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To all Landowners in the Shire of Ravensthorpe

Annual Landowner Newsletter

2024 Edition

About us

We are delighted to announce that Michelle Grobler continues to play a pivotal role in the Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) team, handling the group's daily operations. Michelle joined us as the Executive Officer in March 2022 and has been settling wonderfully in Ravensthorpe with her supportive family. Her husband, Renier, also contributes his valuable knowledge of the agriculture industry through a local outlet.

Michelle brings a wealth of enthusiasm and dedication to her role of managing declared species within the Ravensthorpe Shire. Her commitment to protecting our native fauna and flora from the impacts of declared species is truly commendable. Michelle aspires to make SBG a household name within the Shire, fostering community engagement and collective efforts toward biosecurity control.

Since joining the team, Michelle has made significant strides in securing grants that enhance our impact on the community. These grants have enabled us to streamline operational procedures and ensure robust governance for the group. Her efforts have been instrumental in sustaining and expanding our initiatives, reinforcing our commitment to biosecurity and community engagement.

We encourage you to connect with Michelle for any queries regarding declared pests on your property. Please note that she works part-time and her availability may vary daily. You can reach her directly at 0484 932 447 or via email at sbg.execofficer@gmail.com for prompt assistance.

We would also like to introduce Gemma Walker, who is the current Chair of the group following the resignation of Karyn Tuckett. Karyn's extensive knowledge and leadership have greatly shaped the group, leaving it in a strong position for Gemma to take over. Under Gemma's leadership, we look forward to achieving even greater milestones in our mission of managing declared species within the Ravensthorpe Shire.

Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) are community-based groups formally recognized under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (BAM Act). They each operate within a prescribed area. Currently there are 14 RBGs in Western Australia with their combined areas covering most of the State.

Want to join the group?

To join, simply send a letter to sbg.execofficer@gmail.com expressing your interest in becoming a valued member. Include your basic details, contact information, and tell us why you'd like to join our organization. Let us know how your unique skills and passion for biosecurity will contribute to our group's operations.

As a management committee member, you'll actively engage in quarterly meetings, collaborating with like-minded individuals to provide direction, formulate policies, and ensure effective governance compliance for safeguarding our natural heritage.

Your role as a management committee member will involve asset management, stakeholder consultation, financial planning, and communication, giving you the opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the ecological health and resilience of the Ravensthorpe Shire.

Our management committee, which currently consists of Gemma Walker (Chair), Reece Laycock, and Ross Gibson. The members are committed to preserving the environment and maintaining the financial viability of the agricultural industry within the Shire of Ravensthorpe. We welcome individuals from all backgrounds who share our dedication to biosecurity to join the group.

Declared Pest Rate Priorities for the 23/24

Financial year were:

