

RABBITS EAT HOLE IN IRON TANK

Widespread Damage To Young Trees

NEW CONTROL URGED

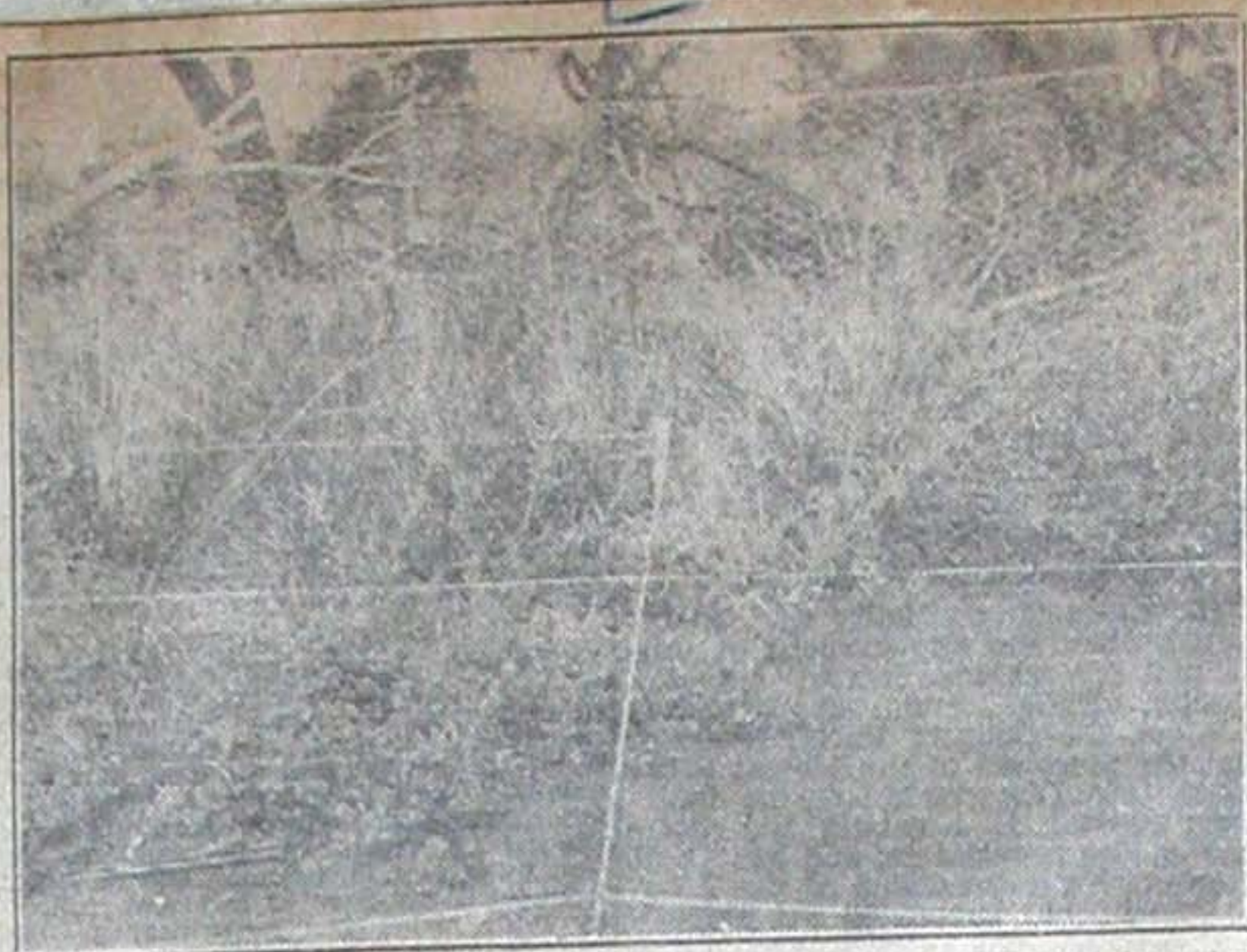
Between October and March nearly 1,000,000 rabbits were destroyed on Koonamore, Melton, and Mount Victor Stations. When the lecturer in botany at the Adelaide University (Mr. J. G. Wood) and the assistant lecturer (Mr. T. T. Colquhoun) visited the Koonamore vegetation reserve (north of Yunta) late in May, they found the verandahs of the laboratory knee-deep in dead rabbits which had been attracted by shade and water in the tanks. The rabbits had bitten through the galvanized iron and one tank was leaking.

