

## **MOUSE PLAGUE WREAKS HAVOC ACROSS PARTS OF NSW, FARMERS FEAR FOR CROPS**

ABC Newcastle

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A "carpet" of mice has blanketed parts of New South Wales, with farmers and townspeople working tirelessly to keep the rodents at bay.

Key points:

- Reports from around NSW confirm there has been an explosion in mice numbers since the rain stopped
- Householders report mice are infesting homes and eating through electrical wiring
- Farmers says the plague was on par with a devastating mouse outbreak around a decade ago

The mouse population has been on the rise in Merriwa in the Upper Hunter, extending to Tamworth and Moree in New England and into Queensland.

Mice start breeding at six weeks of age and can have a litter every 21 days after that, meaning a pair of mice can give rise to 500 offspring in a season.

The explosion in rodent numbers has led to a shortage of baits and mouse traps for people trying to deal with the infestation.

James Constable, a volunteer lawnmower at the Merriwa racecourse, said rodents lay low in the wet, but now that it was drier, they were everywhere.

"It was a carpet of mice because they were running everywhere trying to get away from the mower. I don't think I have seen them this bad," he said.

Mice are on the march in their thousands across cropping country in NSW and QLD. *(Supplied: CSIRO)*

"I have seen an old film where you see mice piling up on each other to try and get away from you, and that's what it was like when I was at the racecourse."

Another Merriwa local, Edward Berrier, said he had been catching 40 mice a night.

"I have caught around 600 in the last couple of months, and it got that bad after the first 200, that I decided to dig three pits so far and am about to dig a fourth. "

Edward Berrier from Merriwa said he had to dig mouse burial pits after his bins overflowed with carcasses. *(Supplied: Edward Berrier)*

Making a meal of appliances

Another Merriwa resident, Emma Henderson, said mice and rats had destroyed her appliances and whitegoods.

"They [mice] had made a nest around the oven and to make it more comfy they pulled all the insulation from around the elements of the oven, which was causing my oven to overheat and trip power," she said.

"Then I pulled the oven out with my son, and we found their little nest and a whole heap of insulation down the back of the wall, so I lost my oven, and the smell, oh the smell."

Emma Henderson said mice had severed power cords, destroying appliances and whitegoods. *(Supplied: Emma Henderson)*

She said the freezer was next.

"The power was still tripping, and so I turned off all my power points trying to pinpoint what it was, and it was chest freezer, they had got into the wires and chewed all the wires and so there were wires shorting, which was tripping my power."

She said her juicer and air fryer also had power cords severed and she was left with a damage bill of more than \$1,000.

Bec Beeney said she had laid sticky traps at her back door to stop mice entering her home and in one night alone caught nearly 90 rodents.

Bec Beeney said she had caught scores of mice in sticky traps laid at her back door. *(Supplied: Bec Beeney)*

A cleaner at a local pub, Karen Gumb, said mice had eaten anything not stored in plastic tubs.

"We have lost about 40 packets of chips and pork crackle that we had stored at the pub," she said.

"We have had to super clean every day and make sure every surface is wiped down and everything is in lock-tight containers in the kitchen. It's just madness."

Farmers on alert

Farmers have been on alert across New South Wales, trying to stop mice from destroying their crops.

In the state's Mid North Coast town of Bobin, cattle farmer Ross Elphick from Dingo Bend Angus said he had hundreds of mice running amok on his property.

"They eat any stored feed or grain in our sheds. It's been like that for about two months.

"You just can't buy any rat baits. I believe the local produce stores are out till about March.