



around THE MOUNDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM SPRING 2018 EDITION FOURTEEN

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM

BY DAVID KELLETT, CHAIRPERSON



SHARON & DAVID AT PULLETOP NR, GRIFFITH

Hello all and welcome to the 14th edition of the Newsletter. The Sixth National Malleefowl Forum held in Mildura on August 17-20 was another success - a big thank you to everyone involved in making it such a great weekend. It was wonderful to have the Threatened Species Commissioner, Sally Box, attend and give a great presentation. Well done to Tim Burnard, John Olsen and Liz Kington for organising and executing this highly successful event. I hope everyone who attended enjoyed themselves, not only during the Forum, but also over the Saturday night dinner on board the Mundoo Paddle Steamer and at field trips on the Monday - see photo right →

On Friday before the Forum there was a large turnout to the National Coordinators Training Event run by Graeme Tonkin (see photo right →). The session was held to ensure all monitoring across the country is uniform and that all sites are monitored. This means that every site is covered by a Coordinator.

I would like to say that it is an absolute honour to be newly appointed as Chairperson of the NMRT and it is still going to take some time to fully sink in. I would like to thank Sharon Gillam, our outgoing Chair, for doing such a fantastic job chairing the Recovery Team for seven years - it is a very daunting task taking over from someone so good at what she does and is respected by all. Sharon will continue to be a member of the Recovery Team. Shortly after the Forum, Sharon (on holiday) passed through my home town of Griffith in central NSW, and we made a short trip out to Pulletop Nature Reserve (see photo above left), the site where Harry Frith did his ground-breaking research on Malleefowl in the 1950's. Despite dry conditions in NSW, this small patch of Mallee was alive with colour and bird song and was a treat to visit.



Now to Peter Stokie, who after being a Recovery Team member for 14 years has decided to stand down and let Ross Macfarlane from Victoria step up. Peter joined the Recovery Team after the 2nd Forum held in Mildura in 2004 and has been actively involved in monitoring and training in several states, as well as being a strong advocate for Malleefowl and volunteers. Peter will remain on the VMRG Committee and has also volunteered to assist NSW with their annual monitoring and training new volunteers. A great thank you to Peter, and warm welcome to Ross.

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A TRIBUTE TO SHARON BY BLAIR PARSONS, AND NMR TEAM MEMBERS

A summary of thoughts from the Team to express our gratitude to Sharon for her sensational contribution as Chairperson of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team.

Victor Hurley (Vic)

Sharon has chaired arguably Australia's largest national Recovery Team with representatives from government agencies and NGOs from across the country. Co-ordinating all of those disparate people and entities can be similar to herding butterflies. Sharon has done this with confidence and respect to all, making the role seem so much easier than it is. Sharon has chaired these Recovery Team meetings with clarity, keeping people focused on the tasks at hand. It has always been a pleasant and professional experience in all of the meetings Sharon has chaired. More Recovery Teams would function at a higher level with someone of Sharon's unique mix of skills and exemplary application to the role.

Joy McGilvray (WA)

As a relatively new member of the NMRT I have never ceased to be amazed at the way Sharon has been able to steer us through the meetings, giving us all a fair share at having our say and keeping us focused on the agenda items. It is not an easy task to keep a range of diverse personalities in line, but Sharon has chaired the meetings in a very professional manner and it is due to her perseverance and diligence that the NMRT is an effective one. She has chivvied us along to come to decisions, directed the organisation of the Forums and there must be countless hours she has spent working behind the scenes. It has

been a pleasure to serve as a committee member under Sharon's chairmanship.

Chris Hedger (SA)

Sharon's conspicuous passion, enthusiasm and dedication towards Malleefowl recovery is exemplified by the enviable status of the National Recovery Team and its on-ground projects. She has clearly worked tirelessly behind the scenes and in her own time to help drive a broad and diverse national program in a clear and consistent direction. The last 10 years have been a testing time for Threatened Species Recovery Programs in general with many other recovery teams failing to survive, but Sharon has been the rudder to help steer this ship through the darkness. I'm sure this was not an easy decision for Sharon to make, but hopefully she will be pleased to witness the strong and resilient position she has left as her legacy will continue to allow for well-informed realised goals for Malleefowl Recovery well into the future.

Joe Benshemesh (Vic)

Dear Sharon, we all owe you a great debt of thanks for the stable course and considerable headway we have collectively made during your 7-year term as chair of the Malleefowl Recovery Team. Most notably, you led the drive to find and engage our first national coordinator, resurrected AtM, and championed the ongoing development of both the National Monitoring Database, and the AM predator experiment. Your attention to detail, assertiveness, yet willingness to consult widely and seek advice, and the many hours you devoted behind the scenes have set a high bar for those that follow. Thank you Sharon!

Peter Copley (SA)

Sharon has done a remarkable job as Chair of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team from 2011 until 2018. She has guided mostly phone-based Recovery Team meetings through very busy agendas, has been inclusive of the Team's wide representation and has provided excellent documentation before and after each meeting. Sharon has done much between formal Recovery Team meetings as well, including involvement with mound surveys and associated training and data management activities and has assisted with planning for National Forums. She is also to be congratulated for helping the team to obtain and spend some of the invaluable funding that the team has been able to secure during her time as Chair. And she has also done an excellent job in cajoling interesting articles from far and wide to help maintain the Recovery Team's newsletter 'Around the Mounds' as an interesting and informative form of communication for all who are interested in Malleefowl.

Well done Sharon. Thank you!

