



# Wallaby illegal releases: Do they stay and why are they released?

Bruce Warburton & Geoff Kaine  
Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research





Wallaby-free Aotearoa

# Ministry for Primary Industries

National Wallaby Eradication  
Programme

Tipu Mātoro



# Wallaby Species

Brushtail Rock

Swamp

Dama

Parma

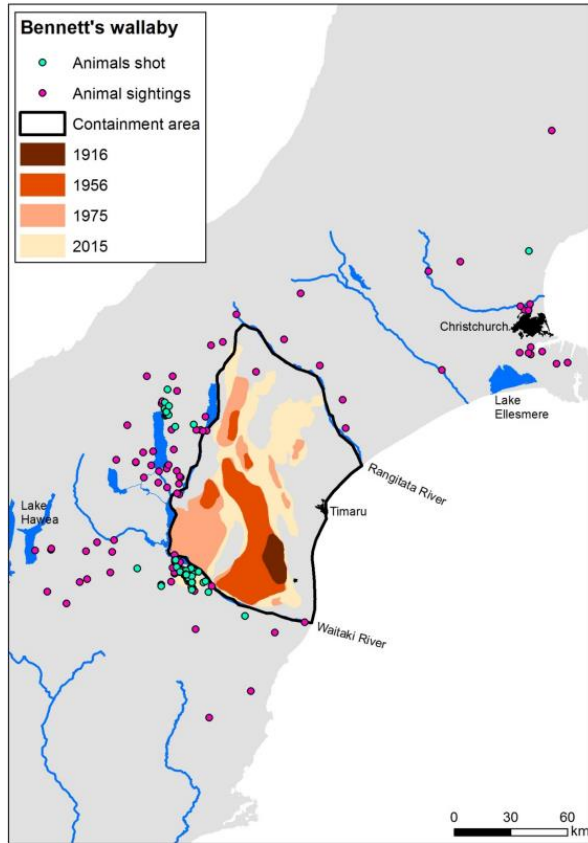
Bennett's



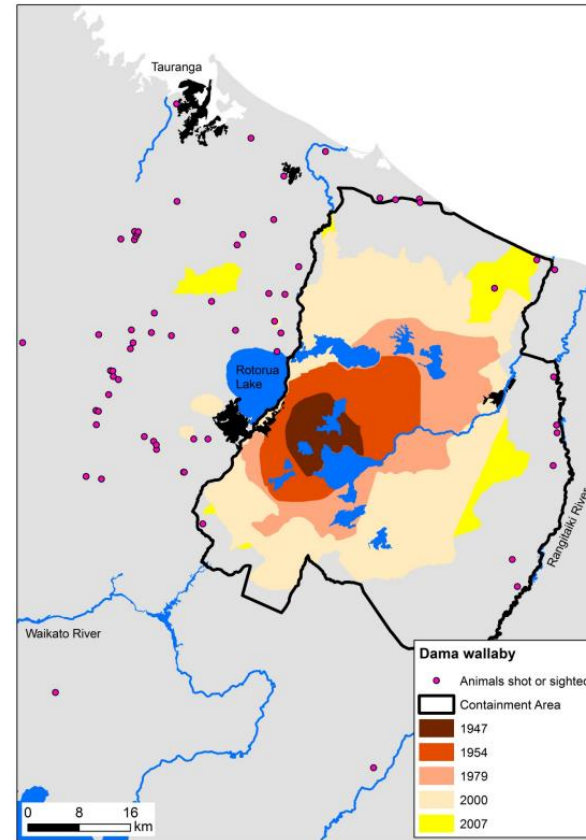
# Wallaby distribution and spread



## Bennett's



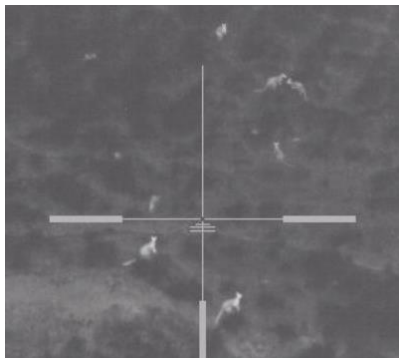
## Dama/Parma





# National Wallaby Eradication Programme Objective

- By 2025 wallabies are contained within designated containment areas
  - This involves:
    - eliminating outlier populations
    - reducing wallaby numbers within buffer areas inside containment, and
    - developing innovation in wallaby detection and control methods.



Pest Master



# Translocation of Bennett's wallabies – a pilot trial

To determine:

- If Bennett's wallabies that are translocated into an area with no other wallabies, do they stay at the release site or move away? (i.e. do they show high fidelity to their release site?).

Why?

- If wallabies are illegally released and there is a reported sighting, is it worth investing resources into searching for them?



