

Picture Story

„How the rabbits came to Australia“

Picture 1:

Once upon a time there lived a man named Thomas Austin in rainy England. His life in England was very sad. Therefore, he decided to move to Australia to start his own farm as a rancher.

Picture 2:

He lived there for a few years, but missed his home and his favourite leisure activity. How gladly he had hunted for rabbits back then in England. Unfortunately, these did not live in Australia. Then he had a great idea. He could bring rabbits to Australia to give them a new home here on his farm. Of course, to hunt them too, but the rabbits would not have to know. So Australia would have a new huntable and tasty animal in the wild. And these cute little animals could actually do no harm.

Picture 3:

So he quickly set his ship to sea, crossed the Pacific Ocean and finally reached England after a long and exhausting journey. There he selected the most beautiful rabbits, exactly 24 in number, to take them on his big ship to Australia.

Picture 4:

It was the first big trip for the rabbits. They had not seen much of the world so far, and looked excited through the ship's hatches at the ocean. They did not know why they should come to Australia. Many days and weeks passed before they finally reached the port in Australia.

Picture 5:

On his farm, Thomas released the rabbits from the cages so they could explore their new home. He also wanted to hunt them the same way he did in England and there they were living in the wild and not locked up in cages. Of course, the rabbits still did not know about this vicious plan. They loved their new home. They romped around happily, now there was enough space and plenty of food. Besides, their English archenemies, the foxes, were nowhere to be seen. So they could multiply undisturbed.

**Picture 6:**

Now Thomas could finally go hunting for rabbits again! At first he was very happy about it. But soon he realized that the rabbits were feeding the flowers in his beds and all the plants on his fields. That annoyed him, of course. The rabbits kept on multiplying. Even the farmer's shots did not stop them from spreading more and more quickly in Australia.

Picture 7:

And they all multiplied happily everafter.

