

# Rascals Down Under

## Kangaroo hunters fight to keep 'cute' marsupials from destroying farms

BY LINDSAY YOUNG  
Staff Reporter

SYDNEY, Australia — The tall, strong man reached down in the dark and grabbed the tendons of a lean kangaroo leg and slid in the hook.

He took the body, which by then had been beheaded, and hung it on the rack in the back of the ute — Aussie for pick-up truck. He signaled, and that night's extra hand shined the spotlight in a new area.

A kangaroo went for it, and now he has his second kill of the night. He beheaded it, cut off the paws and strung it up. He signaled once again to continue.

This is a typical night on the job for a professional shooter, someone hired to kill kangaroos in Australia.

These are animals that most non-Australians view as a show in a zoo — too cute to cause enough harm to deserve death. But this Australian native marsupial is one of the largest groups of pests down under, some Australians say.

And while Nebraska farmers might not take such drastic measures to get rid of gophers, raccoons, deer or snakes, Australian farmers say they won't hesitate to do so.

### Cute pests

Kangaroos are viewed as both cute critters and as pests by Australian farmers.

Winsome Mumford, a Sydney resident, grew up on a farm north of Dubbo, New South Wales, and said she grew up seeing both sides. Dubbo is five hours northwest of Sydney.

About a dozen kangaroos would come up to the fences and feed regularly at the farm on which she lived. As a young girl, she used to watch them with awe, she said, but as she grew older she understood the problem these animals cause for farms.

The vision of the pest beat out the cute one, as the "roo" — as it is commonly called in Australia — competes with farmers' sheep and cattle for food and water, Mumford said.

Kangaroos also cause car accidents and damage fences. Road signs warning of kangaroos crossing are as common as deer-crossing signs in Nebraska.

John McDonald, who grew up on a farm in the state of Victoria, said Australian farmers have no worries when a dozen kangaroos hang around their large farms, which are hundreds of acres.

McDonald said the kangaroos don't cause enough damage to make a difference in the production of the farm.

Kollath said the same about Nebraska farm pests. Kollath's family lives on a farm near Winslow in northeast Nebraska.

But when up to 500 kangaroos visit a farm, problems arise, McDonald said.

Mumford said the kangaroos in the area where she lived were more of a nuisance than a real problem because only a dozen kangaroos visited regularly.

For McDonald, now 28, numbers of kangaroos started to fluctuate in his area when he was about 16.

He said it was rumored that greenies, or environmentalists, brought kangaroos to Victoria, a state in the southern tip of Australia, to protect them from being shot in the outback. The outback takes up the majority of the land in Australia and consists of little or no vegetation.

Kangaroos move a lot on their own, too, which makes them difficult to control, Mumford said.

A study was done to determine the mobility of a mob, or group, of kangaroos, Mumford said. They were tagged in Coonabarabarn, a town northeast of Dubbo.

They were found shot four days later near Baraba, New South Wales. The kangaroos had traveled 248 miles in four days, she said.

The kangaroos follow food and water, Mumford said. During drought seasons, they gather where water is available, she said, and this is usually in the southeastern part of Australia.

This mobility makes it difficult to deter the kangaroos from property, Mumford said, because the kangaroos visiting the farm are not the same every time. Poisoning kangaroos is not effective, she said, because a large amount of poison would have to be used.

Shooting is the most effective, Mumford said.

### License to Kill

The method of killing kangaroos is policed. "We don't want every man and their dog going out on a shooting spree," Mumford said.

Therefore, if farmers want to shoot kangaroos that are harming their properties, they must obtain a license, she said. The requirements for a license vary in each of the five Australian states.

However, all licenses restrict farmers from killing too many kangaroos. Depending on the amount of kangaroos in the area, a farmer is allowed to kill only a certain number of them, McDonald said.

After killing a kangaroo, the shooter is required to tag it. Then, most of the time, the carcasses are taken to a manufacturer of products ranging from leather to dog food, Mumford said.

The manufacturer is not allowed to accept the carcass if it is not tagged, she said. If a wildlife official finds a carcass on a farmer's property that is not tagged, that farmer can be fined.

As with most systems, though, there are loopholes, McDonald said. His father has never obtained a license to kill kangaroos on his farm. Obtaining a permit was painstaking, and can take months, he said. By that time, the kangaroos' damage is done.

Professional shooters also must get a license,

and are limited in what they can kill. They only hunt at night, when kangaroos feed and do the most damage. They use a spotlight to hunt the kangaroos, but, McDonald said, it's not a tough job.

"Kangaroos are so stupid," he said. "In a spotlight, they just sit there."

McDonald said because the animal hops right into the spotlight, hunting kangaroos is not challenging enough to be fun.

"You wouldn't go out for the thrill of shooting kangaroos. It's just pointless," McDonald said.

McDonald and Mumford both have experiences they remember from their days on the farm dealing with kangaroos.

Mumford recalls the time when she had invited a friend from the city to hunt kangaroos with her father and her on the farm.

She said her friend thought kangaroos were cute, and was upset about them being killed. So, as a joke, Mumford

asked her to hold the carcasses in the back of the ute.

McDonald recalled a time his cousin shot a

kangaroo on his farm. The animal didn't die immediately, stumbled away, and was left to die slowly, he said. After that, they made a rule to shoot them only in the head, he said.

Regardless of whether it's the farmer or professional shooter doing the hunting, experiences are similar.

When professional shooters collect their victim, they continue to shoot others, because even though a kangaroo is shot in front of its mob, the death doesn't deter others from jumping into the spotlight, McDonald said.

And so the shooters continue to complete their mission — protecting Australian farms from the wrath of an abundant native pest — the kangaroo.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

## Captive, wild kangaroos hop to different tunes

BY LINDSAY YOUNG  
Staff Reporter

SYDNEY, Australia — Just as with any animal, a kangaroo's environment and behavior in the zoo differs from that of kangaroo's environment in the wild. This creates two views of the animal.

The first thing a visitor sees stepping into the Taronga Zoo in Sydney is an Australian mammals sign. The first thing to visit — the kangaroos.

A visitor will see the kangaroos relaxing on

the light red dirt drinking out of bowls set near the large rocks scattered for them.

These kangaroos are raised in the zoo. The visitor will not see them jumping over the fence or even inside the fence — there is no reason to.

Though less confined, a similar place visitors can find kangaroos is the Koala Park, one of the many wildlife parks in Australia.

There is not much reason for jumping here either. Food is set out for the animals.

As the visitor will see, the kangaroo is quite gentle, and a pat on the head won't be an invita-

tion to a boxing match.

There are no mobs of kangaroos here, as most are raised in the park where they share space with free-roaming koalas and caged emus, wombats and dingoes.

At the Blue Mountains National park, near Sydney, the visitor will see no kangaroos until dusk, when it's time to feed.

These kangaroos aren't the creatures one wants to pet, but rather to observe, as these are wild — not as used to human hands as those in the zoo and in the Koala Park.

During the winter months, May to August, there is even less supple grass for kangaroos to eat. Mob by mob, the kangaroos sift down into one of the clearings where picnickers and campers prevail. The kangaroos ignore them.

Kangaroos cover the area, sticking together, going wherever grass is available.

In time the area will prove to be unsuitable for the mob's needs, and the kangaroos will move on.

These are the kangaroos that cause problems on farms. Those kangaroos in the zoos are subdued because of their lifelong captivity.