

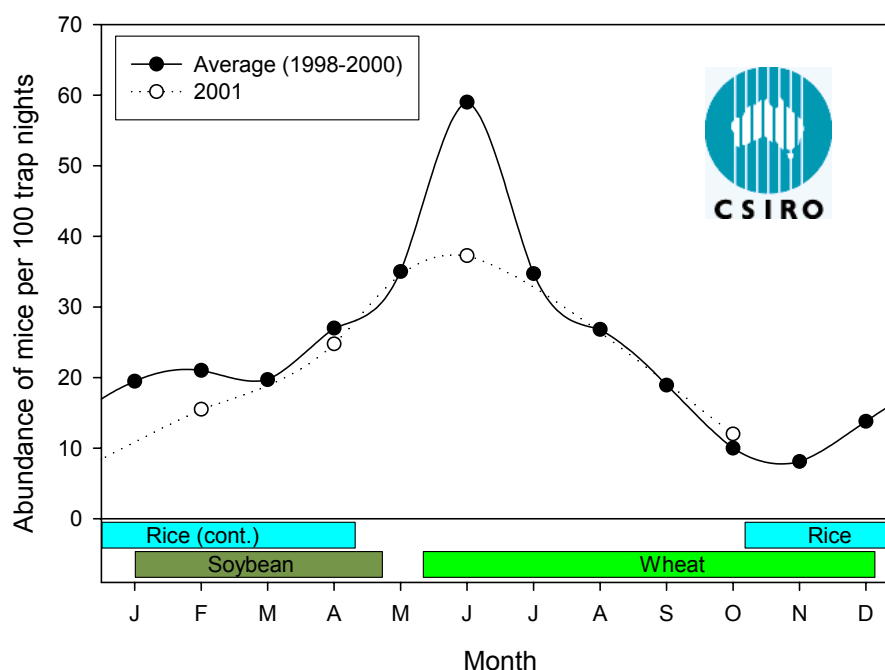
## Update on mice in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, Southern New South Wales – October 2001 CSIRO Rodent Research Group

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 populations follow a regular pattern of abundance each year (Figure 1). The data collected so far this year (2001) are slightly below average. However, our recent October trapping shows the current population is slightly higher than average for this time of year.



**Figure 1.** Average abundance of mice in the MIA since September 1998 with current abundance of mice for 2001.

### Breeding

The breeding season for 2001/2002 began around the middle of September, which is a week or two earlier than previous years. However, breeding performance has so far been below average for previous years. External examinations of adult females showed that 24% (19/79) were in breeding condition (average 31%), while internal examination via autopsy showed that 64% (9/14) of adult females were in breeding condition (average 73%). Average litter size was  $8 \pm 0.7$  (n=4), and average recent scars was  $6.6 \pm 0.5$  (n=5).

### General comments

The majority of mice (158/210 or 75%) were found in the winter crops. This is probably due to the fact that these areas are providing the only food and shelter to be found on most farms at this time of year (most rice crops have only just been sown). Mice are expected to remain in the winter crops until harvest, after which time they may move into other areas such as rice, corn, soybeans or the grassy verges and boundaries surrounding winter crop areas. Controlling weed

growth in these boundary areas now (by spraying, grazing, slashing etc.) will significantly reduce the chances mice have of using these areas as a base from which to invade summer crops.

The next monitoring will be conducted in late November/early December. At this time we will have a better understanding of whether there is likely to be high mouse numbers in autumn 2002.

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