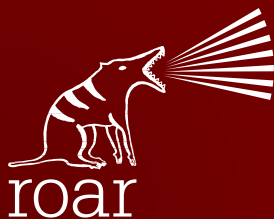




# OPERATION 'THUMPER'

April 2011. Roar Film goes to Macquarie Island with Parks Tasmania's intrepid rangers, dog trainers and chopper pilots as they wage war on feral rabbits.

Proposal for a one hour documentary - November 2010



engageinteracteducate

steve@roarfilm.com.au

Ph: 03 6224 5222

# Operation 'Thumper'

## Synopsis

Rabbits are cute and cuddly, and a damned pest since they were introduced to Australia. By the 1950s there were 600 million of them before the myxoma virus cut the rabbit population to around 100 million.

On World Heritage Macquarie Island, half way between Tasmania and Antarctica, the rabbits are out of control. Sealers brought the rabbits to the island in the 1870s and they used to be contained by a feral cat population and spreading the myxoma virus twice a year. But now the cats have been eradicated and a rabbit population resistant to the virus is exploding. Entire hillsides are collapsing, destroying rookeries and the breeding places of millions of seabirds.

Operation 'Thumper' follows the next season of the Macquarie Island pest eradication project run by Parks Tas. From March to August it involves many hours of training precision to ready for six weeks of helicopter baiting to cover every part of this 34k Island. The baiting is followed by six weeks of dog handlers with trained Spaniels and Labradors digging out the last remaining bunnies. This project could be a world first, eradicating a large isolated island of all feral species. It is also controversial because many seabirds will inevitably die. But still the Tasmanian and Australian Governments have jointly backed this \$24 million project. The stakes are high, Macquarie Island is designated by UNESCO as an International Biosphere Reserve and the rabbit plague is threatening to destroy it.

The Island is at the meeting point of the cold polar water to the south and the warmer sub Antarctic water to the north and the only place on earth made entirely of oceanic crust and rocks formed deep beneath the seabed. It is a home to 25 bird species, including four penguin species. Seals, including the world's largest species, the elephant seal, also haul out on the beaches for breeding. It is also home to two rangers working at the Australian Government Research Station who manage field teams of scientists arriving on the Aurora Australis along with the ten tourist ships that now visit this isolated spot in the Southern ocean every summer.

In Autumn 2011, it's a make or break effort for Keith Springer and his highly drilled team. Keith has spent all his working life in the most remote places in the Southern Ocean. He has worked for the New Zealand Antarctic Program as program support manager, coordinating the field support for field teams working from Scott Base. He led the cat eradication team on Macquarie Island in 2000 for the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, and returned there as a ranger in 2005. He is quite a character and passionately dedicated to saving Macca (as locals call it).

Keith is bringing together expert helicopter pilots from the mountains of New Zealand's South Island, dog trainers from Tasmania and New Zealand led by the irrepressible Steve Austin and specialist 'foot soldiers', marine and animal biologists, wildlife officers and other Antarctic specialists. The first contingent will leave in April and spend six weeks baiting. In August the dog teams will arrive with 14 dogs (Labradors and Springer Spaniels). Their task will be to eliminate any rabbits not killed in the baiting program.

Roar Film has secured full access to observe the team throughout its planning and operational period with berths on both the baiting and dog expeditions. Roar will have access to the team and team leaders right through the planning period, three-day voyage and 6-week expedition

Parks Tasmania acknowledge that the success of this film will require complete open access to the entire process and have agreed to this. Parks have also confirmed access to broadcast quality footage shot over the last fifteen years since the eradication program began.

Roar plan to start in March following the chopper teams as they train for the expedition. This is flying at its most extreme... Macquarie Island routinely serves up some of the wildest weather on the planet and the pilots must fly tight grids across rugged terrain. There's no margin for error.

We'll cover the dog training in Tas and NZ. Steve Austin has trained bomb disposal dogs and customs sniffer dogs over many years. It is his job to ready the dog expedition teams. This film is a unique opportunity to observe a vital conservation program in one of the most extreme and dangerous environments on earth.

Roar is currently in development on an 'Animals Out of Place' series about animals introduced that have now run wild. We will be following the eradication projects dealing with feral camels in the Northern Territory and wild dogs in Eastern Victoria.