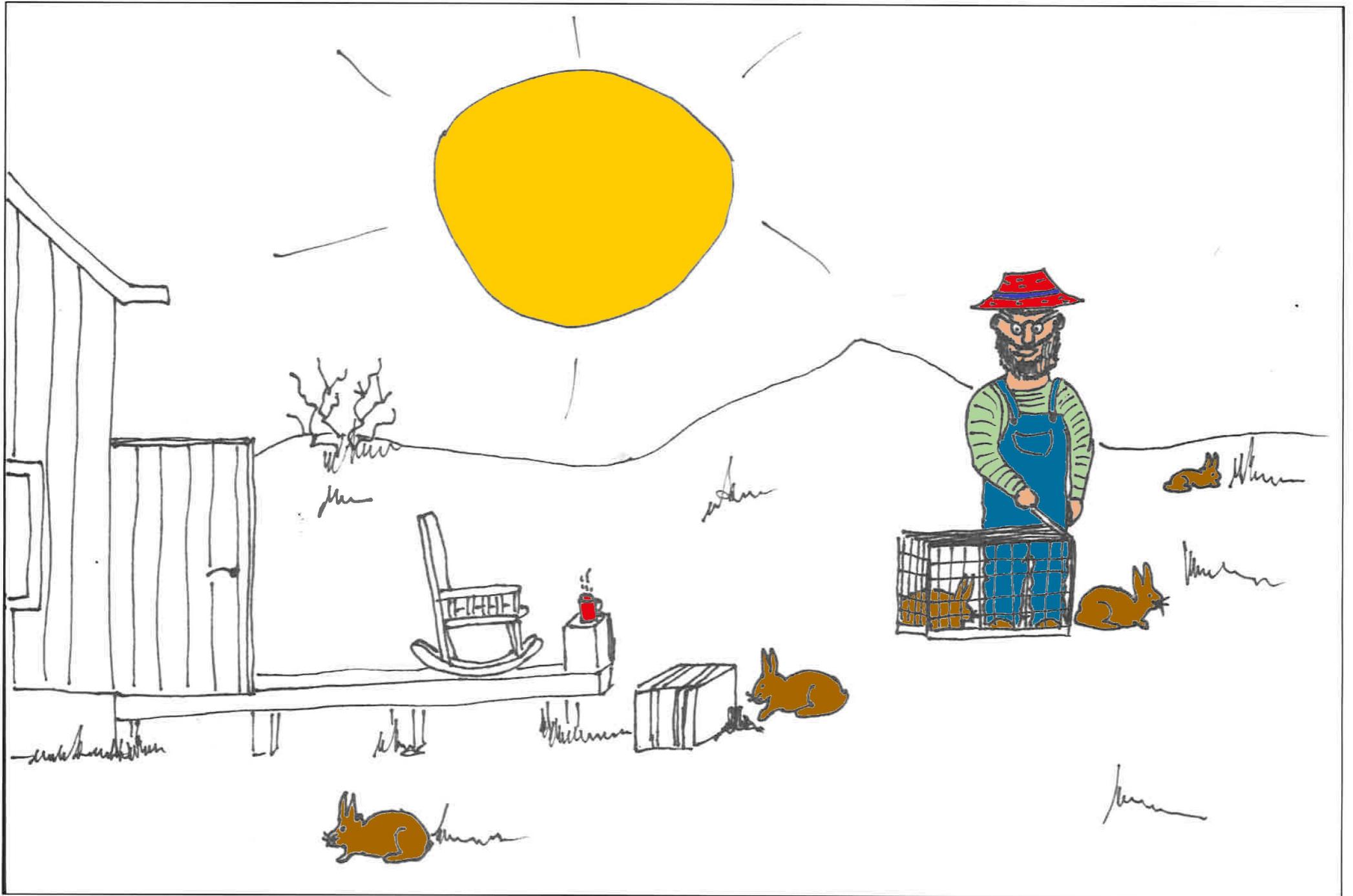


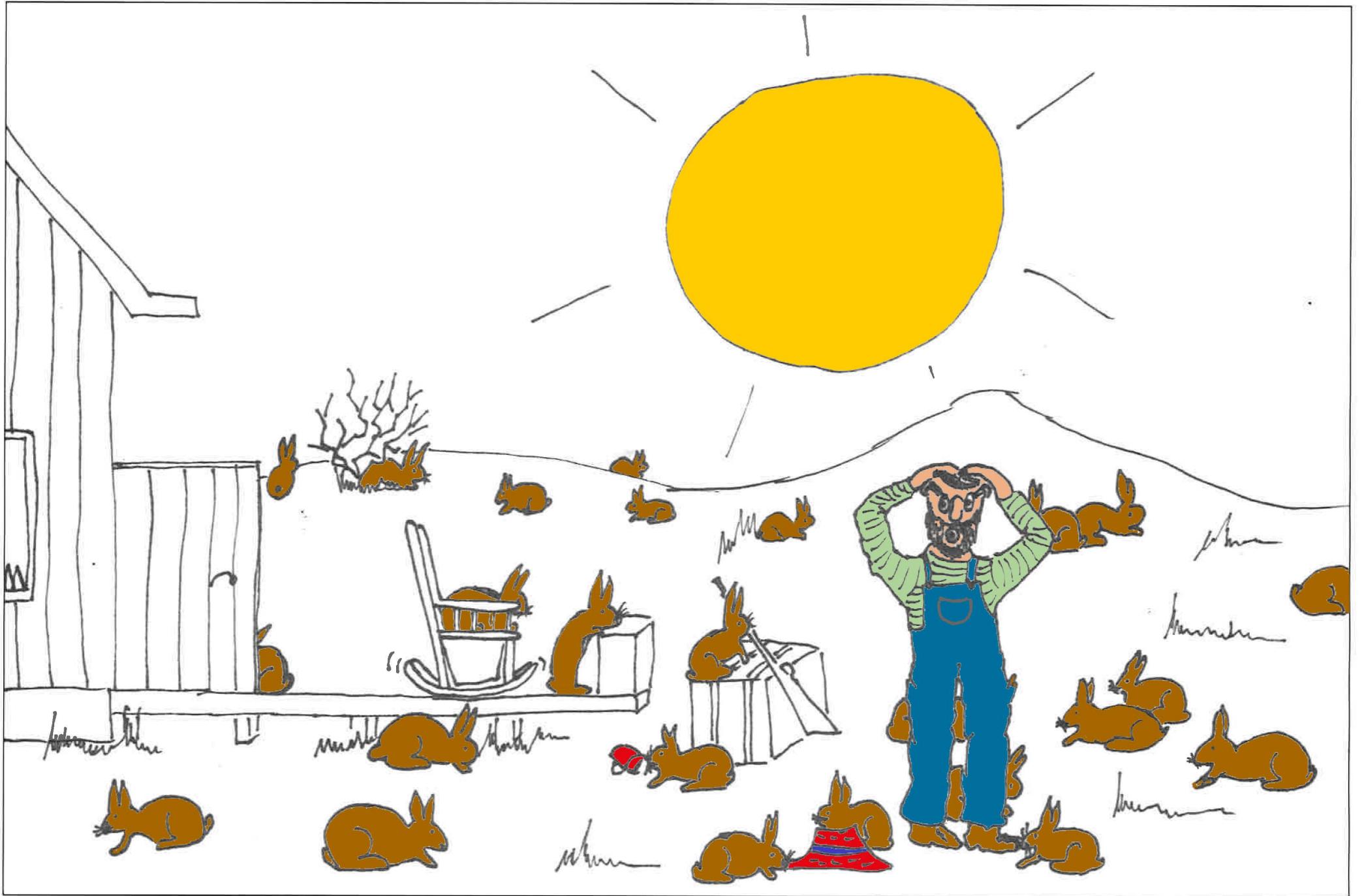


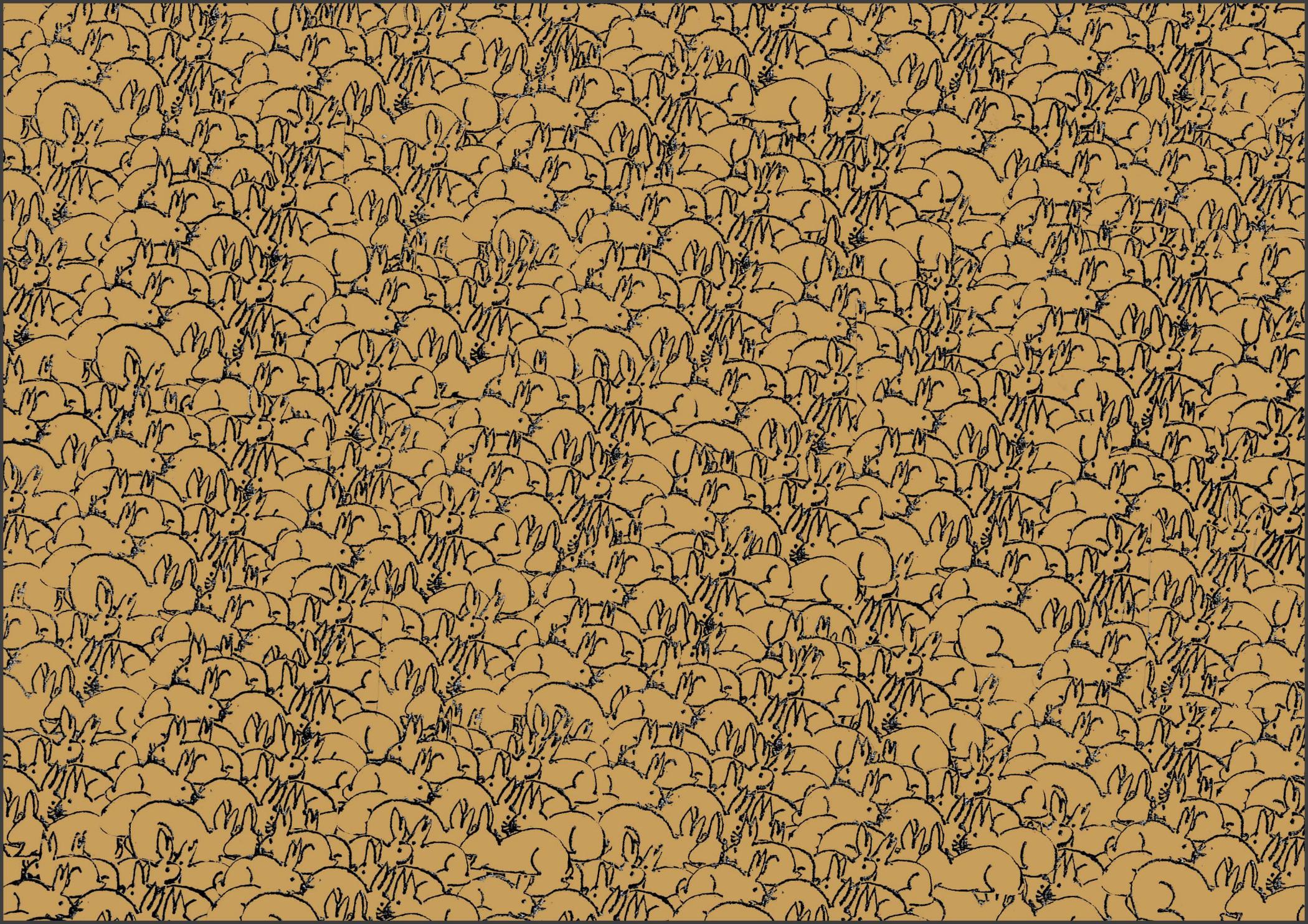


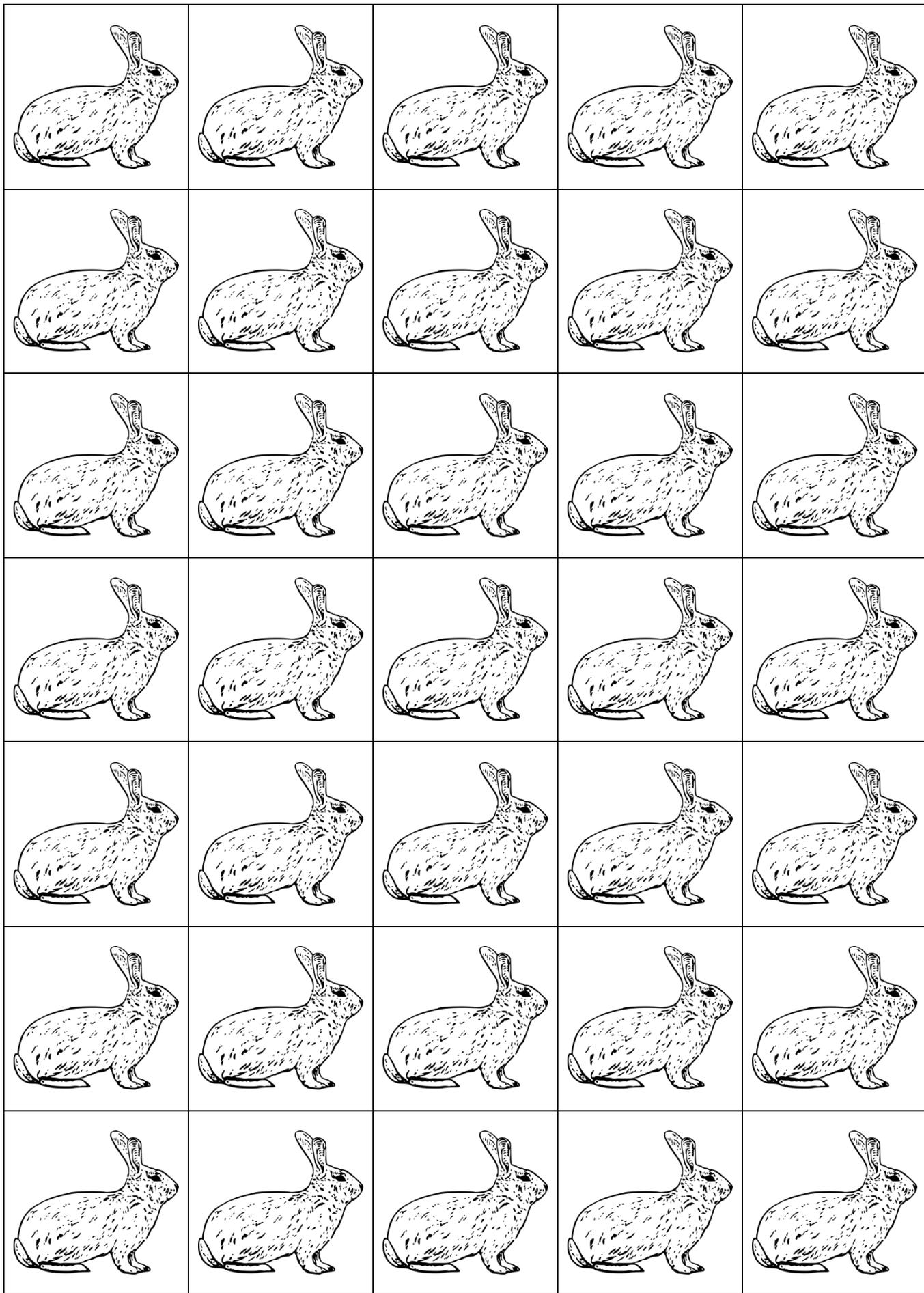


SYDNEY









Rabbits in Australia

You heard about the introduction of the European rabbits to Australia and that there are signs showing that there might be too many of them.

But why is this a problem?

An ecosystem is a balance between plants, animals and surrounding conditions like rain and sunshine. If one thing changes, all the balance is all mixed up.

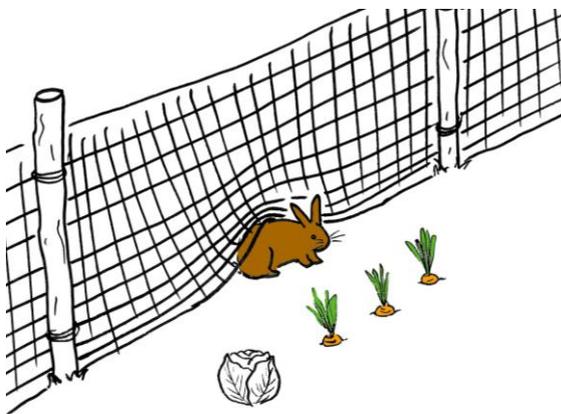
