

Mesos in Invermay breeding programme

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THE Mesopotamian Fallow herd built up by the late Whitley Otway has been enlisted in a battle for the preservation of one of the world's rarest deer species.

Following Whitley's death in 1996, the Otway family set up a joint programme with Invermay, where the eight pure Meso deer — five does, a buck and two fawns — will become the subject of a breeding programme under research scientist Dr Geoff Asher.

The programme includes the use of AI, embryo transfer and in-vitro techniques, with European does as recipients.

The deer are some of the estimated 150 to 200 re-

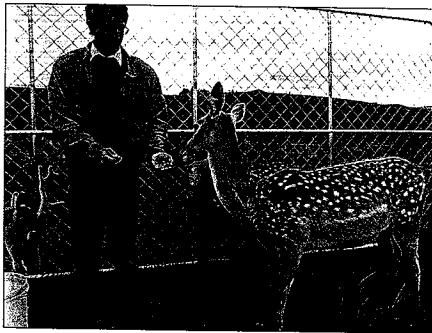
maining pure Mesopotamian Fallow in the world — there are only a few wild animals left in Israel and Iran, while the rest are in parks and zoos.

The animals on Invermay's farm are the only examples of Mesopotamian deer in the southern hemisphere.

Mesopotamian deer are closely related to the more common European Fallow deer, but are bigger, do not vary in colour and have a different antler structure.

Dr Asher said the deer breeding techniques were largely developed in New Zealand, and he was aiming for a base population of 25 animals within five years.

He said there was a



Dr Geoff Asher with some of the rare pure Mesopotamian deer

spin-off for agricultural research in using surplus bucks to hybridise with European Fallow and in

refining artificial breeding techniques.

"It's a nice twist to my usual work."