Wild Dogs
Foxes

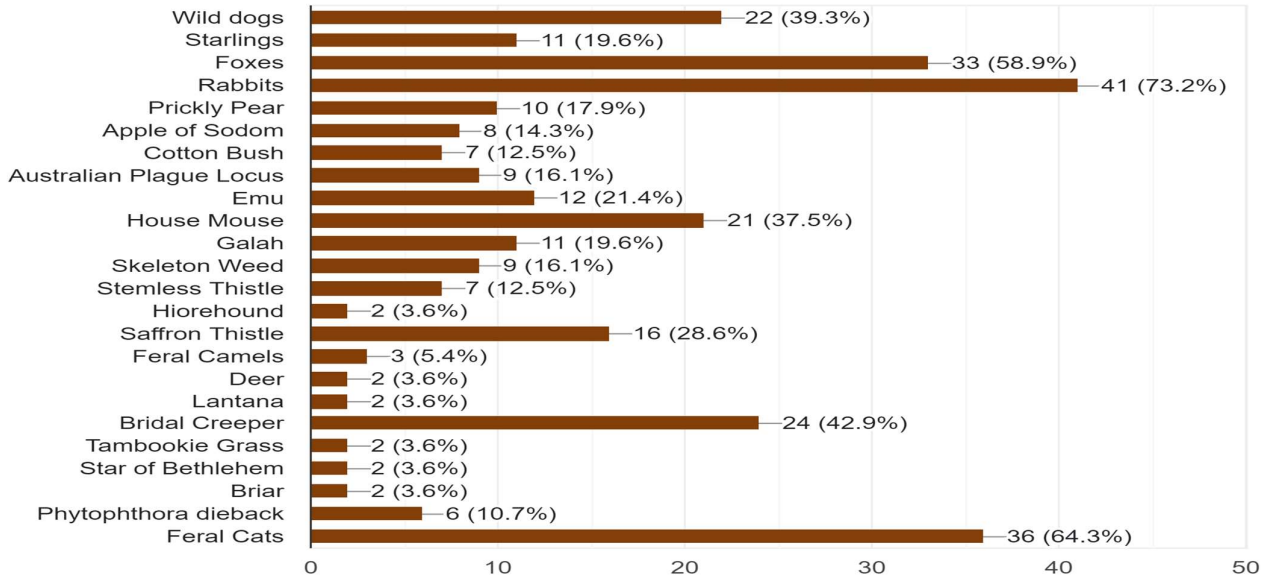
Bridal Creeper
Apple of Sodom

Cacti
Rabbits

Results from the 2023 Priority Pest Survey

What declared species should be a priority for Southern Biosecurity Group?

56 responses



A total of 56 responses were received. Full Survey result available on our website.

Responding to surveys is of utmost importance as it allows us to address and resolve issues more effectively.

So please, get involved! Declared Pest Management is every landholder's legal responsibility.

Reporting of Sightings/issues >>>

Please remember to contact our Contracted Licensed Pest Management Technician Gavern House directly to report any wild dog sightings, as your immediate assistance is vital in our efforts to manage the pest populations effectively.

To report sightings of any other declared species, whether animals or weeds (Include Photo and GPS co-ordinates), we kindly request that you contact SBG directly through the following channels:

- Email: sbg.execofficer@gmail.com
- Phone: 0484932447

We greatly appreciate members of the community reporting these issues to us through the mentioned channels, as it allows us to address them promptly and effectively.

We kindly urge you to refrain from posting negative comments on local social media platforms and instead utilise the provided contact information to ensure our attention to the matter.

Foxes

Within our community, it is widely recognized that, like many other shires in the State, the Shire of Ravensthorpe has a significant fox population.

Each fox typically claims a home range of 280 to 1600 hectares. However, during the breeding season, foxes reduce their roaming and often return to the same den.

Foxes breed annually, usually in June or July, with cubs born in August or September in a dry and sheltered den.

The male fox or dog fox, assists the nursing vixen by providing food for her and the cubs.

The cubs begin exploring outside the den at around 10 weeks of age.

During this period, the dog fox, and sometimes non-breeding 'helper' vixens, hunt for food to sustain the vixen and cubs.

When the cubs are about six weeks old and can be left alone for longer periods, the vixen resumes hunting for herself and the cubs.

Foxes are known for their cunning nature and extensive roaming areas, making timely and effective responses challenging if based solely on social media reports.

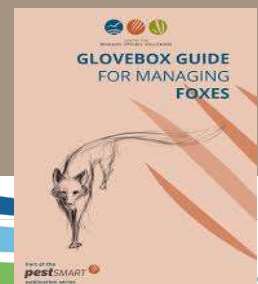
To address the challenges posed by heavy fox populations or fox-related issues with stock, it is crucial to ensure timely reporting of specific sighting locations within the community.

This information helps determine probable fox routes, enabling the setup of surveillance cameras and effective trapping measures.

Please ensure that all sightings are logged directly via the FeralScan application (available for download on Android and Apple devices).

