

The fox and feral cat stole the show - well at least at the Friends stall in February at the Kangaroo Valley Show. Kids and adults alike were drawn to the taxidermy mounts in their new acrylic cases. Conversation about the destructive, non-natural impact of these agile introduced predators on the defenceless little endangered Rock-wallaby joeys was a natural evolution. (The taxidermy of a Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is underway to complete the conservation education project funded through our successful National Landcare Grant application.) New members joined our ranks at the Kangaroo Valley Show in support of the Friends award-winning work on the Shoalhaven Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Recovery Program. Thank you to Jenolan Caves and Nowra Tree Adventure Park for the donation of fun-filled family passes as raffle prizes. Pictured below are the happy winners of the raffle hamper. Thanks again to Troy and Dean Bagnall, our trusty fox, feral cat and wild dog shooting and trapping professional contractors, who helped educate the public about the devastation wrought upon Australian wildlife by these cunning, invasive predators since European settlement.



Kangaroo Valley Rock-wallaby Colony Report

It was a nerve-racking time at the end of January when a bush fire headed towards the Creek colony. The local RFS brought the blaze under control soon after it dribbled over the escarpment into the very centre of the Rock-wallaby Colony (photos below). Damage to the monitoring cameras and soft-release enclosure was fortunately minimal, although the water supply for the enclosure was lost after 9 months of filling the tank by hand from a catchment tarpaulin. There may be a high cost associated with refilling this tank in time for the potential translocation of individuals from Jenolan we are hoping for by the end of autumn. You may wish to consider making a donation. Approximately 37 hectares above and within the core habitat of the Creek colony was burnt. Two tracks were bulldozed through the bush by the RFS from the nearest roads and we are working with Crown Lands to have these barricaded against human and fox incursion. With open understorey and green shoots already sprouting from the blackened ground the threat of predation by foxes, cats and wild dogs is dramatically heightened. Not the best timing when we have three vulnerable Rock-wallabies under one year old – the most we have had at hear in years.

Our favourite Local Land Services trapper is currently setting and checking humane leg hold traps around the Creek Colony to help manage the increased risk. In addition to her ten month old, Rosie has another bulging pouch and Fiona's joey is now being seen independently on the monitoring cameras. Pinot, Jewel, Nibbler and the other Creek Colony females do not seem to have fallen pregnant to Tyson yet.

At the Mountain Colony Irene is also sporting a bulge and her last joey Skye has reached ten months of age. Pangari seems to be missing in action, and I suspect his younger brother Pindari has taken on the alpha male role.

The River Colony continues to explode with joeys. Flower appears to have lost yet another joey at eight months of age. Wirra's joey has emerged from the pouch and has been exploring the big wide world alone. Bangarra also seems to have lost her joey to fox predation, while Pia's youngster is emerging from the pouch. Heaps of cute photos heading out to our adopters soon. Barellan is showing considerable interest in Pebble's oldest daughter Rocket who is just reaching maturity. Pebble's has a new joey in the pouch now that her Jaz is independent. In total we presently have 12 subadults and juveniles at the River Colony, largely thanks to Local Land Services contractor Evelyn Osborne's artful baiting around this colony.

Christy and Lisa have been busy deploying fresh meat baits targeting foxes and wild dogs within a 5km buffer around the three KV Rock-wallaby colonies for NPWS.



Thanks to all our friendly Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby habitat care volunteers for their help protecting the River Colony
A more comprehensive Friends Newsletter is available if you can supply an email address to PO Box 6182, KV 2577

To Shoot A Fox by Troy Bagnall – our Friendly Contractor

An insight into the effort sometimes needed to shoot a fox in Kangaroo Valley

My phone rings and it's my brother Dean. "Have you checked your emails yet?" he asks.

"Not yet, I have been a bit flat out" I answer. "When you get home from work check them and give us a call back" Dean replies.

I get home from my day job and start unloading the fox and dog traps from my Hilux. They have been riding around in the back for a couple of days. I had to pull them on the Monday just gone, today is Tuesday. I only set them on the Saturday before in an area where wild dogs and foxes had been caught on a monitoring camera. However, it rained heavily on the Sunday and completely washed them out. No point resetting them until it dries out. Wet heavy soil is no good to trap in. After saying hello to my family I check the email. It shows a photo of a large adult fox caught on a monitoring camera about half a kilometre from a Rock-wallaby colony.

That was on Monday night not far from where my traps were before I had to pull them earlier in the day.

I phone Dean back: "What's the plan?" I ask.

