

In 1859, an Australian farmer released 24 wild European rabbits from England on his ranch. “A few rabbits” he said, “could do little harm and might provide a touch of home, in addition to a spot of hunting.” Seven years later, he and his friends shot 14,253 rabbits. In ten years, more than 2 million rabbits were hunted on that farm alone! But hunters’ glee turned into nationwide despair. That “touch of home” was soon covering the countryside like a great gray blanket.

The millions of rabbits devoured native plants and pushed native animals to near extinction. They made life miserable for sheep and cattle ranchers. These cute, fuzzy creatures weren’t problem in England.

Answer to the best of your ability

1. Why do you think the rabbits turned into a plague in Australia? Could they be stopped? How?
2. What kind of growth does the rabbit population exhibit in Australia? Why does this present a problem?
3. What factors do you think would limit the size of the rabbit population (what can be done)?
4. Populations of wildcats and foxes have been introduced into Australia. They have come to depend on the rabbits as prey. What effect do you think these

animals are having on the rabbit population? How do you think the wildcat and fox population would be affected if the rabbit population crashed?

5. Is it a good idea to introduce a non-native species into an ecosystem? why?