In short, we are all grateful to Sharon for the hard work and commitment she has put in! Many other Team members expressed their thanks (with their thoughts covered by those above) and we look forward to her ongoing contribution as a Recovery Team member.

Blair Parsons

BELOW - SHARON OPENING 2018 NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL FORUM, MILDURA
PHOTO-D KELLETT



NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM COORDINATOR UPDATE

BY TIM BURNARD, NMRT

Working in the 'Environment Industry' as some of us call it, can be a funny old world. Especially for those working with threatened species. Mostly because funding is so precarious, and this is based on the general low community concern for issues. At this stage, environment and the small part of that which is threatened species play a low priority for the general community.

For many threatened species projects, running out of money means the loss of staff (who often will take much knowledge with them) meaning that even if funding is found, they need to employ new staff and start all over again.

Thankfully with Malleefowl we know that the foundation work (monitoring) will continue thanks to our legion of trained volunteer citizen scientists who go to about 3500 mounds each year and ensure that the data gathered is uploaded and available to our friends at Melbourne University to analyse.

This cooperation between citizen scientists and academia is the greatest example of a single species monitoring program in Australia.

This grand claim was recently given credence when the Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Sally Box, attended and spoke at our 6th National Malleefowl Forum in Mildura. The attendance by Sally at the Forum was a very strong endorsement of our work.

Some months ago at the Adaptive Management workshop we held in Mildura I was told by a representative of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (formerly the Invasive Species CRC) that our predator control experiment (the AM project) was the largest predator control experiment in Australia. And, to top off these grand claims, Darren Southwell from Melbourne University has informed us that our project is one of the largest (and most complicated) Adaptive Management projects in the world!

These are all great achievements and are only possible thanks to the massive work by all of our volunteers/citizen scientists.

And yet, even with all those great claims under our belt, we have run out of funding. We are waiting hopefully for money to start flowing again but there is very little certainty. Unfortunately, this is the case for many other threatened species projects across Australia.

While we wait for funding, Graeme is able to continue his work (which is mostly voluntary anyway, due to him!) to ensure the annual monitoring season runs smoothly, Liz is continuing to run training in WA (thanks to a WA state grant) and Darren can continue crunching numbers at Melbourne University. Joe Benshemesh (who contributes 100s and 100s of hours annually) is continuing to finish the trend analysis but I am on indefinite leave. A skeleton staff you might say!

THANK YOU CITIZEN SCIENTISTS AND LAND MANAGERS FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL ANALYSIS!

BY JOE BENSHEMESH, NMRT

Those of you who made it to the Malleefowl Forum in Mildura in August will know that Darren Southwell and I are close to completing the trend analysis involving all the monitoring data that has been dutifully uploaded onto the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database (NMMD). To conserve Malleefowl, it's fundamentally important to describe these trends and examine them in relation to climate, landscape patterns and management actions. It is only by obtaining national perspective on the conservation of Malleefowl, particularly in understanding whether or not management actions work, that better outcomes for Malleefowl can be achieved. We are finding national declines and that is not good news, but it makes the analysis of trends all the more important.

The analysis is not quite complete as we are still trying to get the last bits of fox-baiting information from a few sites, but here we would like to acknowledge the two main groups of people who have gone out of their way to contribute data.

Citizen scientists

Firstly, of course, are the hundreds of citizen scientist volunteers that monitor thousands of mounds each

year, providing the core data on breeding numbers that tell us how Malleefowl are doing at over one hundred sites across the continent. It is the volunteer base that makes this possible. In fact, in the current trend analysis we have over 1,800 site-years of data comprising nearly 60,000 mound records, and about 85% of these have been collected by volunteers, the remainder having been collected by government and industry (mining). It is an astonishing achievement, particularly considering that two thirds of that data has been collected since 2005. Despite this huge increase in the quantity of the data, the quality has also been outstanding. This reflects the diligence and dedication of all involved in monitoring, particularly the voluntary citizen scientists. The other reasons the data quality is so much better this time is that since 2005 we have a national monitoring system in place, the NMMD (aka the Alcorn database), the efforts of the many 'data ecologists' who check your data each year, and of course Graeme Tonkin, our National Data Manager, overseeing the monitoring data from start to finish.

The importance of allowing volunteers to be involved in and indeed run the monitoring programs is illustrated by

the contrast between the differing contributions by states to the data on the NMMD and in our trend analysis.

Whereas SA, Vic and WA have each contributed an average of 585 site-years of data over the past 25 years or so, only about 70 site-years of data have been provided from NSW. This is not because of disinterest by authorities in NSW. In fact, NSW government agencies are much more involved in collecting Malleefowl monitoring data than agencies in other States. The big difference between the state contributions is due to volunteers; in NSW there has been hardly any community contribution whereas in other states the monitoring programs are designed for and run by citizen scientist volunteers.

In this regard it is exciting that Ronnie O'Donnell (Local Land Services Western Region) is determined to develop a Malleefowl monitoring community group in NSW modelled on the successes of groups in other states. Ronnie, who monitors the Annuello site in Victoria with husband Tom, made the announcement at the 2018 Mildura Forum and has already garnered the support of key locals.

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THANK YOU CITIZEN SCIENTISTS AND LAND MANAGERS - CONTINUED

It's not the first time a dedicated Malleefowl monitoring group has been active in NSW. Over 20 years ago Archie Vann and Bob Clark attempted to develop a monitoring group at Mallee Cliffs at sites set up for them by Paul Burton, but with no national infrastructure (the NMMD, GPS, manuals) and little agency support, the effort was not sustained. Things are different now with a National Team providing the support to keep the national program running. Developing a dedicated community group for monitoring and conserving Malleefowl is a really important initiative and provided it's grown and maintained at a grass-roots level as in other states, should attract lots of local support.

