

Wallabies in the crosshairs



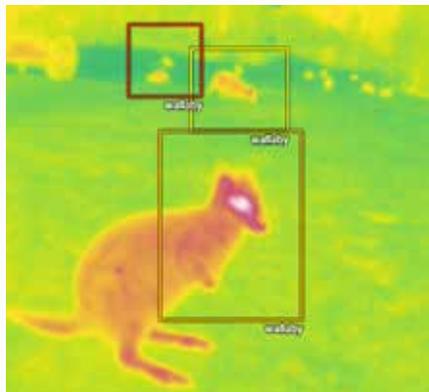
Heliventures and Trap and Trigger contractors with a female wallaby killed in the Kakanui Mountains in June. The wallaby was shot from a helicopter equipped with thermal camera technology during a daytime flight.

The war against wallabies is warming up in Otago, as ORC takes new steps to keep the invasive pests from establishing in our region.

Bennett's wallabies are categorised in Otago's Regional Pest Management Plan under an eradication programme, meaning ORC aims to reduce their numbers to zero in the short or medium term. They were introduced to South Canterbury in 1874, and became a significant pest in the area by the 1940s. Wallabies have the potential to significantly impact on our economy and local biodiversity values and become a burden for future generations, should feral populations become established.

With support from Biosecurity New Zealand's National Wallaby Eradication Programme, an enhanced programme of surveillance, control, and public awareness is now underway in Otago. Funding of \$373,000 from the national programme essentially doubled the operational budget for wallaby management in Otago this year, enabling more proactive groundwork and education over a wider area.

Significant ground-based surveillance is focused on parts of Otago nearer the border with South Canterbury, such as the Kakanui Mountains, the Hawkdun Range, and the Lindis/Hawea area. Beyond the border, other areas to be targeted include



Thermal photograph with AI identification of wallabies.

parts of the Maniototo, the Dunstan Range, and the Macraes area in East Otago.

ORC's wallaby programme involves targeted surveillance of areas where wallabies have previously been destroyed; using cameras in 'dispersal pathways' where they could be entering Otago; helicopter search and destroy methods with a thermal camera; ground-based operations using firearms, dogs, poison, drones, and thermal night shooting; and increased communications with local land occupiers.

Looking ahead, ORC is also advancing new technologies, such as an artificial intelligence thermal camera with the aim of developing a new wallaby control tool. This project aims to expand existing detection technology to automatically detect wallabies where they exist in low numbers. Cameras can be deployed in remote field locations with the possibility of real-time notification when they are triggered by a passing wallaby.

Ultimately, finding and destroying wallabies in low numbers over the vast expanse of the Otago back country – while challenging – is critical to preventing them from becoming established.

Due to the difficult nature of finding wallabies in low numbers amidst remote terrain, public assistance in identifying and managing the pests is essential to the eradication programme. If you see or kill a wallaby, report it online at www.reportwallabies.nz, or directly to ORC by calling 0800 474 082.

Further information on wallabies can be found on the ORC website, at www.orc.govt.nz/wallabies.