

Field Trial : Romark Bait Station for Possum control (revised)

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Introduction

This report is a continuation of previous work carried out to find cheap and simple methods to reduce bait interference by non target species. Possums eating rat baits and ship rat interference with Feratox Bio bags.

Reducing bait interference by non target species reduces the overall bait quantity required and reduces the Toxin loading in our forests.

Stapling Feratox Bio bags to trees has become an accepted method to carry out possum control, they are a user friendly and convenient toxin to use. However research done several years ago shows that around 60% of Feratox Bio bags stapled to trees suffer from interference by ship rats. This reduces the Feratox available to possums and requires putting up more Feratox bags than required and hoping that possums get some of the bags before the rats.

The Romark Bait Station is intended for situations where one will be using smaller bait quantities, such as when using Feratox for possum control, it has a hinged lid intended to reduce rat interference with the bait.

In collaboration with Mike Goodwin a pest control colleague I carried out a field trial on the Romark bait stations. The purpose of the trial was to see if Possums could easily feed from the Romarks, and if they were up to the task of reducing bait interference by ship rats.

In this case the intended future use for the Romarks should they prove successful would be to run combined ship rat and possum control operations. Pindone for rats in the Philproof bait stations fitted with my possum Excluder baffles and Feratox pellets encased in balls of Ferafeed 213 in the Romark bait stations.

Both bait stations would be positioned close to each other as the smell of Pindone should help draw in possums as well as ship rats, but with the Excluder baffles fitted the possums can't feed on the Pindone, so should turn to the Ferafeed/Feratox in the Romarks.

Field Trial

The Romark Bait Stations were trialed at four sites in an area that gets No animal pest control so has good numbers of possums and ship rats. The Romark bait stations were positioned on trees at a distance of 300 - 320 mm from the ground to the front edge of the lid.

Philproof bait stations fitted with possum Excluder baffles were fixed to trees the standard 280 – 300 mm off the ground, and filled with 400 grams of a cinnamon lured prefeed. They were positioned about .5 to 1 metre from the Romarks.

Due to compliance issues No Feratox was used during the trial, I used 12 gram blocks of Ferafeed 213 out of Feratox prefeed bags. Three blocks of Ferafeed were used in each Romark bait station, one block was crumbled up in the bottom so that I could see how well a possum could clean up small pieces, and two whole blocks placed on top of the crumbled block.

Trail cameras were used to monitor animal behaviour at the bait stations. The bait stations were checked and re baited every three days. Each Romark bait station got three top ups of Ferafeed . With a Ferafeed only situation mostly it looked like the first possum on the scene fairly much cleaned out the bait station, which is the same as I saw during the suspended feratox trial. While checking and refilling bait stations only once during the trial did I find any Ferafeed left inside a Romark.

Results

During the trial ship rats took an active interest in the Romarks but none came close to lifting the lid yet alone getting any of the Ferafeed.

Most Possums worked out how to lift the lid and feed from the Romarks within a couple of minutes. The cut-out in the front of the bait station just below the lid overhang is an obvious place for a possum to put his nose to check out the bait smell, when he does they tend to lift the overhanging lid exposing the bait.

A few possums took a while to figure out how to get a feed, it's a bit hard to lift the lid with your nose when your paw is on top of the lid, or you are sitting on top of the lid, but they got there eventually. Taking a bit longer is no big deal as in previous trials I have watched possums take five minutes to figure out how to get bait out of a Philproof bait station (No baffles fitted).

I noticed that with the Romarks possum feeding behaviour appeared to change. Normally from a Philproof possums generally take a pellet out of the bait station with their mouth then hold it in their paws while they eat it.

With the Romarks the possums mostly ate the Ferafeed blocks completely from inside the bait station, they would have had to eat the crumbled block in place but should have been able to remove more whole blocks than I saw them do. This may have just been due to the relatively soft nature of the Ferafeed in February, and it maybe a different story during a normal August operation when the Ferafeed would be much firmer.



Possum Feeding from a Romark bait station

Philproof large Bait Station fitted with a possum Excluder baffle and rope on right. With the Excluder baffle fitted to the Philproof the possum can't feed there which gives him more reason to investigate the Romark station.

Discussion

From this short trial the Romark bait stations show real promise. Possums had no real problems feeding from the Romarks and during the trial ship rats didn't manage to interfere with the Ferafeed. While ship rats took an active interest in the Romark bait stations they appeared to be content feeding where there was an easy meal to be had at the Philproof bait stations.

While animal pest control operations vary dependent on the situation the two uses I see for the Romark bait stations are.

To run combined possum and ship rat control operations as covered in the Introduction. Being able to significantly reduce bait interference by non target species allows one to put out both rat and possum specific baits at the same time. This would reduce the number of required visits to each bait station, and reduces the quantity of toxin required.

While the Romarks were not trialed independent of the Philproof bait stations there is probably a useful role for them when carrying out possum only control near boundaries to help reduce reinvasion back into control areas.

In Follow up field work done after the trial what we found best was to use Feratox Bio Bags, Two bags per Romark. If you fold the ends of the Bags under the main body of Bio Bag and put one on top of each other. If you use this method then a possum can pull out one whole Bag but leave the second one for another possum. It also means he can eat the outside the Romark by holding it in his paws, which is more natural. The plastic Lining inside the Bio Bag also means they last longer.

When we tried pellet prefeed and feratox pellets the feratox tended to migrate down to the bottom so the possum would eat the prefeed but not always eat a feratox.

In field work we did find that in heavy squally weather water can sometimes get into the Romarks, so I recommend drilling a 4mm hole in each corner

The Romark bait stations are listed at \$4.90 incl gst. My first impressions were that the design didn't look that tough but I have video of an adult sitting on top of one, and possums chewing away at them, like they do with everything, but in this short trial they held up well.

This trial was somewhat different to my normal trials as it is not an idea that I developed together with other interested people, it is an off the shelf purchase. I do not have any association with Romark and hadn't seen them until Mike showed me one, they looked like what we were after so we trialed them.

Like I say with all my trials I have no backing to run larger trials so they are more about taking an idea and seeing if it shows promise. Before adopting any of these ideas you need to satisfy yourself that they will work in your situation.

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If you do try this method I would be interested in the results