Land managers

The second group of people we are indebted to is the land managers who have provided us with predator baiting information for the 140 sites for which we have Malleefowl monitoring data. This should have been a simple data collating exercise, but it turned out to be difficult for just about everyone. Indeed, much of the delay in running the trend analysis has been due to the difficulty in obtaining this crucial information for most sites. Landscape measures, including fire history, are easily accessed from GIS and Google earth, and rainfall data from BOM. But there is no national database for management information data such as fox baiting effort, and state-based databases are not set up to obtain this detail, so land managers have had to become detectives, chasing up scattered information and interrogating computer files and field staff. This task was especially difficult because we need data over specific areas spanning many years, and thus there were challenges due to changes in staff, methods, and record-keeping practices. Although we are still waiting for data from a few sites, most land managers have generously put in the time needed to provide us with the best available information on baiting effort and for this we are hugely grateful.

For such a great effort by so many, we want to ensure that the valuable information collated by land managers is safeguarded and secured for use in future analyses of Malleefowl. So we will be uploading these data on the NMMD, appropriately tagged with the data provider's details, and made available for research purposes. The NMMD is

a secure site and access to the data will be restricted.

Our next task is to devise a way of updating these data each year while it's still fresh in people's minds. Annually updating this information on predator baiting will be much easier for land managers than trying to find data spanning many years. While we expect that this will be a relatively simple task for land managers (baiting regimes often don't change much from year to year), with 140-odd sites across Australia it is time-consuming for us to collate this information from so many land managers. In the short term, our small team of part-time staff employed by the Recovery Team will take on this responsibility, but in time we hope to develop a friendly way for land managers to enter this valuable information directly on the NMMD.

Finally, while volunteers and land managers are the key contributors to the data we need to assess and understand Malleefowl conservation, we should also acknowledge the efforts of Graeme Tonkin (Data Manager), Liz Kington (WA and AMPE coordinator) and Tim Burnard (National Recovery Team Coordinator) who comprise the small team employed by the Recovery Team. While the Recovery Team struggles to find the resources to keep this team together, we should be grateful to them for keeping the Malleefowl monitoring machine running smoothly and nurturing the collaboration between community, land managers and scientists which is of fundamental importance to the conservation of this special bird.



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Submissions for Edition fifteen of Around the Mounds Newsletter close on **Friday 22/03/19**. For editing, articles are best sent by **email** to Gil and/or Dave as **attached** documents with photos also as **attachments**.

This Newsletter is available in colour at www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au alongside the National Malleefowl Database.

Other important websites for news, information and photos include www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au www.malleefowl.net.au



WHAT IT'S ALL FOR - PHOTO GIL HOPKINS

MILDURA MALLEEFOWL FORUM REFLECTIONS BY LIZ KINGTON, NMRT

Mildura was a great host town to the 6th National Malleefowl Forum. It's an historic and culturally rich centre in north-west Victoria where Malleefowl and agriculture co-exist, near the intersection between three States along the Murray River.

This was my first Forum; and I was one of six delegates from WA. The national decline of this iconic native bird reinforces why we are all here. There was a real feeling of everyone pulling in the same direction.

Not many would know that prior to the Forum starting on Friday, Graeme Tonkin led the Coordinators training workshop. This was all about providing updates for our leading citizen scientists who will train the next generation of monitors in the coming months.

The Program for the 6th National Malleefowl Forum was a balance of presentations from science and management, and a weekend of celebration of citizen science monitoring effort. So much to say in this short time together!

The National team hosts of the Forum, Tim Burnard and Joe Benshemesh, with an enthusiasm we all enjoy, kicked-off the Forum with an impressive summary of what we have achieved since the last Forum, as well as what we could expect from this one.

Professor Brendan Wintle's Key Note Address opened our eyes to the bigger policy issues and the National Threatened Species research agenda, highlighting the need for a larger injection of National Threatened Species funding.

Malleefowl is one of the 20 priority National Threatened Species identified in the Threatened Species Strategy. The Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Sally Box, and her team made us feel special, with recognition of our Malleefowl monitoring leadership.

Recent studies suggest that only a third of the Australia's threatened species are monitored. Malleefowl is clearly a leader with Dr Box concurring with our understanding that ours is the largest single species monitoring effort in Australia.

Sharon Gillam, our NMRT Chairperson, gave us the good news story of the National Malleefowl Conservation effort. Her superb Malleefowl artwork also decorated the Forum program and banners.

The Forum was held in the Ballroom of Mildura's Grand Hotel and we quickly settled in to this spacious environment, getting into the swing of things after long queues for coffee at the first morning break.

Paul Burton reminded us of just how far we have come and the long-term dedication of those involved. Joe Benshemesh, being the unassuming 'global' leader on Malleefowl, is infectious for anyone who spends time with him, and clearly Paul has.

David Wells, a Forum favourite, picked us up after lunch on the first day with his down to earth commentary of Malleefowl antics from his video archives. It seems that Malleefowl pairs working a mound can be both counter-productive and synchronous. Nesting behaviour captured in this raw personal form reinforces why we like Malleefowl so much!

Professor Stephen explained that genetic studies showing 1080 tolerance across the Malleefowl population is no coincidence and that it's likely all Malleefowl re-populated Australia from WA, after acquiring *gastrolobium* flora tolerance. Fascinating!

We are learning from genetic studies about the diversity of the Malleefowl genepool and how populations differ, with a potential for in-breeding in cut-off populations. An additional management challenge!

