



# WINTER NEWSLETTER



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## BYE, BYE BUNDY

It is with mixed feelings that we announce the completion of the Bundaberg Rum funded project aimed at reducing nutrient loads in the Malpas Dam. This was a joint project between the Dung Beetle Express and Leanne Savage (Constructive Solutions).

The Bundaberg Rum project will be missed because, although it is always nice to achieve a goal, this project provided much more than just another round of redistributions. It has given the Project Officer some very funny lines to use at field days and has been a source of amusement for many people.

The story goes something along the lines of; *Molasses is a by-product of rum production, we feed cattle molasses in winter and during drought, hence Bundaberg Rum must share some responsibility for nutrient run off in the Malpas catchment.* We all knew this wasn't quite true but .....

Seriously, this project resulted in the release of 9,000 beetles in the Malpas catchment. Three species were selected for release; *Onitis alexis*, *Onitis pecuarius* and *Onthophagus binodis*. Early indications are that these species have established at sites in Ben Lomond.

The Dung Beetle Express is very grateful to Bundaberg Rum for their support. With winter coming on perhaps our readers could return the favour and drink more rum?

## WHERE'S WALLY?

Some of you might have noticed this little fellow in the last newsletter. His name is not Wally, he has been christened Dungbee after a lot of other rather silly suggestions failed to impress us. Dungbee will feature in our new brochure and posters.

Dungbee was created by Elizabeth Kerry who is a very talented local artist/designer. Elizabeth has developed a whole range of beetle characters which we hope to be able to incorporate into promotional material. We are seeking funding for a brochure aimed specifically at school children and, if successful, the new characters will be a feature. Some are already named and amongst them is Nina - Eco Warrior.



If you would like to suggest a name for some of the other characters please feel free to send them to the Project Officer. Only sensible names will be accepted - this office can come up with enough truly ridiculous ideas so we don't need help in that department!

## KEY TO THE EXPERTS

*In this issue's Key to the Experts we introduce Vic Johnston who is a landholder, Dung Beetle Site Monitor, former Chair of the Dung Beetle Express and current Chair of the Dung Beetles for Landcare Farming group. Vic was instrumental in the formation of the Dung Beetles for Landcare farming group and has been a keen proponent of dung beetles for many years.*

Being born in 1928 on a dairy farm for cream production and hence the rearing of poddy calves and pigs on separated milk, having a next door neighbour who had a slaughter house for their own butcher shop in Tenterfield and also having the contract to use all the butter milk from the Tenterfield Co-operative Butter Factory in the boiling down piggery, flies did actually swarm.

With the New England climate of cold and dry winters and usually humid summer rainfall (32'), winter dung pads set as hard as concrete and covered up a significant area of grass. About 1950 we bought a brand-new Farmall H Tractor, good for row cultivation of corn etc, also for ploughing and mowing Lucerne.

We also bought a set of chain harrows for spreading cow dung. Over the years we wore out 2 sets of chain harrows. They were not highly successful but better than nothing.

Outside BBQs were not in vogue, kitchens had sticky fly traps on the ceilings, milk jugs were always covered by jug covers with beads around the edge. Roasts were always covered with a gauze cover to keep the flies off.

The most common phrase among the small children was "Shush the flies away!"

While stock owners all over Australia accepted this hardship CSIRO with its team of Scientists led by Dr. Bornemissza worked on introducing dung beetles suited to cattle dung burial in Australia. Between 1969 and 1984 57 species were introduced to Australia. By 1989 some 26 species had been recovered, some having built into large populations.

Several releases were made in the Tenterfield area, we started to notice their activity and to recognise some species. John Feehan, who had worked with CSIRO in the importation program was now conducting Soilcam which was collecting and supplying suitable colonies for sale and also educating people on the chemical dangers to dung beetles.

Our Tenterfield Landcare project obtained *Onthophagus binodis* from John Feehan and released them around Tenterfield in 1996. They quickly established and now work from spring to autumn and quickly bury dung within 2 to 3 days.

There now 9 imported varieties in Tenterfield.

The Landcare Co-ordinators from Tenterfield, Glen Innes, Armidale and Inverell joined together to form the Northern Tablelands Dung Beetle Express Committee, obtaining good funding and support and also employing a Dung Beetle Project Officer.

From this base a new, separate group was formed to obtain funding and support for the introduction of dung beetles that were identified as being suitable for Australia but for many reasons "didn't take" in the initial introduction.

