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Rodent problem down under



Mice. They're everywhere. Clearly there's a [mouse](#) plague in Australia and some believe that this surface infestation has reached biblical proportions.



Millions of these creatures are scurrying across the southeastern part of the country and have already consumed close to a billion dollars worth of crops. The relentless rodents are chewing through barns, homes and even cars; a rural prison in New South Wales Australia was recently evacuated after these critters bit their way through the ceiling tiles and wiring. The stench of their dead bodies accumulating in wall cavities is unbearable. As their dead bodies begin to decompose, another unwelcome problem follows: [mites](#). Inmates and staff are relocated as the facility's purged of the problem.

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Actually, there was a time when Australia had few if any mice. However, this was before the British convict ships arrived at some point during the 18th century that carried both prisoners and mice. Since then, the mice have spread and rapidly as a female mouse is capable of bearing a monthly litter of new borns. But why now? Heavy rainfall is one of the reasons.

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Australia's heightened precipitation levels allowed the grain growers residing there to plant their largest crops on record. An abundant food source, combined with a population reduction of slower-breeding predators stemming from droughts and destructive bush fires over the last couple of years, have created the ideal climate for a mass mice breeding season.



Australian farmers are frustrated and are attempting to address the mouse breeding problem in creative ways. How so? They are baiting their crop fields with the poison: [zinc phosphide](#), an expensive and time consuming treatment that works but leaves a field of rotting mouse corpses that must be disposed.

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Mice aren't just in the fields. They're in the house. Farmers' families awake in pain to discover mice chewing on their toes. Some contract the bacterial infection: [leptospirosis](#); which, if not treated, may cause kidney failure and even meningitis. How are family members of Australian farmers coping with this unpleasant dilemma and protecting themselves? Some are placing legs of the beds in water buckets and away from nearby dressers; where mice can jump onto the bed. While an extreme preventive measure, it can discourage the rodents from climbing into the bed in the middle of the night.



Farmers aren't the only ones affected by the mouse epidemic. Fisherman during hauls have found something somewhat unsettling in the stomachs of freshwater murray cod, which tends to regurgitate as they are brought aboard fishing boats. What are they vomiting? Partially digested mice! Rebounding fish population levels after the drought is not discouraging.

But how these fish are rebounding and what they're eating is troubling, especially for residents with heavy seafood diets.

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Though, as the winter season gets underway in Australia, it should slow mice population growth at least in the short term. It is a reprieve until spring crops ripen next season. Until then, there is some time to brainstorm for creative solutions. [Bromadiolone](#) (aka: mouse napalm) simply isn't a viable alternative, at least according to Australia's federal government, as the side effects are prohibitive. It would kill too much native wildlife; trading one problem for another is counterintuitive.



Suggestions? A few natural solutions to this problem could include the rapid breeding and importing of natural predators (birds of prey, native carnivores, snakes and large lizards), the arrival of some fatal rodent disease, mice food shortages and a cold streak of weather inconducive to mice breeding.

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