



PEST PROFILE

2 Rapeti (European Rabbit)

THE SKI BUNNY WE COULD DO WITHOUT

They might look cute bounding across the hillsides, but rabbits are anything but welcome when it comes to protecting our native biodiversity.

While native plants are trying to survive winter, rabbits are busy expanding their operations. These fluffy entrepreneurs can continue breeding through the colder months, turning what should be a quiet season into a full-scale recruitment drive.

While much of the natural world is conserving energy, rabbits are still eating, still breeding and still finding new ways to annoy restoration ecologists.

WINTER IS WHEN RABBITS CAN REALLY START CAUSING TROUBLE

As grass growth slows and favourite food sources become scarce, hungry rabbits don't simply eat less, they broaden their culinary horizons. Unfortunately, that often means young native plants find themselves unexpectedly added to the winter menu.



**Tender shoots? Delicious. Fresh leaves? Gone.
Young saplings carefully planted by restoration volunteers? Don't mind if we do.**

Rabbits can browse native plants so heavily that young trees and shrubs never get the chance to establish. In some cases, they'll even strip bark from saplings. The particularly ambitious ones may ring-bark a plant, removing a complete circle of bark around the stem and cutting off its nutrient supply. It's a remarkably efficient way to turn a future forest into a former forest.

For restoration projects, years of planning, planting and maintenance can quickly become an all-you-can-eat buffet.

The trouble doesn't stop with individual plants. Large rabbit populations can prevent entire areas of native vegetation from regenerating by repeatedly mowing down seedlings before they reach maturity. The result? Fewer native plants, less habitat for insects, lizards and birds, and more exposed soil vulnerable to erosion.

AND THEN THERE'S THE DIGGING

If rabbits had a secondary hobby, it would be landscape architecture. Their extensive burrow networks can undermine slopes, damage farmland and contribute to soil instability. Their digging and grazing also help create ideal conditions for invasive weeds to establish, making life even harder for native ecosystems trying to recover.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about rabbits is just how spectacularly good they are at being rabbits. Give them favourable conditions and they can reproduce at astonishing rates, turning a small population into a large one faster than most native species can respond.

It's why rabbit control remains such an important part of biodiversity management across the district.