hunters play a massive part in the control of this pest,” he said.

“Wallaby are spreading across New Zealand at a greatly increased rate,” Mr Sullivan said.

“If we don’t address the problem now, it is conservatively estimated that approximately a third of the North and South Islands will be populated with wallaby in the next 50 years.

“The current economic impact of wallaby is estimated to be approximately \$28 million per annum. If they continue to spread at estimated rates, this could grow to nearly \$84 million p.a. over the next 10 years and continue to increase beyond this.”

Mr Sullivan said representatives from farming,



The enemy ... Bennett’s wallaby.

PHOTO: ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY

regional councils, Crown agencies, the Ministry for Primary Industries and others were developing a national plan for wallaby management. A business case for Crown funding help had been prepared.

“Regional councils have increased operational budgets significantly, but this alone will not fund the cost of operational

activity at the scale required nor the research costs for new control and detection tools.

“Meanwhile our effort at Environment Canterbury is focused on stopping the spread of wallaby from within the containment area and locating those that have escaped and established outside.”

Population spreading: Page 4

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# Population spreading

Bennett's wallabies are up to 80cm tall and weigh 15kg to 25kg.

They occupy more than 450,000ha of land in South Canterbury, centred on The Hunters Hills, Albury, Kirkliston, and Two Thumb Range.

More recently, wallabies have spread south of the Waitaki River and west of Lakes Benmore and Tekapo.

Wallaby populations are not known to exist in the wild north of the Rangitata River.

## WHY ARE THEY A PEST?

Bennett's wallabies (also known as red-necked wallabies) compete with livestock for food and limit farms' livestock-carrying capacity.

They foul sheep feed, destroy agricultural crops and plantation forestry, and damage fences.

They also prevent the regeneration of native bush and deplete forest understoreys.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTROL?

Land occupiers within the ECan

Wallaby Containment Area are required to maintain wallaby numbers on their land at or below level 3 on the Guilford Scale, which assesses population levels:

1. No faecal or track sign seen but area known to be within feral range of wallabies.

2. Infrequent faecal sign seen. Track sign absent. One or two pellet groups seen when traversing 100m. Unlikely to see any wallabies.

3. Frequent faecal and track sign seen, but only in isolated pockets. Likely to see some wallabies.

4. Faecal and track sign very obvious and consistent. Tracks well used. High probability of seeing wallabies.

5. High densities of faecal and track sign distributed almost uniformly. Tracks well used. High probability of seeing wallabies.

ECan carries out inspections within the containment area and may help to co-ordinate control work between multiple landowners.

Outside the containment area, ECan is responsible for ensuring wallaby populations do not

become established.

Wallabies cannot be kept as pets or be moved around the region.

## CONTROL OPTIONS

Night shooting can help maintain low wallaby numbers.

Neighbours should be informed where and when shooting will take place.

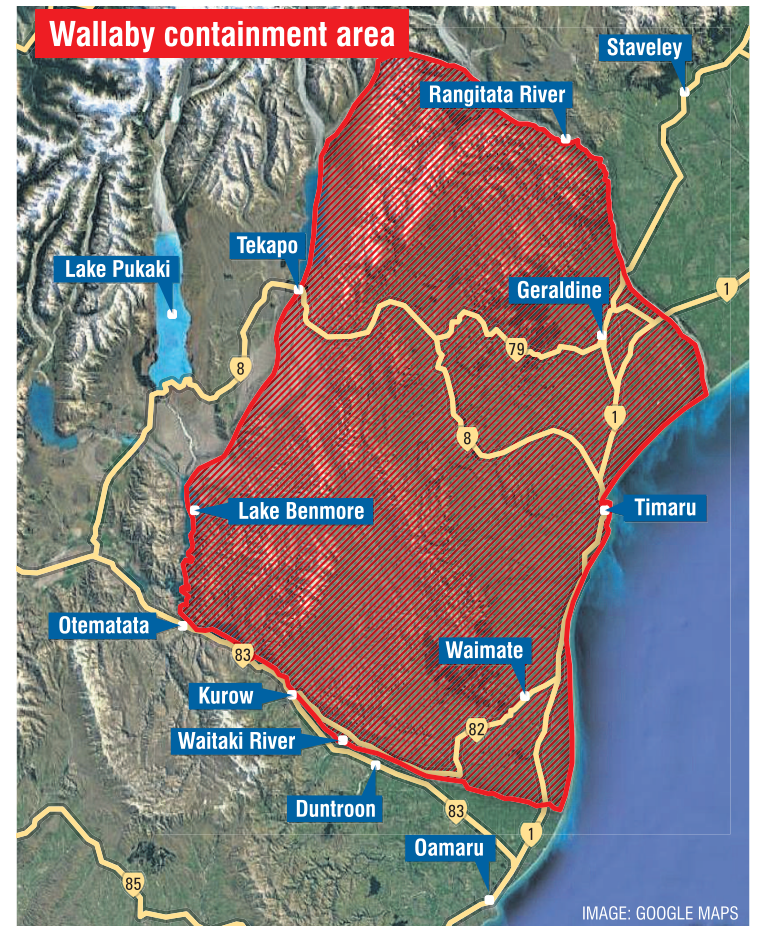
Shooting from a helicopter, particularly after heavy snow, can be effective in open, tall tussock areas.