As VMRG host, John Olsen was clearly no stranger to managing a crowd and was a wonderful MC for the Saturday night quiz aboard the Mundoo Paddle Steamer. As our night's entertainment quiz-master he clearly had us stumped at times. *How many eggs can a Malleefowl hen lay in one mound?!!* The Mundoo paddle steamer was a lot of fun, and for those of us ready for more, our local hosts were there to show us what Mildura's nightlife had to offer.

Such a big happy family - if this bird could only know how well it is loved!

Katherine Moseby's radio-tracking of Eyre Peninsular birds gave us an insight into Malleefowl behaviour when not working a mound. It was interesting to learn that individual birds can survive in small remnant areas and have favoured roost locations.

Darren and Alys, our young, bright Melbourne Uni academics let us know what is going on in the academic world of Malleefowl research. Darren's name

kept cropping up on the second day. His statistical research is critical to us answering some big conservation management questions.

John Wright from Parks Victoria gave a very interesting talk on Adaptive Management, not a mean feat considering how dry the subject can be. John has clearly thought about how adaptive management works and the formula on how we can get it right.

The long-walk enthusiasts in the internal Maralinga Aboriginal lands showed how monitoring techniques can be adapted and applied to all landscape conditions, even in the desert.

Wildlife managers at the Australian Wildlife Conservancy are working to understand the role of baseline monitoring and protection of critical weight-range fauna. They were enthusiastic about joining the Adaptive Management predator control experiment project to further this understanding at Scotia, Mt Gibson and soon Mallee Cliffs.

LiDAR surveying techniques when compared to the other methods of mound location clearly comes out on top, as Jessica Sackmann and Peter Jamieson demonstrated in their talks. Adanti is leading the way in refining this survey method with higher levels of accuracy and efficiency.

We learnt from the recent analysis of the National trends for this bird that they remain consistent with 2005 trend findings; unfortunately, not great news. Joe Benshemesh tells us that Nationally there is a two to three percent decline each year. This is a worrying long-term trend prognosis for such a resilient and special bird.

I came away from the Forum with a strong sense of a closely-knit community with a unified goal to protect the Malleefowl across all of Australia. With about 130 people attending from 5 states and territories, it speaks volumes on how loved our bird is. Well done to the organisers and VMRG for hosting the event this time around.



MALLEE CLIFFS NATIONAL PARK TOUR, SHOWING SOME OF THE COUNTRY - PHOTOS G. HOPKINS

MALLEEFOWL MYSTERY IN LINCOLN NATIONAL PARK, SA

BY DI DELAINE, ROBERT DELAINE AND ANDREW FREEMAN

Malleefowl were thought to be extinct in Lincoln National Park following an extensive bushfire in the park in 1967. In December 2001, 4 one-year old captive-reared Malleefowl were released into Lincoln National Park. The timing coincided with Acacia seed set and fall. All birds were roosting at night at the time of their release.

The Malleefowl release was part of the Ark on Eyre Program, to assist and/or return threatened species to their former range. Under the professional guidance of Rob Wheeler and Peter Copley, well known to many of you, eggs were harvested near Lock and incubated. Graeme Tonkin and the late Tom Bott were volunteers on the program.

One of the male birds was found working a large mound in September 2002. This was discovered after nine months of intensive monitoring. In January 2003 it was decided that the

mound should be excavated to see whether the male Malleefowl had started to breed or whether this was in fact a practice run. Breeding at two years of age is very young for a Malleefowl.

Paul Burton, Ecologist and Malleefowl expert from NSW, came over to excavate the mound. Ten fertile unhatched eggs and eggshells from another six previously hatched eggs were found. It is likely that due to the large size and number of eggs discovered, the female bird was likely an existing older bird in Lincoln National Park. It confirmed that there was still possibly a resident population of Malleefowl living and breeding in the park that haven't been seen in 30 years.

Nothing was heard or seen of Malleefowl for another 14 years or so. Then several reliable sightings of Malleefowl were reported in Lincoln National Park in 2017 and a dead bird was collected from the side of Taylor's

Landing Road in September. Members of Friends of Southern Eyre Peninsula Parks purchased a remote camera and set it up close to reported sightings. Further reports again in 2018 narrowed the search area and now Friends have 'captured' Malleefowl on their remote camera.

What does this all mean for Malleefowl conservation? The events described above raise many questions:

- Are Malleefowl breeding in the park?
- Do we have a population of Malleefowl or just a few individuals?
- Are these birds the offspring of, or the original released birds?
- What effect (if any) has 20 years of fox baiting; and/or prescribed burning; and/or kangaroo management had on Malleefowl in the park?

In consultation with staff the next steps may be to see if any mounds are being constructed near to the sightings.



FRIENDS OF SOUTHERN EYRE PENINSULA PARKS ARE EXCITED ABOUT CONFIRMING THE PRESENCE OF MALLEEFOWL IN LINCOLN NATIONAL PARK.
FROM L-R ROSS KASSEBAUM, ROBERT DELAINE, MALCOLM NICHOLAI AND DI DELAINE

FERAL ANIMAL IMPACT PHOTO COMPETITION, SA

BY SCOTT JENNINGS AND FIONA GRAY, SA MURRAY DARLING BASIN

An award-winning photo began with a conversation in a patch of Heritage Agreement scrub in the SA Mallee, south of Lameroo. The result was the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions 2017 winning feral photo of goats jumping on a Malleefowl mound.

The conversation was about increased fox and cat sightings by the land manager and how to best conduct a predator control program in the rarely visited area, known to support a number of Malleefowl.

