Update on mice in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, Southern New South Wales – May 2002
CSIRO Rodent Research Group

The CSIRO Rodent Research Group conducts regular trapping on eight farms around Coleambally, Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, Southern New South Wales. This is part of an experiment to test the effectiveness of farm management practices on the impact of mice, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (through the Bureau of Rural Sciences), in collaboration with NSW Agriculture.

Abundance of mice

Mice are monitored from live-capture traps set in winter cereal (wheat) paddocks and margins, summer irrigated crops (soybean) and margins, and irrigated rice and margins for two nights, roughly every 2 months. Trapping began in September 1998.

The mouse population follows a regular pattern each year (Figure 1). The data collected from July 2001 to April 2002 are generally slightly below average. Our recent April trapping shows the current population is much lower than average for this time of year.

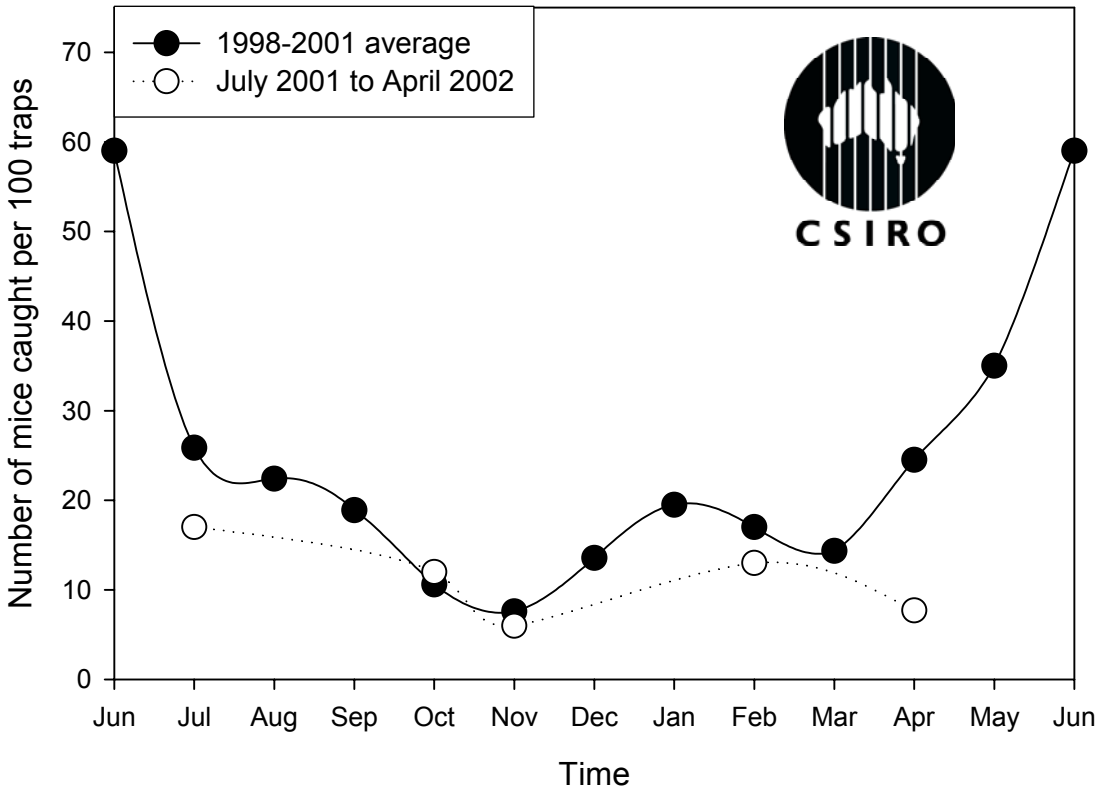

Figure 1. Average abundance of mice in the MIA since September 1998 with current abundance of mice.

Breeding

The breeding season for 2001/2002 began in the middle of September. The percentage of adult females in breeding condition (lactating or pregnant) increased and remained at a moderate level over summer and into autumn.

The percentage of adult females in breeding condition was 24% (19/79) in October 2001, 45% (24/53) in November, 40% (18/45) in February 2002 and 43% (26/60) in April. We were unable to determine the breeding condition from autopsies in each trapping session (in November 1 of 2 were pregnant and the litter size was 3). Breeding may continue for some time, but should decline to less than 10% by the end of May.

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General comments

Mouse numbers have remained low in the MIA. An assessment of mouse damage to summer crops showed very little or no damage by mice to rice, soybeans or corn. In this period between harvest of the summer crops and sowing of the winter crops, mouse numbers may increase a little, but in general are moderate to low. Mice will persist in low numbers in stubble or refuge habitats until the winter crops are established. Reducing the amount of cover mice have in these habitats now will substantially reduce the risk of crop invasion later in the season. The current mouse abundance in the MIA suggests that the risk of mouse damage at sowing will be very low.