



Setting the scene

Rabbits are often shown as cute and mischievous characters in children’s books, movies and television. Easter is celebrated each year with the arrival of the Easter bunny to celebrate an important religious festival.

Rabbits are also recognised as a major environmental and agricultural pest. Farmers regard rabbits as a serious pest which can reduce their crop production.

Rabbits also compete with many native animals for food and shelter and damage native plants.

Is the rabbit a friend or a nasty pest?

What to do

Read the following statements carefully.

Each person has an opinion about rabbits based on their own experience with them.

Describe the feelings each person has for rabbits and why rabbits make them feel this way.

Farmer

*Rabbits eat my crops and dig warrens all over my property.
They overgraze my paddocks and leave no food for my sheep or cattle.
I would like to blast every last one with my shot gun!*

Describe this person’s feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Child

*I love my pet rabbit.
He is cute and cuddly.
The Easter bunny brings me lots of chocolate at Easter.*

Describe this person’s feelings. Why do they feel this way?

National Parks and Wildlife Officer

*Rabbits compete with native animals for food and shelter.
They disturb fragile environments and graze on endangered plants.
Rabbits do not belong in national parks.*

Describe this person’s feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Commerical Harvester

*I make money from hunting wild rabbits and selling the meat to restaurants.
Wild rabbit meat can even be exported overseas as a sought after game meat.
If there are no wild rabbits to harvest I would be out of a job.*

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Chef

*Rabbit meat is a cheap alternative to lamb.
My customers love to eat my prize winning rabbit pie.
Please leave a few rabbits out there so I can continue to buy them from the commercial harvester.*

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Akubra Hat Maker

*We make our hats from wild rabbit fur.
At the 2000 Olympics the Australian team wore our hats for the world to see.
If there were no rabbits left we would not be able to make our famous hats and all of our staff would be out of a job.*

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Scientist

*Rabbits provide research opportunities.
I'm employed by the government to find a way to rid Australia of rabbits.*

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Garden Market Producer

*Rabbits eat my vegetables so I have less to sell at the market.
I had to spend extra money to build a rabbit proof fence around my vegetable garden.
I hate rabbits because they cost my small business money.*

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

Aboriginal Elder in a remote community

Rabbits save the community money. We eat rabbit meat instead of buying expensive lamb or beef.

In times of drought rabbits are a good source of fresh food.

The community can also make some money by selling rabbit skins to tourists.

Describe this person's feelings. Why do they feel this way?

What to do next

Describe your own personal feelings towards rabbits.

Answer the following question:

Should the Easter bunny be replaced by an Australian animal to celebrate Easter?

Explain why you feel this way.

FERAL FACT

The first rabbits arrived with the convicts on the First Fleet. But most of the credit for Australia's rabbit problem should go to Thomas Austin, who lived near Geelong in Victoria. On his weekends in England, he always shot rabbits and he just couldn't live happily in Australia without being able to hunt rabbits. So in 1859 he arranged for 24 rabbits to be sent to him from England.

The rabbits quickly adapted to Australian conditions and soon Thomas Austin had more than enough rabbits to point his gun at. In 1866 it was reported in a Victorian newspaper that Thomas Austin killed 14,253 rabbits on his property.

Did you know that an Akubra hat uses 8-13 rabbit skins? Each year the Akubra company uses about 360,000 rabbit skins to make about 40,000 hats which are sold all over the world.