A fox control program was implemented by Natural Resources SAMDB with assistance from a Green Army team. The use of Canid Pest Ejectors (CPE) were trialled as well as undertaking feral cat trapping. A series of trail cameras were set up to monitor

the success of the program. While goats are known in the area, it was a surprise to see that in this case potentially more damage was being caused to the Malleefowl population by feral goats than predators.

Since 2008, many reserves and some private lands throughout the district have been part of a coordinated feral goat control program initiated by the Browns Well Landcare Group (BWLG), who were noticing the impact feral goats were having on Malleefowl populations. The program was implemented by the BWLG, local land managers, Natural Resources SAMDB and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia - Conservation and Wildlife Management SA Branch (C&WM). The approach included mustering, trapping,

ground and aerial shooting. Feral goat numbers have been significantly reduced, achieving local eradication in Peebinga Conservation Park.

The persistent efforts of the C&WM volunteers has been a major contributor to keeping the pressure on the feral goats with a focus around Karte and Peebinga Conservation Parks. Implementation of a Judas goat program in 2011 helped to focus ground and aerial control programs (through Natural Resources SAMDB) and concentrate effort in the Mallee environment. This work has been complemented by land manager efforts throughout the district, maintaining the pressure on feral goat populations.

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FERAL ANIMAL IMPACT, SA - CONTINUED

The BWLG report that goat numbers are currently very low. The group has an established network so when mobs of goats are sighted now, they are quickly removed. Little formal monitoring is undertaken so it is hard to be certain that goat numbers have decreased, but what is certain is that land managers are seeing fewer goats, and park managers and C&WM volunteers are seeing less evidence of feral goats and their impact. For example, there have been no sightings of goats in the 3,000 ha Peebinga CP for five years, an area known for one of the best Malleefowl breeding populations in the Murraylands.

Goats compete with Malleefowl by browsing on Malleefowl food plants and degrade soil by trampling the lichen crusts, but perhaps some of the greatest impact is the direct damage they wreak on the mounds, particularly during the breeding season, as shown in the photos.

THE WINNING PHOTO



REGIONAL NRM GROUPS MAKING TRACKS IN MALLEEFOWL CONSERVATION, WA

BY JESSICA STINGEMORE, BIODIVERSITY COORDINATOR, NACC NRM

Western Australia's regional NRM organisations are excited to announce that Malleefowl in WA are set to benefit from the Regional Land Partnerships component of the National Landcare Program's second phase. The range of Malleefowl in WA spans most of the southern half of the state.

Four of the regional NRM groups - Northern Agricultural Catchments Council, Rangelands NRM, South Coast NRM and South West Catchment Council - have received funding to support local communities undertake both monitoring and Malleefowl conservation activities.

Through these projects, the regional NRM Groups will work with the local community to undertake strategic restoration to increase native vegetation cover, buffer remnant vegetation, reduce threats from predators, improve connectivity and

enhance habitat for the Malleefowl and other key plant and animal species. The regional NRM groups will also continue to encourage the protection of Malleefowl habitat on private properties through their support and coordination of the Land for Wildlife Program.

In addition, community-based monitoring will contribute to the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database - as contributing to the national program is without doubt the most cost-effective way to improve Malleefowl management within each region. Funding will be used to undertake LiDAR aerial surveys to identify new mounds and focus volunteer ground surveys.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships - by WA's regional NRM organisations, all levels of government and their agencies, research institutions, the private sector, and the community - is critical to the

success of Malleefowl conservation in WA, especially given that much of the Malleefowl habitat is located on privately-owned or managed land.

WA REPRESENTATIVES AT THE MILDURA FORUM



MALLEEFOWL THE MAIN ATTRACTION IN MILDURA

BY JESSICA STINGEMORE, WA

The Victorian town of Mildura went mad for Malleefowl recently, when for two whole days the Mildura Grand Hotel was packed with enthusiastic and energetic community members and scientists alike, absorbing as many Malleefowl facts as possible.

The event – the 2018 and sixth National Malleefowl Forum – was hosted by the National Malleefowl Recovery Team (NMRT) with support from the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (VMRG). Approximately 120 delegates attended the event – many from Victoria but many more from interstate (below)



Throughout the packed program, speakers from a range of backgrounds presented on an array of topics including -

- Photos and videos of breeding Malleefowl from long time Malleefowl devotee David Wells
- A history of mound monitoring with the charismatic Paul Burton
- Unravelling the DNA mystery of Malleefowl with Professor Steve Donnellan (DYK Malleefowl tolerance

to 1080 baits suggest they originated in WA?);

- Benefits of LiDAR for ground searching of mounds with Jessica Sackmann;
- Nganamara two-way science with ecologist Brett Backhouse;
- The use of remotely sensed vegetation productivity as an indicator of Malleefowl breeding with up and coming Malleefowl aficionada Alys Young;
- And of course the ever popular Zig and Zag of Malleefowl, Tim Bernard and Joe Benshemesh with a wrap-up from the National Malleefowl Recovery Team.



Another highlight of the conference was dinner aboard the Paddle Vessel Mundoo (photo above) – where delegates were treated to a hearty buffet meal as they travelled along the mighty Murray River. During which John Olsen from the VMRG had the group in stitches with his hilarious commentary and quiz questions.

Liz Kington from the NMRT said that the forum was well attended by all people across Australia - from policy

makers, researchers to monitoring volunteers, all interested in protecting Malleefowl. “It felt like a big Malleefowl family coming together to share experiences, knowledge and learn how this special bird is coping in its remaining natural environment.”

