



INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

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Bruce Munday: “Those Wild Rabbits, and how they Shaped Australia”

We heard another thoroughly researched talk from the energetic writer and speaker, Bruce Munday, this time about wild rabbits.

Rabbits arrived in Australia with the first fleet to ensure a supply of at least one meat that the English were accustomed to eating. They were kept in cages and sold at the market, but some were also released to see if they could be farmed.

In 1859, Thomas Austin of Barwon Park near Geelong brought more English animals and birds out to Australia. Among these were 24 breeding rabbits to stock his estate with game for shooting parties. He was very popular at the time for doing this (but reviled long thereafter!).

When HRH Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, the second son of Queen Victoria visited Australia in December 1867 he had many official duties to perform. However, most of these were performed by someone else on his behalf, while he spent most of his time shooting at Barwon Park!

By this time the rabbit population was breeding out of control. In those early years farmers attempted to control the population just by shooting them for both human and dog food, but this only dented the numbers.

The rabbits very quickly spread through NSW and Victoria, and were destroying the agricultural efforts of the settlers. The rabbits could eat as much as 25 acres of wheat in a night. Also, many native grasses were completely wiped out. Stoats, weasels and mongoose were imported for rabbit control, but they didn't survive in Australia. Cats didn't kill enough to be of any use.

In the 1880s farmers began poisoning the rabbits with oats mixed with phosphorus, but this only reached so many. In 1893 a galvanized wire fence was begun in Queensland which ended up covering 1500 km. In 1907 one was begun in Western Australia which covered 1855km. These fences were repaired and added to over a long period of time but were not fool proof in controlling the rabbit population.

Many erstwhile farm hands went into the business of rabbit trapping, as a much more lucrative trade, and rabbit canning became a big industry. After WWII refrigeration made it easier to get rabbits to market in good condition, and there was a good market in America for both meat and skins.

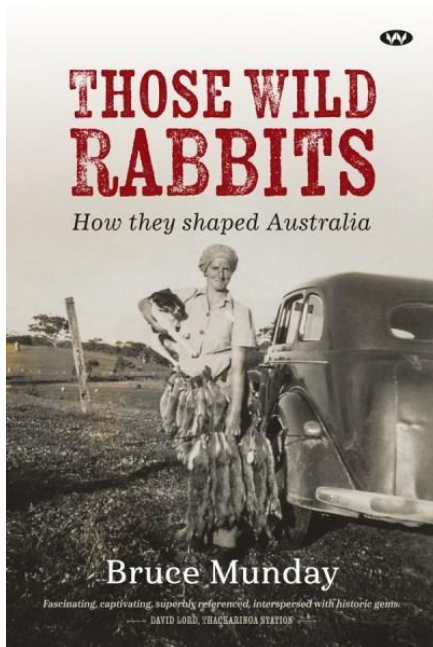
However, the sheer numbers of rabbits were beyond control by any usual means. The NSW government offered £25,000 as a prize to anyone who could come up with a new way to get rid of the rabbits. The prize was never awarded, but ideas were forthcoming.

Myxomatosis was used initially with great success, but it was very cruel, and the rabbit population soon built immunity. Calicivirus was introduced to the rabbits in the 1990s, and was also successful, but more potent strains have had to be used since.

As Bruce pointed out, although the measures taken to eradicate wild rabbits seem cruel, it would be much crueller to do nothing. Rabbits and many native animals and birds would only starve to death if no serious effort was made to control the numbers - to say nothing of the damage to agriculture and the environment. The poor rabbits were just not meant to be here.

Bruce's book is available on-line at around \$40.00

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From the Newspapers 100 Years Ago

The linking of the east west railway was not given high priority in the South Australian Newspapers.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA: 1889 - 1931),
Thursday 18 October 1917, page 5

THE EAST-WEST RAILWAY

SIR JOHN FORREST'S TRIUMPH.

Melbourne, October 17.

The steel road connecting east with west was linked up at Ooldea, about half-way between Port Augusta and Kalgoorlie, at 1.45 p.m. to-day. The construction of the line began on July 31, 1912. Though the estimated cost was £4,015,000, the expenditure when the line is finally completed and equipped will be considerably over £7,000,000. Only a portion of the railway has yet been ballasted. This work will be continued, and when finished will enable an average speed of 44 miles an hour to be maintained over the 1,052 miles separating Port Augusta from Kalgoorlie. The official opening of the line is to take place at Wynbring on November 12. Meanwhile through trains are to be run, the first leaving Port Augusta on Monday next. The completion of the Transcontinental line will permit of a railway journey being made from Perth to beyond Brisbane.

After the linking-up of the rails connecting Eastern and Western Australia had been announced to him, Sir John Forrest said: -"I rejoice to see this day. I have longed to see it, and am glad. For 25 years I have

strenuously and incessantly labored (sic) to connect the railway systems of Eastern and Western Australia, and to-day that great work-1,052 miles-is accomplished. It is indeed a day of rejoicing for all who have assisted in promoting and bringing into existence such a great national and beneficent undertaking. Western Australia, comprising one-third of the continent, hitherto isolated and practically unknown, is from to-day in reality a part of the Australian Federation. From to-day east and west are indissolubly joined together by bands of steel, and the result must be increased prosperity and happiness for the Australian people. The improved means of communication will, I believe, create a broader and nobler national life, and the closer union will, I feel sure, mean a wider sympathy with our kinsmen in the old land and with the British people throughout the world. I am indeed grateful, and rejoice that this inspiring prospect, this great triumph for civilisation, has come in my day."

News from the Marion Heritage Research Centre

With no more public events scheduled for this year, we have more time to help you with your heritage enquiries! Come and browse our newly catalogued City of Marion photo albums, full of pictures of council openings, people and events since the 1960s! Or let us help you with finding out about your house's history, by teaching you how to search SAILIS, the Land Titles' historical records, now available online for free!

For more information on the Heritage Research Centre please call on 7420 6455 or email heritage@marion.sa.gov.au

Marion Historical Society

Next meeting:

Our Annual Christmas Lunch

Meet at 12pm for a 12.30 start on

Sunday 19th November,

at the Marion Sports Club.

RSVP please by Wednesday 15th.

phone Judy 82985585 or email:

marionhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Partners welcome.

The program for the early part of next year will be given out at the lunch.

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