Two poisons are available for use on Bennett's wallabies — 1080 cereal pellets or Feratox (encapsulated cyanide).

Reliance on any one method, or not tailored to the level of infestation, can lead to reduced kills and "educated" shy wallaby populations.

For higher wallaby levels, it is best practise to pre-feed and poison, then to use shooting as follow-up control.

Anyone who sees a wallaby, dead or alive, outside the Wallaby Containment Area should phone ECan immediately or go online to [www.ecan.govt.nz/](http://www.ecan.govt.nz/) wallaby to report the sighting.



War zone . . . The Wallaby Containment Area, of 900,000ha.

MAP: ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY



Perfect conditions . . . Harvesting red clover on the Leadley farm. PHOTO SUPPLIED.

# Arable operation keeps going

TONI WILLIAMS

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Arable farmers Brian and Rachel Leadley welcomed a house guest during lockdown, found new ways of functioning in their work bubble and the wedding of their eldest daughter, meant to take place in the garden of the family farm on April 4, was postponed.

It has meant co-existing with the mother-in-law for Brian, but the gardens, which are looking immaculate, have been a focal point for Rachel to maintain during lockdown.

Otherwise, it's mostly business as usual on the 400-odd hectare property, where Brian and Rachel primarily run a grain and seed operation, with store lambs.

It has just taken extra planning.

"We are fortunate that we can run the business, we are thankful for that," said Brian, who is also United Wheatgrowers NZ chairman.

He said the timing of Covid-19 restrictions for arable farmers had also done little to disrupt production — harvest was able to be completed, they were able to replant and buy in lambs.

"The effect is not too major and we can do those things."

However non-essential jobs such as fencing maintenance, hedge cutting or general clean-ups had been put on the back burner.

Keeping everyone on farm safe — they have one fulltime worker and one extra at harvest time — has also meant work-safe practices providing hand sanitiser, limiting machinery and vehicle use to one user or sterilising between users and social distancing.

A makeshift smoko room had also been set up in a nearby shed to limit the people entering the house bubble.

"We are able to operate and



Beaut smoko window . . . Brian Leadley grabs a quick bite during clover harvesting. PHOTO SUPPLIED.



COVID-19  
PANDEMIC

while I am not technology-minded we have technology on our side. Twenty years ago it would have been a bit more challenging. Family contact has certainly been a help for us," Brian said.

The Leadleys' three adult daughters all live outside the district; two in Christchurch and one in Fairlie.

While he has been in telephone and texting contact with people, he is looking forward to "face-to-face connections being resumed".

On the farm, there had been plenty of industry support with field representatives, stock agents, or machine engine and transport companies making contact by phone rather than visiting.

Health and safety concerns had to be considered such as auger use.

"It's all manageable but needs to be considered," he said.

Shearing, which started last month, just a few weeks later

than normal, also took more time due to gaps between stands and a whole process around collecting wool.

Where usually there were three or four shearers, the Leadleys had just two due to demand and they were unable to travel together.

"Major disruption is not there, but the ways we do things need to be thought about, such as a trip to town for drench, now means a phone call first and contactless pickup."

It had been manageable but "if it goes on, and we drop levels then go back to Level 4, it may be a bit different".

He said re-establishing next year's crops, such as grasses, clovers, green feed for stock, wheat and barley was "essential to get on and get them in".

Although stored harvested grain was fine until Christmas, flour needs for next year, which would supply the following 12 months and beyond, needed to be planted now.

"How fortunate we are to keep our business going where others can't. Crops and animal welfare have to be looked after."

"It could have been a lot worse . . . it is manageable with recognised support from other businesses."

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Applications are now reopened until Monday 11 May 2020, 12pm



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