

# Beetles beat flies



## Snapshot

Cindy and Steven Scott, Henty, NSW.



**Property:**  
1,450ha (500ha cropping)

**Enterprise:**  
Seedstock and commercial Angus beef production, cereal cropping

**Livestock:**  
2,000 Angus cattle

**Pasture:**  
Phalaris and sub-clover

**Soil:**  
Brown clay loam

**Rainfall:**  
550mm

## Dung beetles don't just boost pasture productivity, they also help control flies.

**To say Cindy Scott loves dung beetles might be an exaggeration, but she admits they have played a very positive role in the cattle business she runs with husband Steven at Henty in southern NSW.**

"When I moved to our property Glen Elgin in 1998, I couldn't believe the number of flies. I grew up in South Africa and spent a lot of time in the bush. Despite the large quantities of elephant, rhino and hippo dung there, I'd never encountered as many flies as on the farm in Australia," she said.

"I didn't realise that, unlike Australia's native beetles, dung beetles from Africa had evolved to tackle manure produced by much larger animals."

Her battle against flies seemed a lost cause until 2009 when Cindy heard a dung beetle expert extolling the benefits of the introduced species.

Four years and nine dung beetle colony releases later, Cindy credits the beetles with reducing the property's fly population by an estimated 90%. The Scotts released 8,000 beetles of four different species, climate-matched to their property for year-round activity.

Numbers have boomed as the dung beetles happily work their way across the 1,450 hectare property, breaking down manure produced by the Scotts' 2,000 Angus cattle and supporting Cindy and Steven's goal to be good custodians of their land.

Steven, a sixth generation beef producer, was initially sceptical of the beetles' value.

"Like all producers, he was mainly interested in how it could improve the bottom line," Cindy explained. "But the visibility of beetle activity - with dung pads broken down in 24 hours - quickly convinced him.

"It is rewarding to drive around our paddocks and see how quickly the beetles are breaking down and burying dung, transferring nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous underground, and how their tunnelling aerates the soil and can reduce run-off - not to mention reduce flies."

*Cindy Scott shares her dung beetle experience at an environmental school excursion at Glen Elgin. Image courtesy of Cindy Scott.*

## Management tips:

**Cindy said preparing for dung beetles was simple and required only minor on-farm adjustments:**

- Collect samples of existing beetles so your dung beetle supplier can provide the best species for year-round activity.
- Change to a dung beetle friendly drench before you establish beetle colonies.
- Control foxes to minimise dung beetle predation.
- Maximise distribution by releasing beetles in the centre of the farm.
- Networks such as Landcare are a valuable source of management information. We participated in a local Landcare monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of our dung beetles.
- Collecting dung beetles and monitoring populations is a great on-farm activity for kids and schools.



**Cindy and Steven Scott**

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