Use of Wombat Gates by Wombats and Other Mammals on a Farm

Biodiversity Monitoring Section
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Background

Exclusion fences are installed by landowners or land managers for a range of reasons including protection of agricultural assets and vulnerable wildlife populations. Common wombats (*Vombatus ursinus*) are capable of breaching most exclusion fences established in their territories and "wombat gates" are promoted as a method to reduce their impact on exclusion fences.

We have investigated the effectiveness of wombat gates to allow passage of wombats whilst excluding other browsing mammals on a 300 ha property 'Swanmoor' on the Tasman Peninsula. The landholder erected wallaby-proof fences with a 30 cm apron to exclude Bennett's wallabies (*Macropus rufogriseus*) and rufous-bellied pademelons (*Thylogale billardierii*). Wombats were allowed to breach the fences for a period of approximately three months before the gates were installed at the breach locations. The gates were tied open for two weeks to allow wombats to become accustomed to them.

The use of 17 wombat gates by mammals was monitored for two weeks using cameras. Four mammal species were recorded pushing open and passing through the gates. The wombat was the most common species passing through the 17 gates (613 passes, 94% of passes) followed by the rufous-bellied pademelon (33 passes), Bennett's wallaby (4 passes) and Tasmanian devil (2 passes). Many Bennett's wallabies and rufous-bellied pademelons were observed visiting the gates but rarely passed through compared with wombats (Fig. 1).

Five instances were observed where an adult female wombat passed through the gate but her young at foot did not traverse through the gate at the same time and the two became separated either side of the gate. Reviewing video footage revealed on one occasion that the two re-joined after 30 seconds. The final outcome for the other four separation instances was unknown. Eight instances were also observed of both mother and young-at-foot passing through the gates together.

Wombat gate

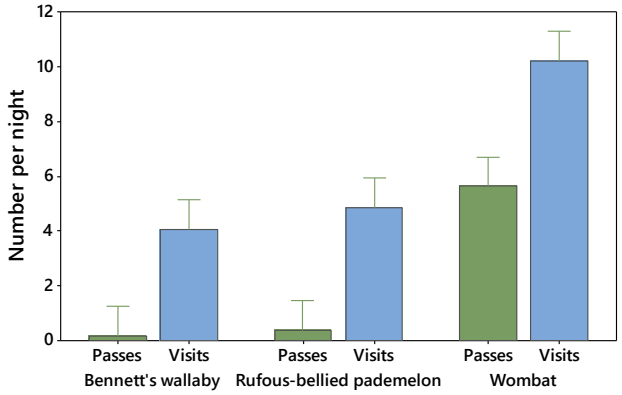

Fig. 1 The number of times wombats, wallabies and pademelons visited the gates per night compared with the number of times they passed through the gates per night.

Outcomes

The wombat gates were effective in providing passage for wombats and restricting passage by browsing macropods ultimately reducing damage to fences. We suggest that the number of macropods using wombat gates could be further reduced if the gates had a heavier base.

The full report is available on the DPIPWE website

http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/conservation/publications-forms-and-permits/publications/nature-conservation-report-series