Rabbits eat plants and they especially like seedlings. This can mean that if an old tree dies, there are no younger ones to grow into the breach and the species vanishes from that place. Some of the native animals in Australia eat the same plants as rabbits or would like to dig their burrows at the same patches of nice, loose earth. If there are so many rabbits that they are always first to use those resources, these native species might be harmed. This is, for example, true for the wombat.



Farmers don't like the rabbits too much either, as they eat their crops or the food needed for their animals.

So what do the Australians do to save their agriculture and environment from all those rabbits?

Of course rabbits can be hunted by shooting and setting traps. About 150 years ago people tried to keep the rabbits out of places by building very long wire fences. Unfortunately, it was a lot of work to keep them in good repair so the rabbits always found a hole to slip through to the other side.



50 years ago, scientists experimented with two viruses, causing the rabbit diseases myxomatosis and RHD. Rabbits get sick and die rather fast, but they still experience pain. This did work out fine for a while, but the rabbits developed resistances to both diseases over time and stopped falling ill.

Does fighting the rabbits like that sound cruel to you? Some people argue that in the rabbits' home area in Europe, there are enough of them living good lives without harming anyone. They think that getting rid of the ones in Australia to save plant and animal

species that do not exist anywhere else in the world is an end that justifies the means.

Of course there are also people in Australia who like rabbits as beautiful animals, pets for their children or for hunting and eating. Some other feel that it is wrong to kill all those rabbits. It's not their fault they're here, is it?