It is essential to contact SBG promptly with information about fox sightings rather than relying on social media posts. You can also contact us for your copy of The Glovebox Guide for Managing Foxes.

feralSCAN



Drooping Tree Pear (*Opuntia monacantha*)

*Drooping tree pear (*Opuntia monacantha*) also known commonly as the 'prickly pear' is a fast-growing succulent shrub that will grow up to 6 m tall.*

It blooms in summer with yellowish to deep orange flowers that are large, up to 8 cm long, and 10 cm wide.

The large fruit is reddish-purple and ripens in the fall.

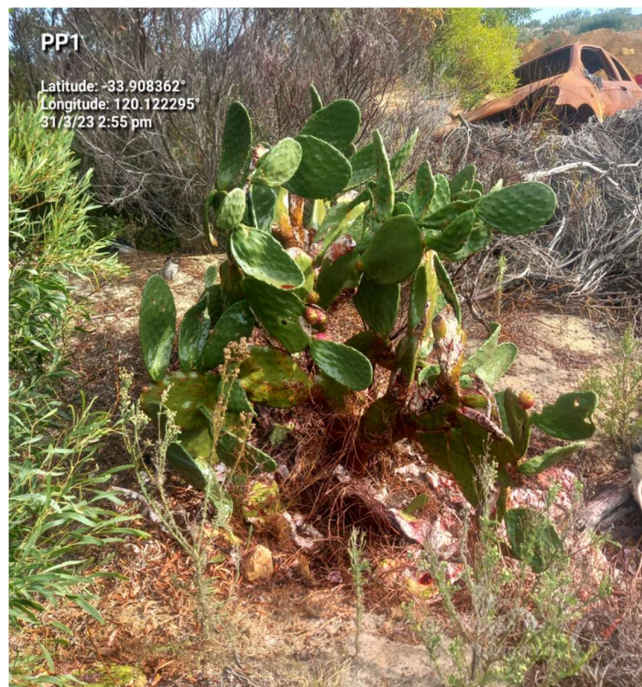
In the past year, the Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) has successfully minimised the presence of cacti in our Shire.

All identified cacti were manually removed and disposed of at the Esperance Waste Site. This was conducted under the guidance of Julie Waters, Esperance Shire Environmental Officer.

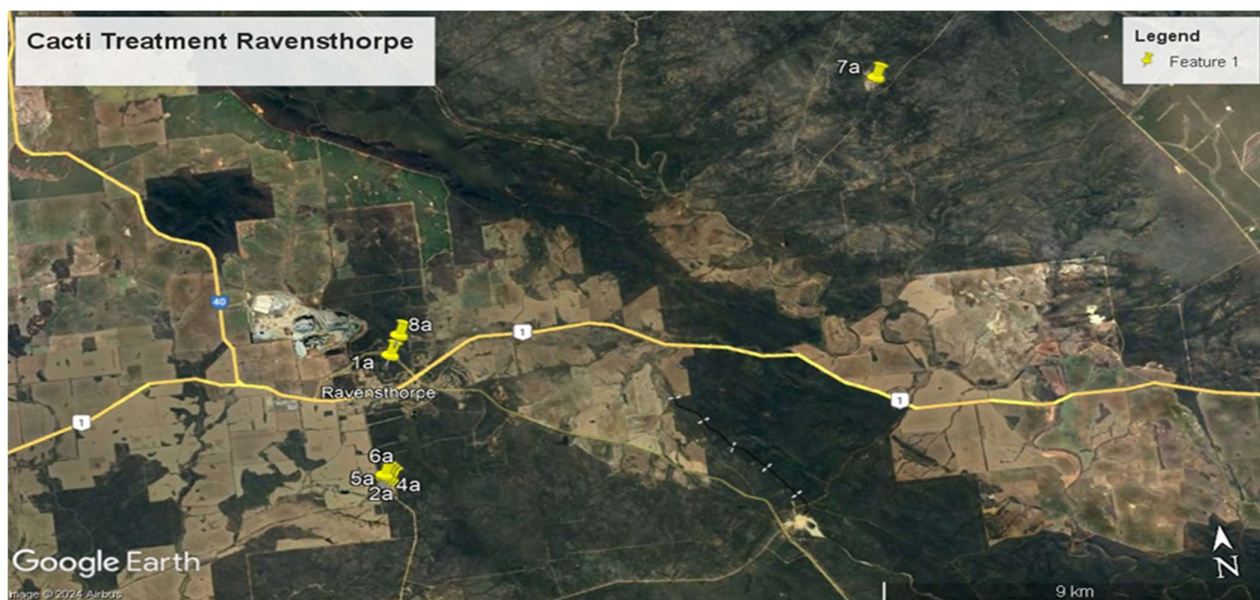
Locating cacti across the extensive area of our shire has proven difficult. To address this, a social media post was placed on Facebook by our Contracted Local Weed Management Technician, which resulted in some reports from landowners and the public. However, most of these reports turned out to be misidentifications.

