

Rabbits in his sights

With a plague of previous books about rabbits available, it would be easy to dismiss *Those Wild Rabbits* as just one more in a large warren. But from page one Bruce Munday strings together fascinating tidbits of information, putting the rabbit situation within the context of major events in Australia and around the world. Take the relatively uneventful arrival of five rabbits with the First Fleet. “The two bulls and five cows that disembarked from the *Friendship* promptly escaped into the bush, to be found seven years later numbering 60 but never looking as if they might overrun the country.”

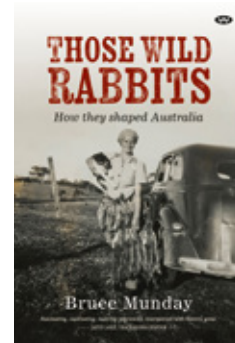
By 1840, the going price for rabbits was “about four shillings a brace (a pair) ... considerably more expensive than beef or lamb”. Bruce describes the warning signs of the rabbit tsunami, noting that the rabbit originated in Spain, and Spain’s ancient moniker Ispania can be interpreted to mean “land of the rabbits”.

He also links Thomas Austin’s devastating release of rabbits on his Victorian property

in 1859 with the public release of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* “referred to by some as ‘survival of the fittest’”. Just nine years later, a private landholder in Colac, Vic, wrote in the *Geelong Advertiser* that people should stop congratulating themselves about the spread of rabbits, considered by many at the time a food and hunting source: “Thousands of acres of perhaps the richest pasturage in Victoria are eaten as bare as an overstocked sheep-run, and the damage they have done is very great”.

Bruce has filled this 280-page book with private letters, never previously published firsthand accounts and enthralling anecdotes from historic newspapers. There are photos galore and the text, although meticulously researched, bounces along.

A farmer in the Adelaide Hills for four decades with a long history in Landcare, Bruce has seen plenty of rabbits, and he brings his experience as a communications consultant in agriculture and natural resource management to create this excellent account.



Those Wild Rabbits:
How they shaped Australia
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\$39.95
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