Devastation caused by rabbits among the young trees and vegetation is described by Mr. Wood in a report to the Vice-Chancellor of the University. He recommends that the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research should be approached with a view to evolving biological or some other method of control.

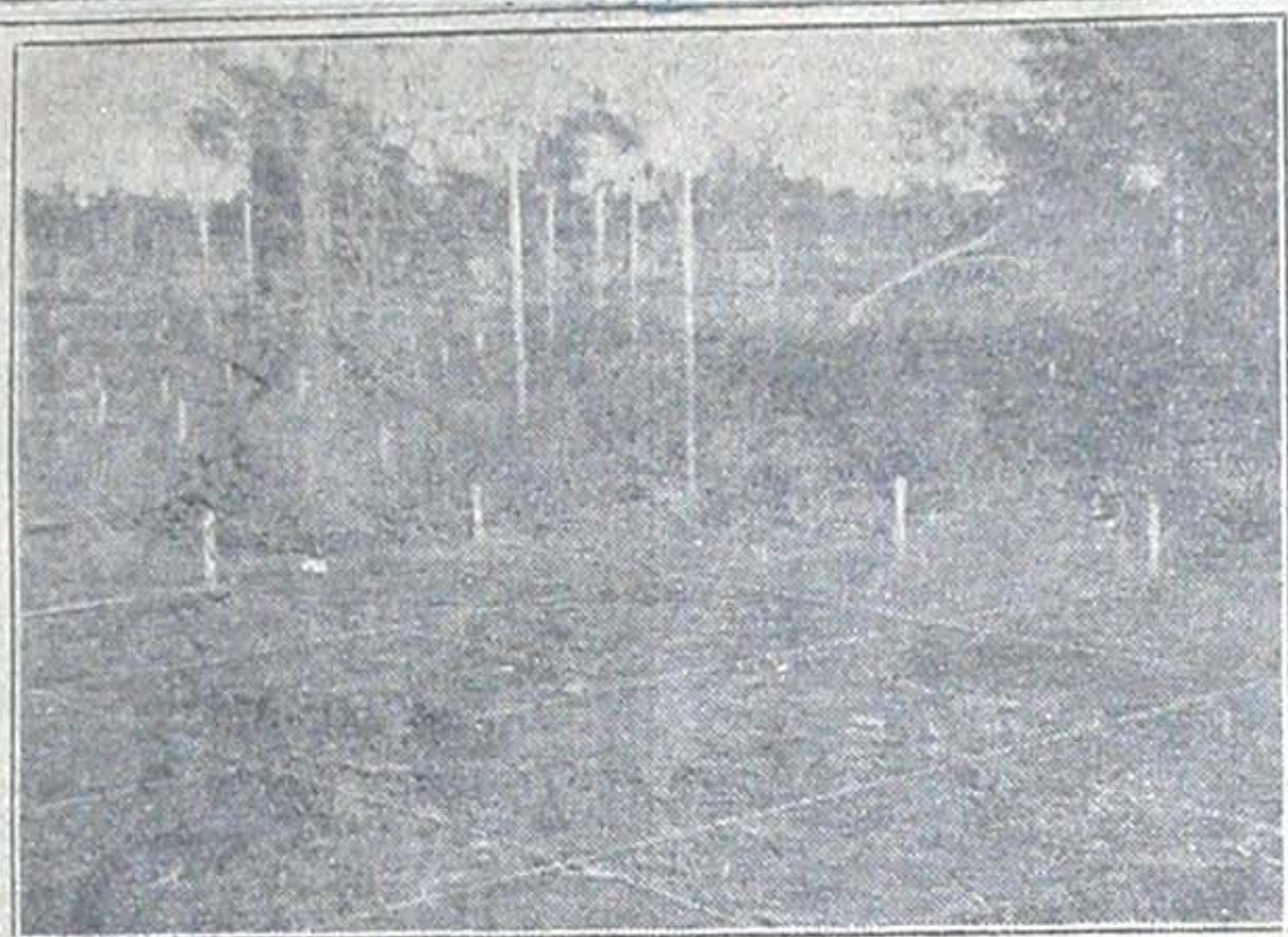
Mr. Wood states:—"In my last report, I referred to the presence of rabbits on the reserve, which caused me considerable apprehension, and also that I had arranged for their eradication. The work of extermination has been carried out very thoroughly on the reserve, thanks to the supervision of Mr. Hardy, the manager of Koonamore. I saw only one live rabbit on the reserve and stopped the only two open warrens which were seen.