Efforts to improve identification accuracy and streamline the reporting process are ongoing.

We encourage community members to continue reporting sightings and to refer to the identification guidelines provided by SBG to ensure accurate information. Your cooperation is crucial in maintaining our district free from invasive cacti.



Treated Plants during 23/24 Treatment programs



CSGL23062: CONTINUING CONTROL TOWARDS CACTUS ERADICATION IN THE OLDFIELD RIVER

The Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) is thrilled to announce the successful grant application from the State NRM (Community Stewardship Grants) for the project titled "CSGL23062: Continuing Control Towards Cactus Eradication in the Oldfield River."

Project Overview

This project, located in the Ravensthorpe Shire, Western Australia, aims to eradicate the invasive drooping prickly pear from the Oldfield River corridor. The eradication effort will involve a combination of herbicide application, manual removal and biological control through the spread of the cochineal insect.

Primary Project Location:

Oldfield River Corridor, Munglinup.

Project Objectives

- **Remove the threat of injury:** Protecting humans and animals from the harmful effects of the drooping prickly pear.
- **Restore native habitat:** Allowing native species to reclaim and utilize the natural habitat.
- **Prevent agricultural spread:** Ensuring the plant does not spread onto agricultural land.

Activities and Measures

The project will be conducted over three years, ending in 2026, with the following key activities:

1. **On-Ground Activity:** Contractors will search for *Opuntia Monacantha* plants, fruits, or pads, with a primary focus on rechecking previously treated areas to ensure no plants are missed or new growth emerges due to flood events.
2. **Control Measures:**
 - **Manual Removal:** Preferred method for effective control.
 - **Herbicide Application:** Used based on the size of the plant.
 - **Biological Control:** Spread of the cochineal insect.
3. **Cochineal Nursery Maintenance:** Both on-site and off-site nurseries will be maintained, using *Opuntia Monacantha* pads infected with cochineal to support the biological control efforts.
4. **Community Involvement:** The project will involve the local indigenous community, ensuring a collaborative approach to control measures.

5. **Mapping Control Activities:** Detailed mapping of control activities will be undertaken to track progress and ensure thorough coverage.

Current Progress

The project is already underway, receiving great feedback from our contracted licensed weed technician. Treatment will take place as and when weather permits, ensuring conditions are suitable for effective control measures.

Expected Outcomes

- **Injury Prevention:** Reduction in the risk of injury to humans and animals.
- **Habitat Restoration:** Restoration of native species to the natural habitat.
- **Agricultural Protection:** Prevention of drooping prickly pear spread onto agricultural lands.

Community Involvement

SBG will actively involve the local indigenous community in the project, fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship towards the natural environment. The collaborative approach ensures that the knowledge and expertise of the local community are integrated into the project's activities.

We look forward to working with our community to achieve the goal of eradicating the invasive drooping prickly pear from the Oldfield River corridor, creating a safer and more biodiverse environment for all.

For more information or to get involved, please contact the Southern Biosecurity Group. Let's work together towards a cactus-free Oldfield River!