NACC’s Biodiversity Coordinator, Jessica Stingemore also had the pleasure to attend the forum and said she was impressed with the spirit of friendship and collaboration that radiated from the event.

“Being relatively new around the mounds I was fascinated by the wealth of knowledge and passion at the forum. Malleefowl clearly have a strong history of community support with decades worth of monitoring data – and friendships formed across the nation.”

“It was an amazing program, with too many highlights to single-out any one presenter – but everyone’s willingness to share their stories has further inspired me to get out of the office and into the bush to monitor more mounds. And hopefully spy more of the elusive bird.”

Jessica added “Being a member of the WA Malleefowl Recovery Group, it was also great to spend time with our Victorian counterparts – plus hear about the newly emerging NSW Malleefowl Recovery Group.”

“I look forward to seeing everyone at the next National Malleefowl Forum in 2021.”

BACK TO BERROOK AND BRONZEWING: REVISITING ESTABLISHED MALLEEFOWL CORRIDORS, VIC

BY GARETH LYNCH, MALLEE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Exciting times ahead for two Malleefowl wildlife corridors at the Berrook and Bronzewing State Forests!

The Berrook State Forest is located approximately 36km northwest of Murrayville, and the Bronzewing State Forest is located approximately 11km southwest of Patchewollock. These corridors were constructed to link fragmented habitat and facilitate the movement of Malleefowl, addressing Objective 5 of the National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl by reducing isolation of fragmented populations. The projects were completed through a successful partnership between the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Mallee Catchment Management Authority

(Mallee CMA), Greening Australia, adjoining landholders, and Ogyris Ecological Research.

Since 2015, the delivery of works at Berrook and Bronzewing has resulted in:

- The planting of 22,780 trees and direct seeding of 83 kg of indigenous seed across 128 ha (88 ha Berrook & 40 ha Bronzewing) and
- The protection of 578 ha of remnant vegetation through the installation of 16 km of standard stock-proof fencing.

Sites have been continually monitored and tree guards have been removed. Rainfall has been variable throughout the project duration; however, recent field inspections have shown a high rate of tubestock survival, with some

evidence of direct seeding germinating. Recent dry conditions have caused an increase in grazing pressure and DELWP have been addressing this to ensure continued establishment of the sites.

Since the completion of works in May 2018, the Mallee CMA along with the project partners has identified further strategic links for the Berrook, Bronzewing and Yaapeet State Forest areas to value-add to past works and establish additional Malleefowl corridors (as identified by Allen and Sluiter, 2014). The proposed works will include revegetation, fencing and grazing control to strategically target and mitigate multiple threats.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

BACK TO BERROOK AND BRONZEWING, VIC - CONTINUED

A targeted Malleefowl conservation funding bid was submitted by the Mallee CMA on behalf of the project partners under the Australian Government's National Landcare Program: Regional Land Partnerships Program.

In August 2018, the Mallee CMA was successful in being selected as a Service Provider for the delivery of services in Victorian Mallee as part of the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnerships Program.

On-ground works and community capacity outcomes delivered as part of the 2018/19 'Threatened Species Services' project will be delivered by Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Greening Australia, Local Government, National Malleefowl Recovery Team and Mallee CMA.

- By June 2019, delivery will result in:
- 12km of stock exclusion fencing to protect established wildlife corridors
 - 33ha of native vegetation established linking fragmented or small populations of Malleefowl to core areas
 - 50ha of native vegetation established to enhance existing Malleefowl habitat corridors through supplementary planting works
 - 12,900ha of Malleefowl habitat strategically treated to control rabbits and weeds on public land; and
 - 12,000ha of Malleefowl habitat treated to control goats on public land.