# Collared wallabies

3 males and 3 females  
captured in ground-set nets

Vacectomies and  
ovariectomies

Satellite collars fitted

GPS fixes every 2hrs and  
uploaded via satellite every  
12hrs



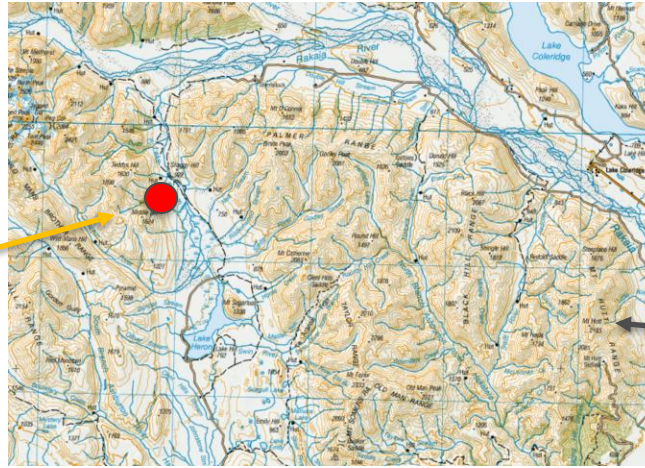
# Release sites

Male & female pair at each site (April)

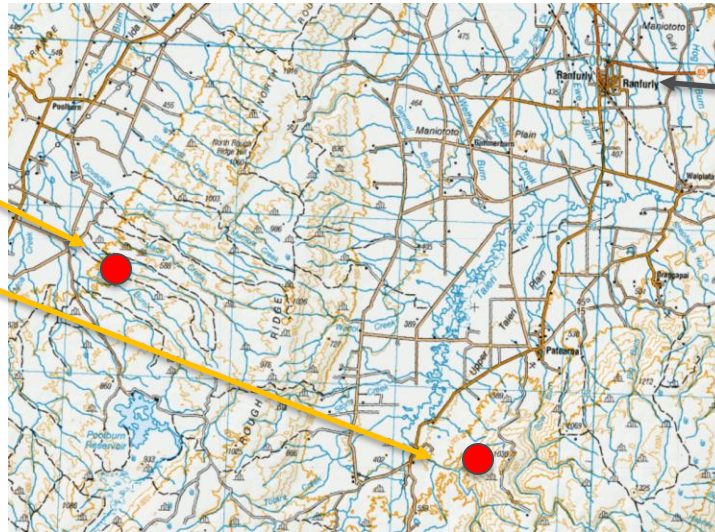
Lake Heron

Ida Valley

Patearoa



Mt Hutt



Ranfurly

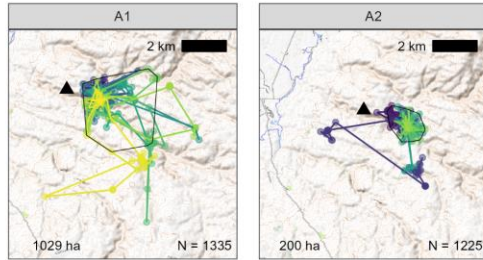




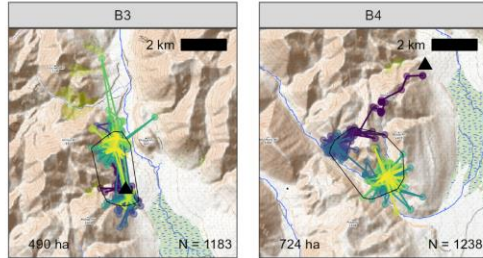
# Wallaby translocation: 5-months movement



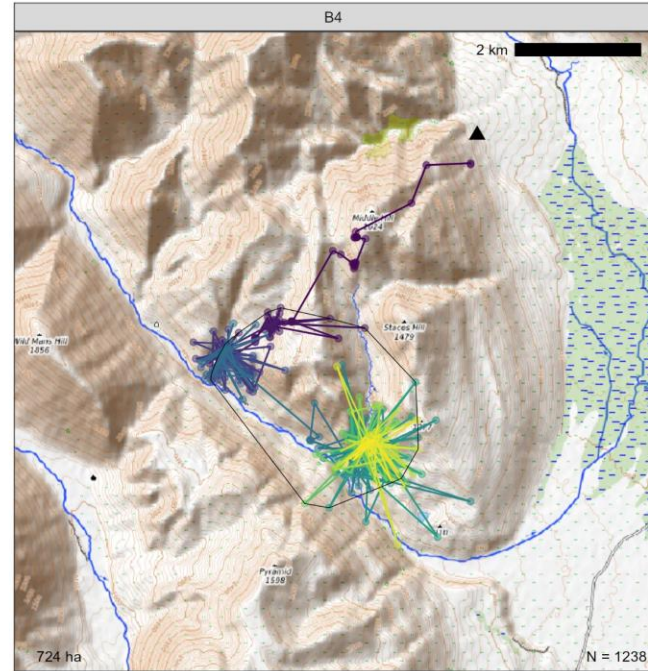
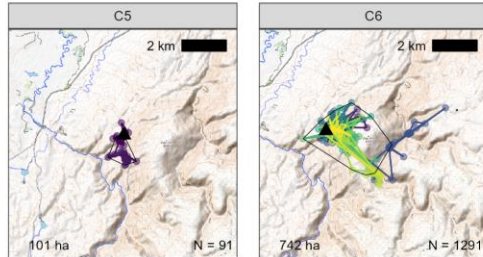
Ida Valley