Cacti Identified and Treated in the Oldfield River

Bridal Creeper

Background

Native to Eastern and Southern Africa, Bridal Creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*) was introduced to Australia in the 1870s as a popular ornamental garden plant. Admired for its delicate allure, it adorned hanging baskets and bridal bouquets, earning its common name. However, this once-beloved plant has now become one of the most significant threats to native biodiversity across WA and is recognised as a declared species.

The resilience of Bridal Creeper lies in its perennial root system, forming an extensive network of underground tubers that obstruct the establishment of other plants. These tubers serve as water and nutrient stores, allowing the weed to endure droughts and rapidly produce new shoots in autumn. Bridal Creeper is frost tolerant and can yield over 1000 berries per square meter, with birds serving as key agents for seed dispersal.

As birds feed on the berries and subsequently excrete the seeds, the weed has spread along roadsides, woodland edges, and infiltrated native vegetation patches within the Ravensthorpe Shire. The dispersion is further facilitated by pest animals such as rabbits and foxes, which consume the fruit.

The persistence of Bridal Creeper in the landscape poses a grave threat to native understory plants and disrupts the ecological balance of both disturbed and undisturbed bushland systems.

Key Achievements

To address this significant issue, the Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) took decisive steps, allocating funding for a project targeting 4.6 hectares of Bridal Creeper control along the Hopetoun foreshore. This area was deemed a high priority due to its visual exposure, public access and adjacency to the RV camping area, as well as other remnants of coastal vegetation and mallee communities.

SBG enlisted a team of licensed weed management technicians who employed a light hand spray method over three days in October. An herbicide spray was used to initiate knock-down.

Mindful of environmental considerations, the application was selectively hand sprayed at a very low dosage, well below the recommended dose for targeting vascular plants.

To enhance visibility, a red dye was incorporated into the solution, and signage was utilized to caution people against entering the treated area.

In a bid to combat Bridal Creeper, SBG coordinated with the licensed pest technician to introduce the naturally occurring biological control agent, 'rust fungus' (*Puccinia myrsiphylli*), within the targeted area. This method has shown promise in previous trials and aims to initiate the spread of the rust fungus throughout the district.

Initial observations have demonstrated a notable reduction in visible Bridal Creeper presence within the treated area.

This achievement is particularly significant considering the plant's capacity to produce up to 1000 seeds per square meter, which remain viable for up to four years within the soil. Moreover, Bridal Creeper's formation of dense underground tuber mats, constituting over 90% of its biomass, impedes the germination of native plants.

Although the viability of corn remains unaffected, the ongoing control efforts aim to decrease corn viability and prevent subsequent weed germination. It's important to note that around four years of consistent control measures are necessary to effectively reduce tuber viability.

Recent Findings

The latest report findings highlight a dramatic decrease in Bridal Creeper on the Hopetoun foreshore, evident in the originally treated area. This success has enabled future treatment areas to be extended.

Krystal Park Area: All treatments in this area were carried out using the rust pathogen due to the following reasons:

- Large area coverage.
- Landowners' preference to avoid chemical use.
- Most Bridal Creeper infestations were in small stands of native vegetation, primarily consisting of Christmas trees, which are highly susceptible to chemical treatment.

The rust pathogen was applied by making a solution of water and rust spores, then sprayed using backpacks.

The rust has been highly successful and was present on nearly all Bridal Creeper plants, as well as most other sites throughout the town.

Challenges encountered included difficulty in locating many landowners to obtain consent for treatment. However, this was mitigated by the natural spreading of the rust spores. Currently, there is little Bridal Creeper encroaching into the bush bordering the estate.

Moving Forward

Encouraging active participation from landholders to undertake control measures on their property will yield the best outcomes and is paramount to curtailing the further spread of this invasive plant and its disruptive effects on the ecosystem.

The progress made along the Hopetoun foreshore serves as a beacon of hope, driving us toward a future where the invasive grip of Bridal Creeper is loosened, enabling the restoration of our precious natural ecosystems.

