How Great Is The Danger That Rabbits Might Escape From Your Project And "Create Another Australia"?

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asked this question of Fremont Regier in Botswana after he had been so kind as to answer questions reported in the last issue of EDN. His reply follows: "I've heard this argument before but I believe it is a rather ridiculous one. The problem in Australia was caused by the introduction of wild rabbits, not of domestic rabbits. J. E. Owen in "Rabbit Production in Tropical Developing Countries: A Review," Tropical Science, 1976, 18 (4) pages 203-210 says, 'One aspect of rabbit keeping which causes concern to many developing countries is the potential threat of escaped domestic stock and their effects upon other agricultural enterprises. The unfortunate experience in Australia is probably responsible for this. It should be pointed out, however, that in Australia in the mid-19th century domestic rabbits were kept in almost every town and city. Those which were liberated or known to have escaped gave little or no trouble, except around Sidney where they became established and merely constituted a local nuisance. However, this problem paled into insignificance compared with the damage caused by wild rabbits which were introduced later on. All successful mainland invasions (of England, Australia, New Zealand and South America) have developed from the introduction of wild stock. But even in Australia wild rabbits have not spread into the tropical parts of the country.

'There are many instances of escaped domestic rabbits multiplying on small islands, to the detriment of the vegetation in both tropical and non-tropical climates. The burrowing habit has undoubtedly helped them to withstand periods of very high temperature and water shortage in warm countries. On large land masses such as Africa, escaped domestic stock are extremely unlikely to cause serious problems. On small islands with no natural predators, however, the situation may be very different, although the island of Malta has both wild and domestic rabbit populations and has suffered no such problems. In these situations expert advice from ecologists who are familiar with local circumstances should be sought.'"

The cited article by Owen is included in Technical Note B-1, "Observations on Raising Rabbits in the Tropics". Also included is a review of some of the literature available from World Neighbors. The most unusual is a manuscript called "Commercial Rabbitry Handbook." This is written by two Ghanaians who have an interesting method of reducing labor and number of cages by housing rabbits in large groups which they call intensive gangs. Even does about ready to kindle are caged in pairs. Also interesting is a method called "rotary crossing" that they use to ensure that a

uniform number of bunnies are produced each week even in a large rabbitry. This Technical Note is available at no charge if you believe it might be helpful in your work.

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