

Fox Hunter

The Toby O'Brien Story



Lizzie Byron, Kynan Crossley,
Thomas Casnave and Claire Lievens

Gundagai South Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to agriculture and natural resource management issues.

www.wirraminna.org/creative-catchment-kids/

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants.

www.wirraminna.org

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by Peekdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

www.envirostories.com.au

Fox Hunter

The Toby O'Brien Story

Authors: Lizzie Byron, Kynan Crossley,
Thomas Casnave and Claire Lievens

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School: Gundagai South Public School

Local Land Heroes - Securing Our Region

In 2015, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about their 'Local Land Heroes' who are involved in pest management in the Murray and Murrumbidgee regions. These heroes are local individuals, couples, a business or industries that have made a difference in their local community by contributing to the management of pest animals and plants. The program was generously funded by Murray Local Land Services and Riverina Local Land Services.

Local Land Heroes is part of Enviro-Stories, a PeekDesigns education program.



Local Land Services



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This book is about Toby O'Brien who is the Senior Biosecurity Officer for Riverina Local Land Services, based in the Gundagai Office. Toby is passionate about the environment and helping farmers and land owners in the region. He works with them to help them solve their problems with feral pest animals.



Toby grew up on a property called Bellevue near the town Coonamble, not far from the Warrumbungles National Park. He had two younger brothers, Rodney and Phillip. The farm was a mixed farm, with wheat and sheep and his Uncle's and grandfather's farms next door. Toby had a fun childhood, spent mostly outside playing with his brothers, trapping rabbits and helping out on the farm.



Toby's childhood inspired him to study agriculture. Toby's favourite subjects at high school were agriculture, drama and sport. When Toby finished high school he studied at Orange Agricultural College where he got a degree in Farm Management. One of the things Toby enjoyed the most at College was the bus trips through country New South Wales and into southern Queensland visiting different farms and talking to farmers about their lives, their jobs and the challenges they faced.



Toby grew up on this property, Bellevue, near Coonamble and says it inspired him to keep working in the farming industry.



Pigs cause lots of damage such as digging, trampling crops, destroying fences and they compete with livestock for food and water.

Toby's job as a Senior Biosecurity Officer involves helping land owners manage pests on their properties. Although there are many different feral pest animals in the region, the main pests Toby deals with in his work in the Gundagai region are feral pigs, dogs, rabbits and foxes.

The biggest pest faced by farmers is foxes. Foxes are extremely clever, very cautious and can adapt to any environment they are in. They can live happily in towns, cities and farms. They will hide in blackberry thickets, drains, hollow logs and trees and are often seen at night scavenging for food.



When foxes scavenge for food they keep their noses low to the ground.

Foxes cause problems for land owners in many different ways. Foxes kill lambs and will get into chook pens and slaughter chickens. Foxes dig up land when hunting for crickets, storing food and making shelter. Foxes also kill native animals including birds, mammals and reptiles. Seventy-six species of native animals are close to extinction because of foxes. Foxes can spread disease and seeds from weeds such as blackberry. All of this has a big impact on land owners' ability to run their farms productively.



This lamb skin shows the puncture marks from the teeth of a fox.

Foxes will kill and eat chickens.





Toby works with another Biosecurity officer, Richard Lloyd. In this photo they are working with sheep. Foxes can wound or kill sheep so they are a problem for land owners. They visit farms regularly as part of their job.

Toby does lots of things to help land owners control fox numbers. Toby talks to land owners because land owners know their land better than anyone else. Toby organizes workshops for land owners to learn the best method for getting rid of foxes. He also coordinates efforts so all land owners in an area control foxes at the same time. Fox control involves methods for monitoring, catching and killing.

Monitoring Methods

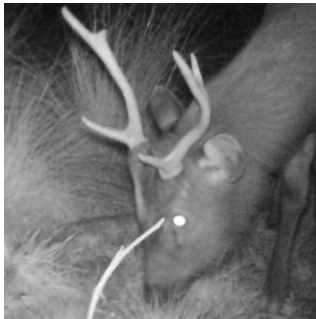
Monitoring can involve lots of different methods. These include looking for:

- Scats (fox poo)
- Animal tracks and paths
- Fur
- Fox scent

Toby also lends out motion sensor cameras to land owners and managers to help them locate and track foxes.