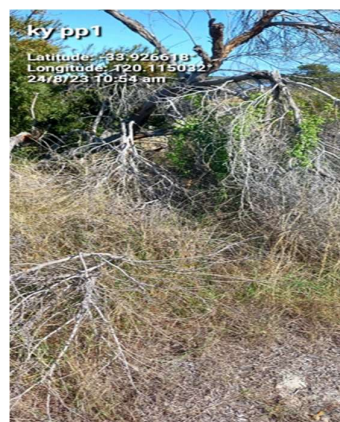


Figure 1. Before and after photos A and B within the treated area.

Rabbits: A Persistent Menace to Agriculture and the Environment



Apple of Sodom >>>

Urgent Action Required: Combatting the Spread of Apple of Sodom

Recent concerns about the spread of the invasive Apple of Sodom (*Solanum linnaeanum*) in the Hopetoun and Ravensthorpe areas have prompted ongoing efforts by local landholders to address this issue.

Sightings of this declared pest species in the Hopetoun region have been recorded, highlighting the need for immediate action.

As a declared species under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (WA), the Apple of Sodom qualifies for dedicated pest control funds to support efforts to manage its spread.

To ensure effective control, we encourage all residents to report any sightings of the Apple of Sodom directly to the Southern Biosecurity Group.

Prompt reporting will help us coordinate timely treatment measures and intensify our efforts to combat this invasive weed.

Over the past year, projects funded by the Declared Pest Rate have been launched to target areas where this plant has been identified. We are collaborating with stakeholders to ensure the removal and treatment of the Apple of Sodom on private properties.

Your vigilance and cooperation are crucial in our efforts to protect the ecological balance of our region.

By reporting sightings and taking proactive measures on your property before the plant produces seeds, you play a vital role in preserving local agriculture and ecosystems.

Together, we can effectively manage and control the Apple of Sodom, ensuring the health and biodiversity of our region.

Thank you for your ongoing support and participation in this important initiative.

The Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) has implemented a comprehensive program to control rabbit populations in Krystal Park and Hopetoun. The initiative aims to reduce the number of rabbits and their predation on parks, private properties, vegetation, and remnant bushland areas.

Scope of Works

The program commenced on August 28, 2023, with the release of the Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) into the rabbit population. The use of toxins was not an option for this control program, focusing instead on biological control methods.

Control Areas

The control areas included:

- Both sides of council verges in all streets of Krystal Park
- Hopetoun Oval & recreation area
- Hopetoun Foreshore and CWA
- Caravan Park perimeter
- Several curb-side areas around the town

Rabbit Population Densities

A survey was carried out at the time of the RHDV release to assess rabbit population densities and dispersal areas in the target locations.

Krystal Park:

- Rabbit activity on private properties and council verges was found to be high in density across most of the Krystal Park area.
- Large active warrens were observed on private properties.

Hopetoun Townsite:

- Activity and density across the townsite and foreshore areas were found to be light.
- No active warrens were found during the release.

Recommendations

Due to the very high density of rabbits in the Krystal Park area, it is recommended that a follow-up release be undertaken in autumn to further reduce numbers.

Rabbits are Australia's most expensive pest animal, inflicting an annual cost exceeding

\$215 million and causing estimated agricultural damage of \$600 million each year. Their detrimental impact extends beyond agriculture, contributing to erosion, hindering native vegetation regeneration, ravaging domestic gardens, and undermining farm structures.

Despite previous control efforts, landholders in Hopetoun continue to report ongoing rabbit activity on their properties, with sightings of extensive warrens and damage to trees. Rabbits pose a significant threat to over 320 threatened species across Australia, making them the most impactful invasive species.

