

Establishing Dung Beetle Colonies

The last in our series on Dung Beetles, brought to us courtesy of the Lucyvale Dung Beetle Project.

Before ordering a colony of dung beetles and attempting to establish them on your property, find out which species of beetles reside successfully in the district. Check with suppliers, the local agricultural department and your neighbour and perhaps even the beetles themselves as if your neighbours have them, it won't be long before they fly over the fence and take up residence on your property.

Take note of which months lack dung beetle activity in your area then locate a supplier (try the internet) and ask them to climate match beetle species for those months. We paid around \$400 for a colony of 1400 beetles. From our supplier, colonies of the larger species usually number around 1000, and the smaller species, 1400 to 1500 beetles.

Beetles are harvested when they reach sexual maturity. Therefore you won't receive a shipment of autumn active beetles during spring as they are not sexually active then. They are only harvested, consigned and released during the period when they are active.

The arrival of your colony is dependent on seasonal conditions as soil moisture and temperature determine when different species

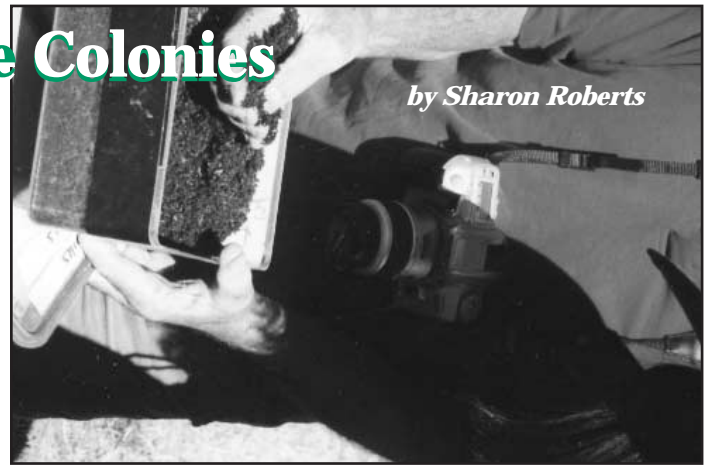
become active. We were unable to obtain winter active beetles this year because they were in short supply due to drought.

A dung beetle colony is transported in a special container that allows the beetles to breathe, whilst preventing them from escaping. One of the farmers in our beef group temporarily put some new beetles into a poly bag. Within minutes, they were burrowing through the walls of the bag and buzzing around inside our local hall! Beetles are protected in transit by burrowing into a weed-free medium such as peat moss inside their container. No dirt or manure is included in the container with the beetles and it doesn't smell unpleasant.

New colonies should be released as soon as possible upon receipt. Don't place the container near extremes of temperature - \$10,000 worth of beetles recently perished when a baggage handler stacked them beside a heater!

Select a small area for release, roughly 100 metres x 100 metres where there is fresh manure. If you have a large property, make sure the release site will have livestock grazing on it at the same time next year.

Don't be tempted to split the colony. The success of the release depends on next year's hatchlings being able to find a mate. If you are sharing the cost of a colony with a neighbour, select a site on your boundary and



by Sharon Roberts

Dung Beetles are transported in a special container often filled with a weed-free medium such as peat moss which they can burrow into.

spread the beetles both sides of the fence but within a 100 metre x 100 metre area.

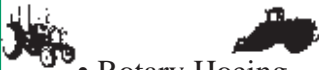
Take a handful of peat moss and beetles and place on top of a fresh pile of manure. Spread the entire colony over your release site in this manner. Many of the beetles will look like they're dead, but don't worry, they're only lying doggo. (Unless they've been cooked or frozen in transit!) Most will quickly dive into the dung to have a slurp of dinner before resuming their life cycle. Most of the females should already carry fertilised eggs and begin tunnelling, whilst others may still need to find a mate.

The biggest threats to the establishment of a new colony of dung beetles are drench chemicals and predators. (See previous article in August/September issue for beetle-friendly use of drenches).

Most species of introduced dung beetles prefer horse manure to cow manure. Being ruminants, cows have four stomachs and extract more protein from feed as it is processed four times. Horses are monogastrics, having only one stomach. The higher protein levels of horse manure can be fatal to a new colony of dung beetles if a farmer drenches his cows with a beetle friendly chemical, but forgets about his horse and doses it with a beetle toxic drench. The new beetles will zero in on their favourite food and your dollars are down the drain.

Foxes and birds enjoy a dung beetle banquet. Fox control measures are advisable and if you see a flock of Ibis landing near your release site, you may wish to be out there cracking a stockwhip or stationing a yapping dog nearby! 🌱

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Safe and Secure Fencing

A new concept in electric fencing has arrived in Australia. Electrobraid is a patented polyester fibre braid designed to be used with electric fence units. The braid can be combined with wooden or pvc post and rails or used as a stand alone three or four strand fence with wooden, steel, pipe or pvc uprights. When erecting as a portable fence, fibreglass posts can be used

Durable, with a 25 year guarantee, the Electrobraid requires fewer fence posts (approximately one fifth of the usual number) because of its strength. However, safety is not compromised as it remains very resilient and will allow bend and stretch if hit by a horse, then springing back into shape.

The beauty of this product is that it will not rust, rot, lose strength due to extreme weather such as sunlight or cold, or break as in a normal permanent fence installation.

The product is lightweight, making installation easy for anyone and maintenance is almost non-existent. Repairs can be made with a few basic hand tools. Components for attaching and fixing the braid to the uprights are simple and easy to use - various insulators for the post attachments, roller insulators for corner posts, and split-bolt connectors to splice two strands together and to make electrical connections are available, as well as other accessories to suit the Electrobraid fencing such as fence alerts, volt meters and energisers. Tensioning is done with a special straining tool to suit the braid.

Copper wire is used as the conductor in the braid, woven into the outer jacket in two opposing directions that cross three times for every 2.5 centimetres, allowing for bend and stretch with strength and durability. The conductivity of copper is 70 times more effective than steel, it's use in this product



The polyester fibre braid has copper wire woven through it for high conductivity

gives the braid a higher effectiveness in deterring horses, which ultimately will keep them safely within their own paddocks.

Electrobraid is available from Paramount Fencing, the people who do the PVC post and rail fencing (see ad on pg 16 and 17 of this issue).

Further information is available by phoning 03 8727 6244 or visiting the Paramount website www.paramountpvcproducts.com.au 🌱