

“ABC Radio Innovations”

Interview by Desley Blanch

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Night Predator Deterrent - Foxlights

Foxes deterred by the night time scarecrow

Website: <http://www.abc.net.au/ra/innovations/stories/s2689045.htm>

TRANSCRIPT :

DESLEY BLANCH: Ian Whalan is a third generation sheep farmer who four years ago, came up with the idea of using lights near lambing ewes to deter foxes from killing the new-born lambs. Foxlights - the night predator deterrent is a series of lights inside the device to give the impression of human movement at night time in order to keep foxes away from lambs, goats, free-range hens and other vulnerable animals.

Ian Whalan talks to us from Sydney, and describes the difficulties farmers have in keeping foxes from attacking and killing newborn lambs.

IAN WHALAN: Using the same principle as what most other farmers do, that is with Ten-Eighty poison bait, which you put out just prior to lambing, some night shooting with a spot light to try and get whatever numbers you can but you can never catch up with all animals and foxes are renowned for traveling quite large distances and so even though you might put baits on your own property, you never clean them all up. There is quite a problem with numbers increasing continually.

DESLEY BLANCH: And what made you think of lights as a workable deterrent for foxes? I mean I just have this image of a cold night and you are sick of standing out there guarding your flock and you saw the light so to speak.

IAN WHALAN: No, in fact it was a little different. I think I was lying in a warm bed thinking that I was very lazy and I should be outside guarding my lambs. And the idea came to me from the fact that well, back in the old days, shepherds used to live with their sheep and camp with their sheep, at night time in particular and so I thought well how can you go about in putting that presence in the paddock and I thought well, with a light, if I could have some form of moving light then be able to give the perception of somebody wandering around through the paddock of a night time.

DESLEY BLANCH: So okay, a word picture of the device. What size is it for instance?

IAN WHALAN: Twenty centimeters tall, which is about 6 inches by around about 5 to 6 inches wide, designed to sit on top of a star picket or a steel post.

DESLEY BLANCH: Out in the paddock somewhere on a corner or something?

IAN WHALAN: Yeah that's right. Sheep will always go to a high ground to camp, so you tend to concentrate them more so around the camp and a couple out on the perimeters looking for the higher ground so that you can get maximum visibility. They work a little bit like scarecrows.

DESLEY BLANCH: So how is it powered and how many hours do you get from that power source?

IAN WHALAN: It's powered from a standard 6-volt square battery. Your running time would be anywhere between say three to six months. Now there is such a variance there, because in wintertime your nights are a lot longer than summer time. So if you are running them of a winter time, you would not get as long in flashing power.

DESLEY BLANCH: You're not running around switching them on though as it turns dark?

IAN WHALAN: No, no indeed that's another thing, I said laziness is a big key on this. Ah, no there is a light sensor inside them. As the sun goes down and it darkens off, they will start flashing just before dark and same thing when the sun rises.

DESLEY BLANCH: And they would need to be waterproof because there's all sorts of weather?

IAN WHALAN: Indeed.

DESLEY BLANCH: So how many devices would you need for a paddock or a field?

IAN WHALAN: Well, it varies greatly depending on the terrain you may have. If you've got very hilly country or very heavily timbered country, you would need more light. For example, in a paddock that I might have which I would call hilly country but yet basically cleared, I can use five lights to protect