Ongoing Efforts and Challenges

Rabbit control remains an ongoing task. The RHDV1 virus has been employed in Australia to mitigate the impacts of the introduced European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) on agricultural production and the environment. While the RHDV1 virus has shown notable success in controlling rabbit populations on the East Coast, its effectiveness in Western Australia appears limited. Unlike its performance on the East Coast, the virus seems to be effective primarily in localized areas where it has been released in WA, without substantial landscape spread.

Upcoming Projects

Another rabbit control project is planned for this year within the Shire. Information will be passed to residents in due course, ensuring the community is informed and involved in the efforts to manage rabbit populations effectively.

Conclusion

The Southern Biosecurity Group remains committed to controlling rabbit populations in Krystal Park and Hopetoun. Continued efforts, including follow-up releases and community involvement, are essential to reducing rabbit numbers and mitigating their impact on the environment and agriculture. For more information or to report rabbit activity, please contact the Southern Biosecurity Group.



Wayne Preece

Wild Dogs

Wild dog management in Australia has received a substantial boost with the recent allocation of a \$640,000 Federal Government grant for the National Wild Dog Action Plan.

This funding, awarded last year, adds to the ongoing support for the plan administered by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI). Administered by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), this funding is part of a larger \$31.6 million allocation shared among several organizations, including the South Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regions, Australian Pork Limited and Invasive Animals Limited (operating as the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions).

The primary goal of this funding is to address the severe impacts caused by feral pigs, deer, cats, foxes and wild dogs.

By investing in targeted management strategies and initiatives, this funding aims to reduce the negative ecological and economic effects of these invasive species, ensuring the preservation of Australia's biodiversity and agricultural industry. The grant will support various activities outlined in the National Wild Dog Action Plan, which focuses on reducing the impact of wild dogs on agricultural production and the environment.

It will also fund key roles, including the Action Plan Implementation Manager and Communications Officer, who are essential for the successful implementation of the plan.

The National Wild Dog Action Plan funding is crucial for:

- Ensuring the continued delivery of the plan, including facilitating cross-tenure management, raising community awareness and promoting best practices.
- Enhancing stakeholder involvement and co-investment in wild dog management, achieving priority actions, and fostering effective collaboration.

Ongoing Control Efforts in the Shire of Ravensthorpe

In the Shire of Ravensthorpe, wild dogs have posed a significant threat to native wildlife and caused considerable financial losses in the agricultural sector.

These predators endanger various species by preying on small mammals, birds and reptiles.

Throughout the year, comprehensive control efforts have been ongoing without interruption.

The Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) has been actively managing the wild dog population using a strategy that included deploying 2253 baits and strategically placing 73 traps, resulting in the successful capture of 5 wild dogs.

Effective management has been achieved through continuous monitoring and prompt responses to sightings. Whenever wild dog sightings or track reports are received, management actions are promptly undertaken to address the issue.

This proactive approach ensures that control measures are timely and effective.

Residents are strongly encouraged to report any wild dog sightings, track evidence, or stock

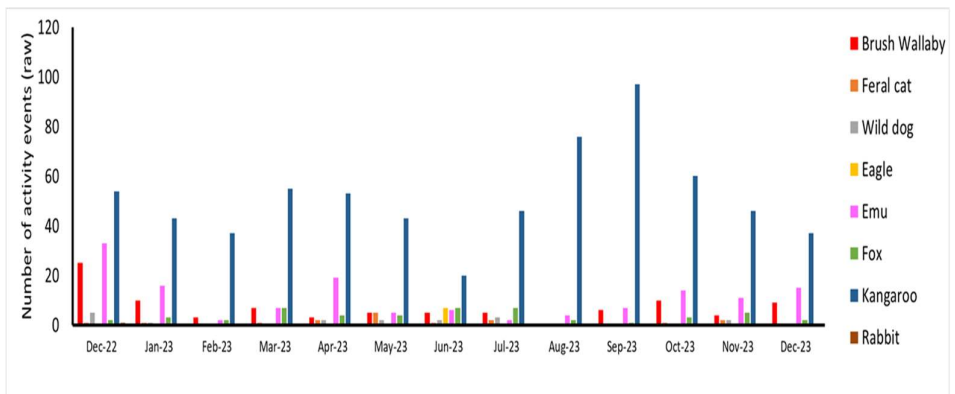
losses. This information is vital for proper planning of baiting programs and control work, enabling a more coordinated and effective approach to wild dog management.