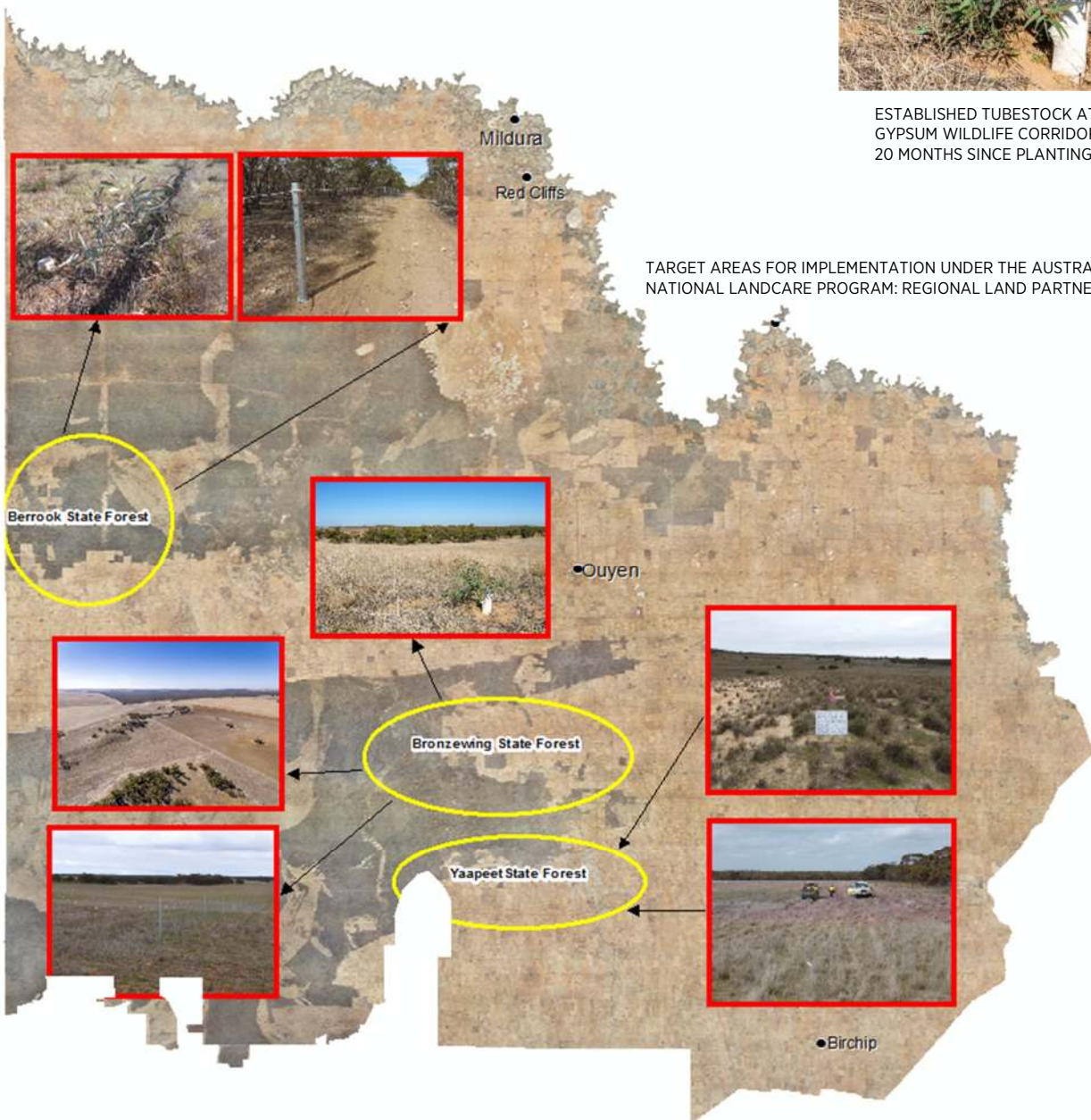
As of September 2018, project partners have commenced on-site planning for the Berrook, Patchewollock and Yaapeet target areas. For further information contact Gareth Lynch, Project Officer Regional Land Partnerships on (03) 5051 4377.

Acknowledgements

The projects were developed and implemented through a successful partnership between Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, the Mallee Catchment Management Authority, Greening Australia, adjoining landholders and the Ogyris Ecological Research. The wildlife corridors were jointly funded through the Mallee CMA and the Australian Government in partnership with Department of Environment Land Water & Planning and Greening Australia.



ESTABLISHED TUBESTOCK AT THE BARING GYPSUM WILDLIFE CORRIDOR 20 MONTHS SINCE PLANTING



TARGET AREAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION UNDER THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL LANDCARE PROGRAM: REGIONAL LAND PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

MALLEEFOWL IN THE RIVERINA, NSW

BY DAVID KELLETT - RIVERINA LOCAL LAND SERVICES

Well it is going to be a very interesting Malleefowl breeding season here in the Riverina with the entire state of NSW being declared in drought. With some areas receiving less than 100 mm of rain for the year, this is over 230 mm less than average. Having a live camera set up at one of our sites in Yalgogrin (the Gog) I am lucky enough to be able to look at the activity at that particular mound whenever I get the chance.

Unfortunately, there has not been much activity by Malleefowl in the past few weeks. There has been plenty of activity by echidnas, with four or five echidnas taking over the mound, it seems. Below is the link to the live camera. Unfortunately we are having some technical issues with this camera but you will get a snapshot of the mound; it just isn't updating as we would like.

<https://riverina.lls.nsw.gov.au/our-region/projects-and-programs/malleefowl-protection-and-habitat-management-project>

Things are looking very promising with a NSW Malleefowl Recovery Group in the making, thanks to Ronni O'Donnell (Western LLS) and Libby McIntyre (Central West LLS) for instigating this at the 6th National Malleefowl Forum in Mildura. There has been one teleconference already and another meeting to be held in Buronga in the near future. Also, a big thank you to VMRG's Ross MacFarlane and Peter Stokie for volunteering to assist the NSW group, as well as Tim and Joe.

I'm looking forward to working on our LiDAR results that have been supplied by Peter Jamieson (ANDIT!) in the coming weeks and getting ready for the hot weather to get out and do some ground-truthing. It was great to catch up with Peter at the Malleefowl Forum in Mildura and also to see Peter deliver a great presentation about LiDAR. Peter is so passionate about his work and it's great to see him as equally passionate about Malleefowl conservation.

I was so lucky to have Sharon Gillam drop in to Griffith recently when she and her husband were touring around the country on holiday and I thought it was quite fitting to head out to where Harold Frith did his studies on Malleefowl back in the late 50's & 60's.

Frith's hut was built in the early 1960's at Pulletop Nature Reserve for his studies on Malleefowl Conservation and is still in very good condition.

If anyone is interested in more information about the NSW Malleefowl Recovery Group or would like to volunteer, please contact one of the below people in your area. We would love to hear from anyone wanting to be involved.

Ronni O'Donnell - Western region Local Land Services - 0350 219 429

ronni.odonnell@lls.nsw.gov.au

Libby McIntyre - Central West Local Land Services - 02 6841 6525

libby.mcintyre@lls.nsw.gov.au

David Kellett - Riverina Local Land Services - 02 6960 1355

david.kellett@lls.nsw.gov.au



ECHIDNA TRAIN - PHOTO COURTESY MAL CARNEGIE
(LAKE COWAL FOUNDATION, MOTION DETECT CAMERA)



FRITH'S HUT
PHOTO - DAVE KELLETT



THE MALLEE POST ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLE

FROM GRAEME TONKIN

MALLEEFOWL EGGS (AUTHOR UNKNOWN)

MALLEE FOWL

REMARKABLE TAMENESS.