Dean says he can get there Wednesday night, but I can't as the kids have something on at the school. I can go tonight, but the ground is too muddy, and we don't want to tear up the properties we have access too. (Without the property owners around the Rock-wallaby colonies on board, the Friends organisation would struggle to keep fox numbers down.) Thursday night it is, we decide.

Thursday lunch time Dean rings again.

"How many properties do you want to shoot on tonight?" he asks me. "What time did the camera show the fox in the area?" I rely.

"Around 9:30pm" Dean answers.

It gets dark around 7:30pm, so we can go to one place before we get to the area the fox was seen in. There is a couple of others we can do in the area. We decide on visiting five properties tonight.

(I cannot express enough what a privilege it is to have so many property owners allow us access to their beautiful patches of the world for the Rock-wallaby cause.)

About 5pm I ring Dean: "How did you go?"

He has rung three properties, I have rung one. The fifth property owner wasn't home, so we leave a message. We will not enter a property unless we speak to the owner or caretaker in person. Four out of five isn't too bad for a Thursday as I think the Valley pub might get a workout on such nights. We discuss what firearms we are taking and whose Hilux we will be in.

"I will pick you up around 7pm" is Deans ending comment.

About 7:15pm the familiar sight of headlights in my driveway signals it's time to go. Dean waltzes in like he has a million times, greets my family and heads straight to the fridge. My dinner is in the microwave, as I don't eat before I go shooting. But Dean always seem to find something to eat in my fridge. "Rug up" he says, "it's freezing outside." But, in reality, I don't have too, as I always drive and Dean always spotlights on the back, even in his truck. It has worked for over 25 years and we know the system well. I kiss my family goodnight and my little girl, Tully, has a cheeky grin. She knows when Dad goes getting those naughty foxes, she can share the big bed with Mum, Therese.

From home we stop at a service station in Bomaderry, fuel up and buy sustenance for later on. I normally have water and a lettuce leaf, while Dean on the other hand is rather fond of coke and mars bars. As we head along Moss Vale Rd towards Cambewarra Mountain, Dean informs me that the fifth property has got back to him and we are right to go there.

Beauty, we should be able to nail some foxes tonight as the air is crisp and clear so the fox caller should travel a long way. There is no wind and no moon. Weather is a big factor in spotlighting success.

"Ring the police" Dean demands. "You ring them" I snap back. "I'm driving" he replies.

"I have to do everything" I say in a sooky voice, knowing full well Dean has done most of the organising. It is just friendly brother banter.

The Nowra police number is fixed in both our phones. After the fourth try I finally get to speak to a real-life human police officer! And I tell them it's Troy Bagnall.

A familiar "Where are you going tonight?" comes back at me.

I give a brief description of where in the Valley we will be shooting is given. The lovely police woman wishes us luck as she bids us goodnight, while writing down our details. We don't shoot in the Valley unless we have contacted the police first. Credit has to be given to all Shoalhaven Area police that we deal with. They are always polite, accommodating and never hassle us even though we might ring them five times a week. I guess to get respect you have to give respect.

Approaching the top of Cambewarra Mountain heading north into the Valley it is now 8:15pm and Dean lets out a grumpy moan.

"That doesn't look good" he states. "Oh crap!" I say as the headlights start to pick up a glimpse of the famous KV fog.

"What are the chances of that?" I ask. I know the answer – it's a rhetorical question more out of frustration than anything else. While the cold still night is good for shooting, it is also good for fog in the Valley.

Between Green Valley Rd and Walkers Lane the fog thickens. No point trying to shoot now. We know from past experience you can't wait it out unless the wind picks up. That's not going to happen tonight.

"Let's head home" Dean says with a sigh, as we do a U-turn at Merchants Rd.

We will start the process again tomorrow and if all the stars and the moon line up, we might have success.

Back in my drive way by 9pm, the guns and gear locked away, shower had, and dinner heated, I watch the news while eating. What a bummer - anyway at the least I will be in bed at a reasonable hour.

Yes; my little girl can stay in the big bed for the night. What a lot of time and effort for nothing, I ponder.

Not to worry, it has happened many times before and it will happen again.

The passion that Dean and I share for protecting our little Aussie battlers won't be dented by a little fog, rain, storm, lightening, wombat holes, electric fence, mad cows, cranky tourist, unreasonable locals or whatever else the Valley can throw at us. The fox in the photo and many others will continue to fall to the Bagnall Brothers and maybe, in the not too distant future, our sons and daughters. It can take time. It is just not as easy as unlatching the gate and shooting a fox.

Part Two to follow, where the Bagnall Brothers actually shoot a fox. In February they shot 11 foxes in KV in six days, including a pesky one at the River colony. Troy appears in both KV Show article photos.