

## **'Disturbing' footage of 1984 mouse plague re-emerges as new mice invasion sweeps NSW and Queensland**

By Amelia Bernasconi

Posted Friday 5 February 2021 at 3:05am

A video from the 1980s has those living through the eastern states' current mouse plague twitchy about the 2021 pest invasion worsening if weather conditions continue.

Key points:

- A 1980s news story of a NSW mouse plague is gaining traction on social media as viewers compare it with a current infestation
- Experts say they cannot rule out mouse numbers growing, as the weather stays in their favour
- Mice are continuing to destroy summer crops as farmers recover from the drought

John Goldsmith was a cropping farmer at Mullaley in north-west New South Wales during the "worst plague" he had ever endured, in 1984.

It was so bad the locals even renamed the road, connecting Mullaley and nearby Gunnedah, to the "felt highway".

"The mice were incredible," Mr Goldsmith said.

"They'd get in silos and storage and just make a mess of it, eat it. [They] would literally clean up ahead of the header.

"We'd go to bed at night and put a mouse trap in the kitchen, and you'd wake up with probably three or four mice dead in the one trap!

"The smell through the house was absolutely foul; it was a time you'd want to forget."

But those memories have stayed with the now-retired farmer who restored the 1984 Channel 7 news clip and shared it to the Facebook page of his video restoration business.

At the time, Mr Goldsmith sought publicity from the media in the hopes of putting pressure on government to help the situation, but never did he think the video would gain traction decades later.

The video was originally shared to social media more than four years ago but in recent days it resurfaced, being watched by thousands, shocked by the extent of the 1980s mouse outbreak.

"It's suddenly up to about [60,000 views], most of it just lately," he said.

"I think people are just in awe of what really happened."

Mouse problem likely to worsen

Experts say the current plague, which has blanketed parts of NSW and Queensland, could worsen, with a significant number of females still breeding, which is unseasonal.

"Normally we'd expect to see mice start breeding in the spring and then as the summer dries out ... and food starts to deplete, they stop breeding ... and then they decline in numbers through the autumn and winter," CSIRO Research Officer Steve Henry said.

"This year what we think will probably happen is they'll continue to breed if climatic conditions remain favourable."

Mice can breed from just six weeks old and females can have a litter of six to 10 pups every 20-odd days.

"One hundred mice can multiply to 600 mice after one round of breeding — after two rounds of breeding, they're starting through the roof," Mr Henry said.

"The chances of mice to continue to breed in the autumn and causing trouble for the sowing of the winter crop are quite significant."