Sources:

<http://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/rabbits-introduced>
<http://www.rabbitfreeaustralia.com.au/rabbits/the-rabbit-problem/>

Role Playing Game – Role Cards

Role Card – Rabbit

You are a rabbit living in Australia. You already have many children and would like to get more to ensure the survival of your species. Grasses, leaves and herbs are your favourite food as you are an herbivore. You build complex underground tunnels to protect yourself from enemies and the weather. From your grandparents' stories, you know that foxes used to be your greatest enemies in your old homeland, but luckily they do not exist in Australia. You only know the vicious hunters who want to kill you with their guns. The people of Australia have already taken some measures to get rid of you. For example, they built a huge fence so you could not explore the beautiful land. But your fellow rabbits were smart and have overcome the fence. They also blew up your underground tunnels or poisoned other rabbits so they got sick. Some, however, were lucky and survived. You wonder why people are doing this to you. You just want to live. Do you have any idea how to ensure your survival?

Role Card – Farmer

You are the farmer Fred. You are 54 years old and have your own farm in Australia. A huge number of cattle lives on your farm. And you also have a large field on which you grow vegetables. Your wife and two children help you with the farm work. But some years ago, the beautiful farm life was disturbed by a plague: the rabbits. They make your life difficult as they eat your crops and the food for your animals and they make the ground unstable with their underground tunnels. As a result, all your hard work is done for nothing and you have difficulties to feed your family. So far, people have taken some measures to stop the rabbit plague. A huge fence was built, the underground tunnels blown up and some rabbits were poisoned or infected with viruses. You also tried to kill the rabbits with your gun. What should you do? You have to feed your children, after all! Do you have any idea how to proceed?

Role Playing Game – Role Cards

Role Card – Teacher

You are Sabine. You are 35 years old and work as a biology and English teacher in Australia. You have a 4-year-old son with your husband, who works as an architect. Together you live in a little cottage in the country. You love your job, because you like to work with children. But since today's biology class in the 6th grade you are very thoughtful. The students should introduce each other's pets. One of the children introduced a rabbit. There were many negative comments from the other kids. Why is a rabbit the favourite pet, even though there is a rabbit plague? These arguments have made you think a lot, because on the one hand the rabbit is a very cute animal, but on the other hand here in Australia, farmers lose their crops, the unique nature in Australia is destroyed and native animals and plants disappear. Humans have taken many measures, such as the construction of a giant fence or the blasting of underground passages. Also, they poisoned the rabbits, so many of them died. You find these measures cruel, because you feel that every living thing has a right to life. You cannot kill all the rabbits! On the other hand, you also understand the side of the farmers who have to feed their families. How can people react without harming the rabbit?

Role Card – Observation

You take on the role of the observer. This means that you are not allowed to interfere in the conversation during the roleplaying. You quietly watch and take notes. Get a paper and pen ready to take notes on the following questions while watching your classmates debate:

1. Which views do the different roles have?
2. What do they want to achieve?
3. Which solution proposals are made?
4. Was a common solution found? Which one? Why?
5. Did everyone agree with the solution?
6. If no common solution has been found: why not?
7. If a common solution has been found: Do you think the solution is realistic?

Role Playing Game – Role Cards

Further optional role (can be used for differentiation):

Role Card – Animal Rights Activist

You are Lisa. You are 28 years old and work as an animal rights activist in Australia. You got to know your husband at work and you think it's very good that he is just as fond of animals as you are. You are actually from England, but you moved to Australia with your husband in order to fight the animal cruelty to rabbits. There, rabbits are considered a plague, even though they want to survive and have children just like any living thing. The people have taken very cruel measures against the rabbits. Not only did they build a huge fence, they also blew up their underground tunnels or poisoned the rabbits, causing them to die. People are taking more and more cruel measures against which you want to act. So you filed a complaint with the government and collected signatures. In addition, you have organized many demonstrations to draw attention to the problem. Do you have any further ideas on how to help the rabbits?