Bat Conservation & Rescue QLD Inc

MITIGATING BARBED WIRE RISK FOR WILDLIFE

Wildlife, including birds, bats and gliders, commonly become fatally entangled on barbed wire fences. This is not only an ethical concern, but is a serious health and safety hazard as volunteers and members of the public attempt to rescue bats off fences. Decades of barbed wire use has created a hazardous environment for our wildlife with entanglements a very common occurrence. Unfortunately, barbed wire is prolific with its use entrenched in our society. Removal is not always feasible or possible so mitigating its impact is our only viable option. Very little standardized mitigation has been proposed up to this point but our aim is to change that. Our design is based off mitigation successfully used by the Royal Australian Air Force for close to 15 years. It works by allowing wildlife to see and avoid the fence while navigating during the day and night. These specific tags have been chosen for their aesthetic look, low cost and ease of installation. A step-by-step guide is provided below.

The tags we recommend are marketed as aluminium plant labels or tree tags. They can be purchased from Ebay or online garden supply stores. Their approximate cost is $100-130 for 1000 tags. 1000 tags will cover 400m of barbed wire fencing.

Although the tags are supplied with wire, this is not appropriate for long-term attachment. For longevity we recommend medium sized netting clips (also known as C clips). These clips can be found in the fencing section of your local hardware for an approximate cost of $13 for 500. The specific hand tool to close the clips is available for a cost of $12. These clips are very simple to install and can be used by anyone, regardless of skillset (figure 1).

Figure 1: Equipment required for installation

The installation is easy, thread your netting clip through the tag and close the clip on the wire with the specific hand tool. Tags should be placed no greater than 40cm apart on the top strand of barbed wire. The tags do not need to move so do not worry if the tag is stationary after attachment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Recommended tag installed on barbed wire fence

These tags will only work if they can be seen by wildlife. This is why its important to prune trees and shrubs away from barbed wire fences as entanglements are more common where vegetation grows through fences. An example of a high-risk barbed wire fence and a mitigated fence is provided in Appendix 1. Entanglements are also more common on the tops of ridges and directly adjacent to flying fox food trees. Consider spacing your tags closer together along these higher risk areas.

The total cost for materials is approximately $168 per 400m of fencing. This is attractively economical compared to the potential health and safety risk an entangled flying fox presents.

When you have installed your mitigation, please send an email to barbedwire@bats.org.au to let us know. It's very important that we know where mitigation has been installed so that we can monitor it's effectiveness and continue to improve this process.

Although we believe this mitigation will greatly reduce entanglements, accidents do still happen particularly in high wind environments and where tree branches break and grow through fences. Never touch or attempt to remove a bat from a fence yourself, instead give us a call immediately on 0488 228 134.

Appendix 1

Example of a high-risk barbed wire fence with a flying fox food source growing through the fence.

Example of a mitigated barbed wire fence with vegetation pruned away from the fence and tags installed to make it more visible to wildlife.