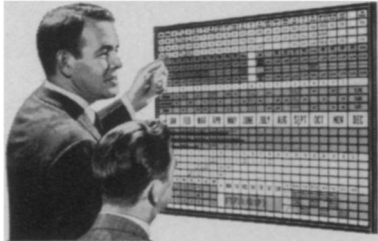


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FROM AUSTRALIA

# Murder bonus paid on wombats

## Australian conservationists campaign against professional scalpers

Last year 7,000 wombats were trapped and clubbed to death in Victoria for a dollar scalp bounty.

The state government pays the money for the slaughter of the wombats, which make lovable pets; once befriended they remain loyal for life.

The general manager of the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association, John Boundy, recently claimed that wombats were beyond the control of the average landholder.

One member of the Victorian Parliament, B. J. Evans, told delegates at the Victorian Country Party's annual conference that he hopes the minister for lands would not succumb to pressure from fauna and wildlife protection societies. "If the bounty were removed,



Wombat: lovable nuisance

as the minister for lands has indicated, wombats would eventually force East Gippsland farmers off their properties," he said.

The wombat is closely related to the koala. The koala is an arboreal wombat that took to the gum trees several million years ago.

Koalas, of course, cause no trouble to man whatever. Nevertheless in 1927, nearly 600,000 of them were slaughtered in Queensland for their pelts alone; the koala population has never recovered.



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Wombats are vegetarians; they do not attack crops, but they do damage fences. Built slightly like a bulldozer both front and back, they break through fences if the barriers stand in their instinctive rights-of-way.

Broken fences let in ravenous rabbits, and a busy farmer is justifiably annoyed if he has to mend fences broken by wombats. But wombats have never been sufficiently numerous to endanger



Baby wombat—a dollar a scalp.

the livelihood of country folk, as rabbits or prickly pear do.

Nobody knows the total wombat population of Victoria. It is estimated that between 500,000 and 2 million live in the heavily timbered hills. Bonus hunters kill between 6,000 and 8,000 wombats every year.

Conservationists have launched a campaign against the professional scalpers who go into the forests, set traps and then return later to club the mangled victims.

The scalpers get a dollar from the Government in Melbourne, but because fewer than one percent of the total population is taken, they make little impact in the wombat numbers.

All the scalpers do, assert the conservationists, is to waste public money and give the state of Victoria a bad reputation at home and overseas.

Conservationists are pressing for the abolition of the bounty system, and for the expenditure of the money on a scientific work on the biology of the wombat.

Many say that wombats remain within a mile of their burrows. If so, it is economical only to destroy them within a mile of a farmer's fence.

It would be simpler to fumigate burrows and painlessly eliminate whole families in the areas where they are proved to be pests.

Conservationists want the wombat to be declared a protected animal and to have permits issued for its destruction only in areas where it is a pest.

William A. Scholes

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