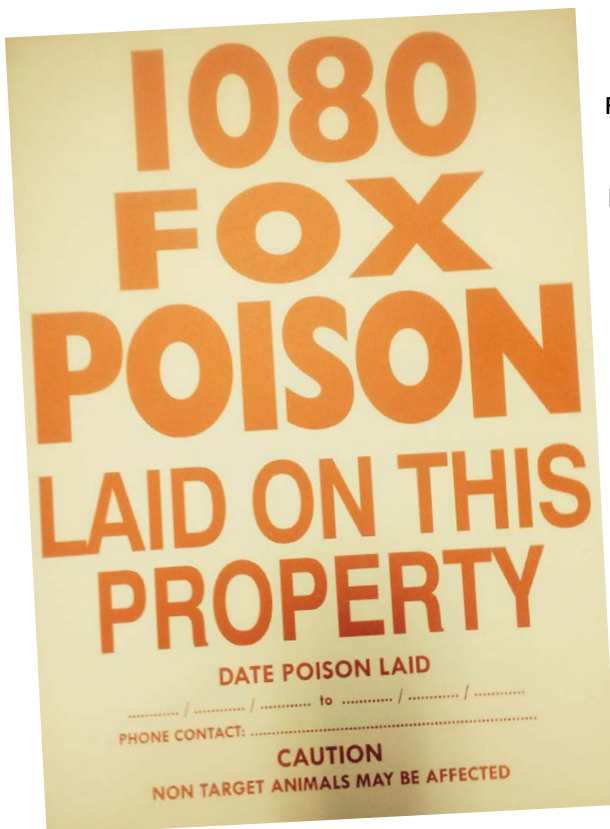
Motion sensor cameras like this, take photos of animals when they move in front of the camera. This helps track numbers so they know where foxes have been and how many there are.



Motion sensor cameras not only track foxes but they also track other animals like deer.

Baiting

Baits are one of the most common methods for controlling fox numbers. Nowadays 1080 bait is used to kill foxes. Baits are laid in chicken wings, lamb tongues, boneless meat or pre-manufactured baits. Baits need to be buried and farmers need to record the date, number and location of baits. Old baits need to be removed and destroyed so other animals don't eat it. Because it is so poisonous to other animals, 1080 is used only on farms and not in town where pets might accidentally eat it.



Farmers have to put up this sign when using 1080 fox poison so people know not to let their dogs loose.

Traps

Traps are used in town and on farms to catch foxes. Previously, old, serrated steel-jawed traps were used but are now illegal.

The traps used now are soft-jawed traps. They have rubber jaws instead of serrated metal because this is kinder to the animals.

Cage traps are used to catch foxes, as well as other animals like feral cats, dogs and pigs. Toby lends out cage traps to land owners to help them catch foxes



Traps such as these are used to trap foxes (right) and cats (left)



These old serrated metal jaw traps are now banned because they are considered cruel to the animals and dangerous for people too.



(L to R) Claire Lievens, Lizzie Byron, Toby O'Brien,
Thomas Casnave, Kynan Crossley

We would like to thank Toby for giving up his time to share his knowledge and many interesting stories with us.

We wish Toby and his family the best of luck for the future.

Fast Fox Facts

- Foxes can climb trees and will sit in trees during the daytime to hide.
- Foxes have a very strong sense of smell and often keep their noses to the ground because of this.
- Foxes also have an acute sense of hearing.
- Foxes can adapt to live in many environments and can often be found living in backyards, parks and alleyways in major cities like Sydney, New York and London.
- Fox whistles work by making a high pitch squeal which sounds like a rabbit squealing in distress. This attracts foxes because they think there is a rabbit they can catch.
- Foxes are omnivorous which means that they can eat plants, fruit and meat
- Foxes can travel 10-15 kilometres each night.
- Foxes were introduced in Australia in the 1850s for hunting and spread quickly. They are found in all states and territories. They have only recently been introduced to Tasmania and their numbers are low there.
- Fox furs used to be worth a lot (\$50 per skin) and people used to make a lot of money selling fox furs. Today, fox skins are worth about \$17 per skin. Some people still catch and sell fox furs for money.
- There are 21 species of foxes in the world but only the red fox is found in Australia.
- Foxes are related to jackals, dogs, wolves and coyotes.



Front: Thomas Casnave and Lizzie Byron
Back: Kynan Crossley and Claire Lievens

2015 Year 5-6, Gundagai South Public School

CONGRATULATIONS

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre and the Creative Catchment Kids Program won the 2015 NSW Junior Landcare Team Award and will be competing in the 2016 National Landcare Awards.



Local Land Services

