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As cunning as a fox

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"A s cunning as a fox" is a popular saying, but are foxes as cunning as the words imply? After all, they are not really difficult to destroy. I think all farmers will agree that foxes are always a serious menace at lambing time, and everything possible should be done to keep them in check, particularly in a season such as this when the breeding ewes will possibly be weakened.

Farmers should commence planning their campaigns immediately. The most important thing is to act before the damage is done, and not wait for killed lambs, or reduced lambing percentages. A heavy baiting campaign a month or two before lambing will be found a good insurance. If this coincides with the driest time of the year when natural food for the foxes is scarce and baits are doubly attractive, so much the better.

Foxes have a weakness which may be exploited. They are greedy eaters, and will tackle almost anything edible from beetles even to sea-weed. They eat all kinds of meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and will readily fall for carefully made and placed baits.

Well prepared baits made of meat and fat, including liver, kidneys, corned beef, suet and brisket are excellent while parrots, small birds, heads of poultry, eggs, butter and sardines are very good. Possibly the best general purpose baits are made from fats or fatty meat.

The baits need not be very large, about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to 1 in. cubes are sufficient, but large numbers of them are required.

Each bait should contain at least a third of a grain of strychnine, and the half-grain tablets now being manufactured are excellent for the purpose. The tablets have the advantage of containing a measured dosage, and are easily handled.

If powdered or crystal strychnine is to be used, remember that a third of a grain covers a three-penny bit, or a quarter-inch of the small blade of a pocket knife. Use alkaloid strychnine in preference to soluble strychnine, and take great care to ensure that all of it is well inside the baits. If any strychnine touches the outside, it will be noticeable to a fox.

The signs and tracks left by foxes are the best guide to where the baits should be placed. Travelling routes, such as paths and waterways leading into properties should be well baited. Baits should be placed near any carcasses which might be lying around, and in the vicinity of watering places in dry weather.

Many farmers drag trails using a sheep's paunch or the carcass of a sheep, kangaroo or emu, preferably one that has been slightly singed or scorched. Baits are placed along the trails. Other farmers maintain depots where waste foods, bones, offal and other rubbish are dumped to establish regular feeding places for the foxes. Whenever necessary, some of the food may be poisoned or poisoned baits spread around.

I know that many farmers fear to bait because of farm dogs. However, if the baits are placed where any left may be picked up later, and the dogs muzzled and chained during a poisoning drive, there should be little danger. Quite a number of dogs are trained to ignore baits and this is always a wise precaution.
Hundreds of foxes are destroyed by shooting, trapping and hunting with dogs. However, our fox population has now reached millions, and the breeding rate is so rapid that these methods do not go far enough.

Wholesale baiting is the only really effective mass destruction method. To obtain the best results the campaigns should be well planned and organised on a district-wide basis.

Farmers, you can protect your lambs from foxes by wholesale baiting. I suggest that it is in your interests to arrange for district-wide drives to be organised by your vermin board, the local branch of the Farmers' Union or any other organisation.

(From a broadcast talk given over 6WF. Published by courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Commission.)

CLOVER SEED PRODUCTION

Up to March 15 of this year, the Department of Agriculture had certified 363 tons of subterranean clover seed, made up of 154 tons of Dwalganup strain, 169 of Mount Barker, three of Tallarook, 36 of Yarloop and one ton of Bacchus Marsh.

Up to the same period last year 873 tons had been certified and the total for the season was 1,816 tons made up of 1,141 tons Dwalganup, 306 tons Mount Barker, 165 tons Yarloop, three and a quarter tons Tallarook and three-quarters ton Bacchus Marsh.

Questioned as to the likely total of the 1955 harvest, the Officer-in-Charge, Weeds and Seeds Branch, Mr. G. R. W. Meadly, said that he did not expect to certify more than another 100 tons so that the estimated total yield this year would be less than a third of last year's output.

He said that the heavy February rains had halted clover seed harvesting in all districts and although some rolling was resumed following a period of fine weather, the majority of producers did not recommence harvesting.

As the main seed production areas in New South Wales and South Australia had been affected by unseasonable rains, an Australia-wide shortage of subterranean clover seed was to be expected during the coming sowing season.