

# Dung Beetles buzzing at Marlborough

Local graziers, Stewart and Glenda Jones of "Foresthme", Marlborough have seen a huge increase in dung beetle activity in the past three months, with the air a buzz in the early evenings. The Jones family have been monitoring dung beetle activity for the past

in a 100 day period, due to irritation, not to mention hide damage and lesions.

Mr Jones commented that during the drought and during the extremely wet conditions, beetle numbers were reduced, but since the rain, the populations have recovered well to be able to reduce buffalo fly populations on most occasions. The beetles tend to follow the mobs of cattle around, but you can find dung beetles in nearly every pat when the conditions are right. The biggest problem we have is no dung burial in winter. In fact, we can usually tell when the beetles are burying fast, there is no major buffalo fly activity. Our only problem is that we have no dung beetles active during winter.

In the last week, we have identified at least four species burying dung (Onthophagus gazella, Onitos alexis, Liatongus militaris and Euoniticellus intermedius) and one species shredding or rolling the dung (Sisyphus rubrus) on Foresthme. Dung beetle specialist, Mick Alexander (Grazing BestPrac) has been monitoring dung beetle populations on Foresthme and other properties in the



Stewart Jones "Foresthme" Marlborough inspects various species of dung beetle.

twelve years and were co-operators in the 2002 - 2003 Queensland wide Agforce Dung Beetle monitoring project. Since the project was finalised, they have continued to have a keen eye and ear for monitoring beetle activity and its effect on stock. The importance of dung beetles was highlighted in a recent survey when DPI researcher, Lex Turner estimated a moderate buffalo fly activity can cause the loss of up to 15kg live weight gain



Mathew Alexander Yeppoon, getting a close up of the Onitos alexis beetle.

Marlborough region. He believed the activity was excellent for April and would continue until the first major frost of the winter, as long as the warm days continued. The only thing which can affect beetle populations this late in the season would be excessive and



Dung soup!

unwarranted chemical usage. Remember, if you have a good wet growing season, warm conditions and no dung beetles in your dung pats, something is definitely wrong. Mr Jones explained his strategy for managing fly populations late in the season would be to spray stock with an overall Supona treatment or use backrubbers.

Mr Alexander has been monitoring activity and species all around Queensland and into New South Wales in past months to ascertain the populations and activity after rain. There are eight species which will be found in the central Queensland region with two ball rolling species.

In the past few years, individual pats have been recorded to have over 5,900 individual introduced beetles with eight different species operating together. Last Sunday, the Foresthme pats contained only a few hundred this time around. Mr Alexander commented the tunnellers have been extremely active following this year's rain. However, we cannot let our guard down as late in the season is as critical as the first few weeks of summer. Dung beetle activity occurs mostly in the spring/summer period and is dictated by temperature and moisture, as well as stock management. Mr Alexander has been promoting the role of dung beetles at several "Technology of growing Grass" workshops in past months, it is important to do the right thing by your little environmental helpers.

Look after your humble 24/7 dung beetles and they will look after your land. And all you have to do is manage the drenches and chemical products (parasiticides) you treat your livestock with.

For more information, see advertisement below.



Mathew Alexander collecting cow dung for sampling.