This group is called "Dung Beetles for Landcare Farming". We hope that through bodies such as Meat and Livestock Australia, CSIRO, RLPBs, Livestock owners and environmentally aware people including financial supporters such as Orica, Bundaberg Rum etc to quickly "get the ball rolling" and finish this most important program.



# WATER FOWL

Actually nothing to do with water fowl or any fowl at all. This has to do with webs - not feet but sites. However, the headline did get your attention and that was the aim. We have come across a couple of very nice websites lately that should be helpful when trying to identify insects or just for those who are interested. Have a look at:

[www.geocities.com/brisbane\\_beetles](http://www.geocities.com/brisbane_beetles)

<http://insectographs.com.au>

## CAN YOU STOMOXYS THEM?

Just when it seemed we were getting on top of the whole fly problem another rears its ugly head. This fly is *Stomoxys calcitrans* commonly known as stable fly. It is often mistaken for buffalo fly and has a number of traits in common with this pest.

Stable fly feed on the blood of animals and are not really selective - they will feed off anything with blood. However, unlike buffalo fly, this fly feeds for between 2 and 5 minutes and then flies off to laze in the sun. They can be found sitting on fence posts, walls etc generally not far from a food source.

Like buffalo fly, stable fly cause considerable distress to livestock and their feeding habits can lead to anemia, weight loss and reduced milk production. Unlike buffalo fly which breed in livestock dung these pests breed in all kinds of waste including decaying silage, dung and compost.

There are a few ways to tell exactly what fly you are dealing with. Stable fly generally land on the backs of cattle but then settle on the outside of the forelegs, whereas buffalo fly tend to favour the upper body including the head and brisket.

Stable fly are also slightly bigger and their abdomen is grey with black spots and a stripe. Buffalo fly have a brown abdomen with one dark stripe. Just to thoroughly confuse the issue, both bush and house flies have a yellow abdomen with dorsal gray and black marks.

While it is a bit late in the season to talk about these flies it doesn't hurt to be prepared. If you have a fly problem and can't identify the species please bring a specimen to Pam Wilson, The Project Officer at the Glen Innes Office of the Northern New England Rural Lands Protection Board.

*Thanks to Lex Turner, QLD DPI, for much of this information and the sketch of the stable fly.*



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**UP AND COMING EVENTS**

*Winter - and time for us all to slow down  
until the weather breaks!*

*However, if you would like to go somewhere  
warmer there's always Primex Field Days at  
Casino on the 14th, 15th and 16th June.*

*See you there!*

*It is not too early to be thinking about field  
Days for the coming Spring. Contact the  
Project Officer.*



Natural Heritage Trust  
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**BAA, BAA BLACK SHEEP, have you any worms?**

The MLA supported Super PIRD project has been put on hold until next Spring when we hope to kick start it again - with some refinements.

As this is the first project of its type we did expect some problems and, as usual, we weren't disappointed. We did several different preliminary trials aimed at ensuring we were recovering all the larvae from the trial pots (think WD 40\*) and by the start date in January we were certain that we could re-capture the larvae.

So, with this little problem solved, we seeded trial pots (both ours and those of landholder Co-operators) with 50 grams of sheep dung infected with up to 26,600 eggs per gram of *haemonchus contortus* (Barber's Pole Worm). Easy! We then seeded some pots with a known number of dung beetles, allowed natural populations to enter others and excluded beetles from the controls. Dung burial was estimated after 5 days and was recorded as being anywhere from 0 to 85%. So far, so good.

Then disaster struck (possibly). Leo Le Jambre (our parasitologist from Chiswick) called to say he had recovered no larvae from the first samples. Perhaps this was good and all the larvae were at the bottom of the pots? This seemed unlikely so we continued to trial some rather unorthodox methods of extracting larvae until we finally had to admit they simply weren't there (or we couldn't catch them).

We then emptied the pots and found brood balls in a number of them and shredded dung pellets in others. We sent samples to Leo and he found viable larvae in these samples. Great stuff we thought - except that he recovered less than 1% of the larvae we should have had.

The results so far? We know that some worm eggs can survive burial and develop into larvae. What we still don't know is what percentage and whether the survivors can migrate through soil to the surface. Hopefully we can answer these questions in the next attempt.

*\* For those of you not familiar with the WD 40 story. WD 40 stands for Water Displacement, attempt 40. Norm Larsen worked for Rocket Chemical Company and this was his 40th attempt to develop a lubricant/corrosion protectant for use in electrical circuitry, and eventually, space ships. So, unlike our humble efforts to build larval recovery equipment, it really was rocket science. Then again he was a rocket scientist!*