By working together and sharing information, we can reduce the impact of wild dogs on our native fauna and flora, safeguard our agricultural and tourism industries, and preserve the unique natural environment of the Shire of Ravensthorpe.

Your participation is essential in this ongoing effort to manage and control wild dog populations.

Thank you for your continued support and vigilance.

Please continue to report sightings to Contracted Licensed Pest Management Technician Gavern House (Contact details on page 2 of this newsletter).



Graph 1: Sheep and Goat Industry Fund Scheme – Control Graphs as per remote sensing Camera surveillance along the state barrier fence

Thank You

Southern Biosecurity Group (SBG) would like to sincerely thank everyone who has supported the local volunteer Committee throughout 2023/2024 and those who have sought more information on the priority declared pests that SBG is assisting landholders to manage.



PO Box 292
Ravensthorpe, WA 6346
sbg.execofficer@gmail.com

The Declared Pest Rate remains unchanged for the operational plan of 2024/2025. SBG aims to generate approximately \$94,515 in funds (excluding GST), which will be matched dollar for dollar by the State Government which will bring our forecasted income to approximately \$189,030.

By coordinating efforts and targeting specific priority pests, collective action can make a meaningful impact. The SBG committee is currently focusing on developing the Operational Management Plan for the period of 2025/2026.

Your feedback is crucial in shaping this plan, and you can contribute by providing input through the Annual Priority Survey included with this Newsletter (Please scan and email, or mail back the hard copy by **30 November 2024**), or completing the newsletter via our website <https://southernbiosecuritygroup.org.au/> (survey link is on the Home page).

Please take a moment to let us know which Declared species you are concerned about in the Shire of Ravensthorpe.

This information helps us prioritize how the DPR funds will be allocated for the upcoming financial year. **It is important to note that DPR funds can only be utilised for managing Declared Pests within the Ravensthorpe Shire.**

Declared pest rate.

Under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) the State raises a Declared Pest Rate from landholders in specific areas, and matches the funds raised from the rate dollar-for-dollar.

The combined funds are made available to Recognised Biosecurity Groups who provide support to landholders to manage widespread and established declared pests.

The funds raised are used for controlling **declared pests** in prescribed areas. This rate is known as the Declared Pest Rate (DPR).

The DPR has been collected in the pastoral lease areas since 2014. Prior to 2014 and since the late 1970's, it was collected under the previous legislation, the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976.

The rates are collected by Revenue WA. Rate assessment notices (invoices) are usually issued in September each year.

Rates are matched with WA State Government funds and transferred to the DPA which is administered by the

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). These funds are made available to recognised biosecurity groups to manage declared pests.

How are rates determined?

The rate to be charged is determined by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Forestry, and Small Business following consultation with affected landholders.

The rate is set to raise money required by a Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) to fund activities for the control of declared pests in its area of operation.

Prior to the Minister setting the rate, DPIRD reviews and approves plans submitted by RBGs on priority pest control activities and budgets. RBGs are responsible for the funds disbursed to them and are required to produce an annual progress report and audited financial statement each year.

Rates apply on the relevant land as owned at 30 June each year and a notice determining the rates is published in the Government Gazette each year.

Who to Contact regarding the Declared Pest Rate

Payment of Declared Pest Rate inquiries to Revenue WA
(08) 9262 1199, country callers WA 1300 368 364

Regional Biosecurity Group and Declared Pest Rate rationale to
Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIRD) via email talkingrbg@dpiird.wa.gov.au
(08) 9368 3070

Operational activity coordinated by the Southern Biosecurity Group
Contact the Executive Officer on 0484 932 447