Lake Heron



Patearoa



# Wallaby translocation: after 8 months

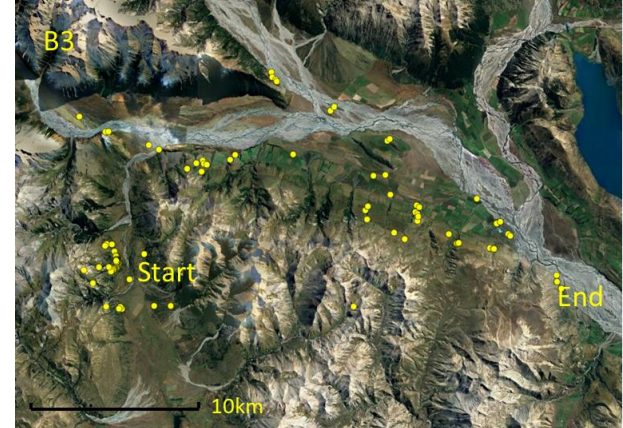
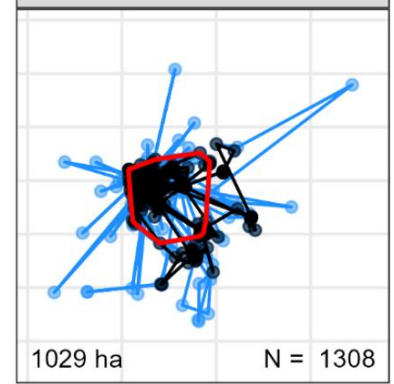


Date: 2023-10-13



# Summary results

- Mean daily movements <2.5km
- Maximum shift 40km
- All stayed at or close to release site for the first 5-6 months (April to Oct) and 3 of remaining 4 shifted in spring/summer – tentative evidence that wallabies may stay at release site during autumn/winter but shift in spring and summer
- Those that move are very difficult to locate and kill
- **So, why do people release them?**





# Why might people catch-and-release wallabies

## Methods:

- Literature review
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Survey of the public and stakeholders

## Findings from literature review and interviews



1. The illegal catch-and-release of wallabies is most likely motivated by a desire among hunters to improve recreational opportunities, together with a desire to take advantage of commercial opportunities in relation to hunting and the utilisation of wallaby meat.
2. There is a reasonable likelihood that some wallabies may have been raised as pets and subsequently released into the wild once they had matured and become difficult to manage. Hunters are the most likely source of pet wallabies.
3. There is a possibility that concerns about animal welfare, especially among animal rescuers, might motivate the illegal release of individuals to rehabilitated them.
4. The accidental release of wallabies from private zoos or petting farms appears unlikely, especially in the future, as these enterprises are tightly controlled through a licensing system that regulates the number of wallabies that can be kept, enclosure design, and the breeding and sourcing of replacement stock.

# Survey of the public and stakeholders

## Survey sample



Category	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Public	1000	83.1
Food processors	2	0.2
New Zealand Game Animal Council	55	4.6
Forest & Bird	18	1.5
NWP Stakeholders	55	4.6
Animal welfare	18	1.5
Wallaby permit holders	55	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>100.0</b>



## Key results for the public

- A small proportion of the public (6%) had a strongly favourable attitude towards catch and-release
- People tend to support catch-and-release if they have a strongly unfavourable attitude towards eradicating wallabies
- People have an unfavourable attitude towards eradicating wallabies if they believe:
  - Wallabies are economically and socially useful
  - Wallabies are less damaging than other pests like pigs and possums
  - Hunting helps control wallabies
  - Hunting wallabies is unsafe and costly
  - Recreational hunting is as effective as government baiting in controlling wallabies



## Key results for hunters

- A small proportion of hunters (5%) had strongly favourable attitude towards catch-and-release.
- These hunters wished wallabies were in greater numbers and had a greater range.
- They believed that:
  - Wallabies were becoming more difficult to find (and so hunting was becoming unsafe and costly)
  - Recreational hunting was as effective as government programmes in controlling wallabies
  - Hunting is as effective as poison baiting in controlling wallabies
  - Wallabies are economically useful
  - Wallabies are not as environmentally damaging as other invasive pests such as pigs and possums



# Suggestions to increase reporting and reduce catch-and-release



1. Marketing campaign focussing on the damage wallabies do to farms and the environment to encourage reporting
2. Marketing campaign focussing on catch-and-release as improper hunting behaviour
3. Programme linking farmers and hunters to reduce time and effort finding wallabies to hunt
4. Allow pet wallabies to be released into containment areas



# Report your wallaby sightings - thanks

## Acknowledgements

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- *Manaaki Whenua staff:* Jane Arrow, Leigh Elmers, Sam Brown, Luke Sutton, Grant Morriss, Amy Whitehead

