

Capacity building

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Dung Beetles

Goulburn Mulwaree Landcare Landscapes



Dung beetles: helping to build soil and community

The issue

GMLL hosted an Across the Fence Farming event in spring 2025 to help build rural community collaboration to care for and improve agricultural land. John Feehan, a Dung beetle expert, spoke about the missing ecosystem services of dung beetles in our agricultural landscapes.

Local regenerative farmers in the Goulburn district have also identified conventional farming practices, such as drenching for worms, as contributing to low dung beetle numbers and activity across the landscape. One farmer noted that even with changes to the management of animals and inclusion of different species grazing, they still noticed that soil biology was not changing as quickly as they'd liked, and manure was not being broken down.

The solution

What farmers across the district have said:

- Working together as 4 property owners to introduce dung beetles to our properties and change our management practices to protect and build dung beetle numbers has been a great experience.
- We investigated safe treatments to apply to cattle to allow dung beetles to thrive.
- We sourced dung beetles from the ACT, a mixed pack suitable for the Southern Tablelands environment and season.
- Some species of beetles migrated in, and we started to see dung getting processed.

The impact

- Big jump in numbers and the processing of dung, and seeing an increase in water infiltration and soil biology.
- At times, we could see groups of beetles moving from pat to pat; it was very encouraging.
- Evidence of dung beetles in all paddocks, helping to reduce the fly population.
- Evidence of improving soil health (SOC, pasture quality and growth, cattle health, soil compaction improvement).
- Building community around soil health and repair.

Learnings

- Releasing a colony can be daunting due to the cost, and also funny to watch, chasing fresh dung pats following sunset to release them.
- We are working out the best way to deal with liver fluke and protect the beetles, and we have found a product we're happy to use.
- The beetles thrived across seasons.
- Monitoring the changes that occur in the future will be really interesting.



Key facts

- Dung beetles bury dung!
- Dung beetles aerate the soil!
- Dung Beetles pull vital nutrients (nitrogen, carbon, and phosphate) underground!
- Dung beetles reduce pest populations of flies and internal parasites in dung by destroying breeding habitats!