"Before our arrival the verandahs of the laboratory were knee-deep in rabbits which had died there, attracted by the shade and the water in the tanks. The base of the water tanks is polished by the teeth of the rabbits, and in one place the galvanized iron had been bitten through and was leaking badly. These rabbits had been cleared away before our arrival. The garage, however, had been overlooked, and we were obliged to clear away the decomposing bodies.

"It is difficult to convey an impression of the numbers of rabbits and the damage they have caused. Some idea



Young mulga plants on specially enclosed quadrat in the Koonamore vegetation reserve.



Bare area open to rabbit grazing just outside the quadrat shown in other picture.

monest of these—sandalwood, mulga, and birdseye (Cassia spp)—form the chief fodder reserve of the pastoralist in times of drought, and I speak only after due consideration when I say that I believe that within the next hundred years not a tree will be found within the 8-inch rainfall line. The greatest mortality occurs with seedlings and young plants. Young plants of mulga appear readily after burning, as our experiments have shown. Cassia spp. also germinate more readily after fire, but before the rabbit invasion young plants of cassia were numerous over many parts of the reserve on untreated areas. These have almost entirely disappeared.

"In addition, many mature trees, especially of Acacia spp. and sandalwood, have been ring barked to a height of 10 feet or more. Even mistletoe parasitic on the lower shrubs has been eaten out in many cases.

Varied Tastes

"Of the fodder plants, bluebush and speargrass have suffered considerably. Saltbush, on the other hand, seems to be not palatable to rabbits. The

features of the regeneration work. At present in the areas where the greatest number of rabbits were present, these have disappeared. A certain amount of new growth is appearing on the moribund bushes following rabbit extermination. Rabbit grazing of speargrass has been enormous and important in reducing the number of potential seed and nurse plants. The accompanying photographs illustrate some of the most important phases of damage by rabbits.

Control Methods Useless

"The rabbit problem is one of national importance and will never be controlled by methods now in force. The Conservator of Forests in Western Australia informs me that he has located a quarter of a million acres in Western Australia with suitable host trees for sandalwood afforestation, but experiment has shown that rabbits invariably kill 100 per cent. of germinated seedlings. He finds it impracticable to keep rabbits out of an area greater than five acres, enclosed with rabbit-proof fencing, and that only with a man permanently in attendance."

damage to the bluebush has been considerable. At my last visit in August, 1931, regeneration of this shrub was marked, and one of the most hopeful



Picture shows how rabbits strip the bark from sandalwood trees.

of the numbers may be gained from those destroyed on the surrounding stations between October and March last. On Koonamore over 500,000 rabbits were killed, on Melton about 200,000, and on Mount Victor 120,000. On the reserve itself (which consists of about 1,200 acres, enclosed by rabbit proof fencing), about 7,000 rabbits were destroyed.

Damage To Shrubs

"Their presence on the reserve has in many cases put back the regeneration of shrubs and trees by some years, but has not been without its advantages in one direction. We have on the reserve certain areas which were laid out to watch the regeneration of shrubs and trees. These small areas were specially fenced. Most of these escaped the rabbits, although a few were entered and the plants destroyed. We have, therefore, an area which has not been grazed by sheep for seven years, but which has been subject to the depredations of rabbits only; within this are the special areas which serve as controls.

Not A Tree In 8 In. Rainfall

"The most serious damage has been done to shrubs and trees. The com-

ton, and Mount Victor stations alone. It is possible for a pair of rabbits to bring a family into the world every 40 days, and their young start housekeeping when four months old. Reckoning on every female having a litter of five, which is often exceeded, and if no casualties were caused by foxes, dogs, trappers, epidemics, or droughts, it would be possible for the progeny of two rabbits to increase to 500 in a year.

Inoculating With Disease

"Many attempts have been made to deal with the rabbit scientifically," said Professor T. Harvey Johnston yesterday. "The Danysz system was tried in New South Wales about 40 or 50 years ago. The rabbits were inoculated with a disease which had some relationship to plague. It was effective while the rabbits were kept in a closed area. Dr. F. Tidswell also did a lot of work in connection with the bacilli pasteurillas on an island in the Sydney Harbor, set apart for experimenting on the destruction of rabbits. Pasteurellas, however, had been found dangerous to use. At first it was thought that they were not communicable to human beings, but, according to Park and Williams in 'Who's Who Among the Microbes,' infection was liable to occur among market men while skinning and dressing infected rabbits."

Worse Than Blowfly

Mr. Wood said yesterday that he considered the rabbit a greater menace to the pastoral country than the blowfly. Rabbits were levelling the natural herbage to the ground, and much of it would not grow again. In a good year like the present the rabbits did not trouble to make burrows. They sheltered under the bushes and travelled with extraordinary rapidity. Some of the rabbits in the north-east were suffering from a form of hydatids, which were communicable to dogs, but would not affect human beings.

News 18-6-32

University Labor Club Proposal

University students are still much concerned with the proposal to form a Labor Club at the University. In the latest issue, "On Dit," the students' newspaper, devotes nearly 25 per cent. of its news columns to the proposal.

"On Dit" says, "Political clubs within the University might well serve the dual function of education in politics and education in democracy."

CORRESPONDENTS' PLEA

Two correspondents are very indignant at a correspondent's proposal, made in a recent issue of "On Dit," that all those interested in the formation of a Labor Club should be seized and thrown into the River Torrens. The two writers think that every effort should be made to form a club.

One correspondent says:—"I can say quite frankly that I am not a Communist, but I cannot blind myself to the rottenness in the present social system. Further, I emphatically protest against the mock heroic strains of one who 'sees red' at the slightest provocation. May I suggest that the extreme orthodox is as great a danger to society as the extreme radical, or, in more familiar terms, that 'Anabaptist' (the previous correspondent) is as great a social menace as the most violent Communist. The time is ripe for free and frank discussion, not for hot-headed counsels. We can surely try to sort out the order of the present disorder, or the disorder of the present order, if we claim to be true university students. Therefore, I plead for a commonsense attitude towards social questions."

The other writer deplors the lack of freedom of thought. He says:—"Our Australian universities are truly in a parlous state when students (so-called 'thinkers') cannot allow freedom of thought and freedom of speech to a fellow-thinker."

Adv. 20-6-32

SCIENCE CONGRESS IN SYDNEY

At the meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, to be held in Sydney from August 17 to 24, in addition to the business sessions, at which topics will be discussed by 16 sections representing the various branches of science, there will be two public lectures in the evening. Dr. R. W. Cilento, of the Division of Tropical Hygiene, a graduate of the Adelaide University, has been invited to deliver one of these lectures.

News 17-6-32

Barr Smith Library Now Open at Night

The Barr Smith Library at the Adelaide University is to be opened at nights. Two months ago students expressed great dissatisfaction that it was not open to them at nights.

A notice signed by the librarian (Prof. Fitzherbert) has been posted in the University entrance saying that in future the library will open to students from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on week days.

Adv. 18-6-32

COPING WITH RABBIT PEST

Aid Of Science May Be Sought

SERIOUS MENACE

With the bountiful season in the outback country rabbits have bred in millions, and are now advancing upon the settled country and denuding it of vegetation.

The position has become so alarming that the Universities of Melbourne, South Australia, and Western Australia may request the Federal Government to instruct the Commonwealth Bureau of Scientific and Industrial Research to evolve means to exterminate the pest.

Great interest has been evinced in the report in "The Advertiser" yesterday, in which Mr. J. G. Wood, lecturer in botany at the Adelaide University, described the depredations by rabbits in the north-east country. He said that nearly 1,000,000 rabbits had been destroyed on Koonamore, Mel-