The mallee fowls, or native pheasants (*Leipoa ocellata*) recently captured on Eyre Peninsula by Mr. J. W. Mellor, the honorary secretary of the South Australian Ornithological Association, for liberation on the National Reserve at Cape Borda, Kangaroo Island, are creating great interest. They are unlike the usual birds freshly caught, as they are not nearly so timid. The observer has thus a chance of seeing their particular form and the artist coloration of their feathers. Those on the upper surface appear to have two brown eyes on each feather. The note, which is probably that of the cock-bird, is a low cooing sound, resembling "moo-moo-moo". The tameness of the birds is due to the care and protection given them in their normal state by the owners of the land on Cumbrutla Creek, in the hundred of Mangalo, and near to Mount Desperate.

Kindness of Prospectors.

Messers H. R. and F. P. Perry, two well known prospectors, have lived for some years in the solitude near the last-named place, and several years ago a single mallee fowl visited their lonely humpy. It was welcomed by the bushmen, who have taken a lively interest in studying nature all their lives. Food was thrown out to it and the bird continued to come each evening and feed during the winter time, leaving her benefactors as the spring came on, and laying time approached. Two years went by, and then "Pheasy", as she was called, appeared again on the scene with several more fully grown birds, which soon became as tame as herself. They strutted out of the scrub each evening to partake of a meal of wheat thrown out to them. Others came later on, until at least nine birds were counted feeding together not long since, some being so tame as to allow the bold bushmen to go quite close to them. Should a stranger come in view, wearing an unusual costume, the birds became suspicious and wary at once. The birds soon became so tame that they would follow after the Perry

Brothers when called and eat like ordinary fowls. Such tameness on the part of the mallee fowls is remarkable and unique (Mr. Mellor explains), as they are the most timid and cautious birds he knows, and hundreds of people who have lived in the bush all their lives have only caught a glimpse of the bird as it darted through the thick scrub with lightening-like rapidity, half-running, half flying, in its endeavour to get away from the approach of man. Many were sceptical as to the correctness of the present instance of tameness until Mr. Mellor proceeded to the locality and verified the statements made. Mr. Mellor asserts that no birds are too wild to allow of their confidence being gained by man if only kindness is used towards the dumb creatures. The Perry Brothers were loth to part with any of their wild pets, but when they learnt it was for a national cause so that the breed might be handed down to posterity by acclimatising them on the Kangaroo Island reserve at Cape Borda, they allowed a few to be caught.

MALLEEFOWL MONITORING REMINISCENCES BY ALEC HAWTIN, VMRG MEMBER

We have been members of VMRG since 2000, when VMRG began. I have monitored nest mounds every year since, and with my wife Sharon from 2004.

Barry McLean and I started at South Bore grid and Bambill South grid the first year, then Pheenys and Underbooll grids for the next two years. These are all remote Sunset National Park grids. Then we settled on Pheenys for our annual searches, with Sharon and others on various years - including Colin, Ray, George, Owen, Peter Sandell, Bob and Salty. Then it was suggested that we go to a less remote grid named Hattah Tracks with Owen, Maria and Juls.

In the early years of monitoring we followed the grid marker lines from where we counted our steps by compass at right angles to the grid line. I took 135 steps for 100m, allowing for dodging trees and stumps along the way. After recording data from the nest on paper, we went back to the grid line again to the next compass

point, and so on until we eventually found approx. 30 nests that were staked, tagged and numbered.

Then when we used GPS to find the nests we could relax and talk without concentrating and counting steps. When the electronic gadgets came for recording data, this made it easy or difficult depending on one's understanding of them.

For the 2016/17 season we monitored half of Hattah Tracks site on November 27, visiting 15 nests and finding only 3 active mounds, a fair/average result. We waited for good monitoring weather and returned December 18 to finish the other half with our young friend Finley Japp. Nests 26-04 and 26-21 that weren't working on November 27 were now active! Nest 26-04 did not use any new leaf-litter, the birds were just using the loose hot sand to hatch the eggs!

Malleefowl use this method late in the season after the heat has gone from breakdown of the mulch in the

mound. We checked 26-04 again on January 2 and again on January 15 and found it still active. We had thunderstorms in November and this triggered new growth in the Mallee trees and understorey, creating suitable conditions for Malleefowl to begin the late nesting.

I had seen this method previously in 1992 in Bronzewing Reserve when helping John McLaughlin monitor Black-eared Miners. During November 1992 there was heavy rain and thunderstorms and Malleefowl had started a sand-only mound in December because of the good conditions. I didn't take much notice of it at the time, but we don't realise how smart these birds are, with them working to the conditions available and making every post a winner.

TRAINING WEEKEND, VIC BY ROBYN RATTRAY-WOOD, VMRG

VMRG Monitor Training and AGM took place on the weekend of October 13, 14.

Seventy enthusiastic Malleefowl monitors and supporters gathered at Wyperfeld National Park Wonga Hut camping ground, where official proceedings commenced at 1 pm.



John Olsen, VMRG President, welcomed everyone then introduced Joe Benshemesh who gave an interesting review of the state of Malleefowl across Australia, then more specifically within Victoria, essentially based on analyses of the long-term data that has been collected, mostly by volunteers, during the last 25 years, or even longer at some sites.

Next speaker was VMRG Safety Manager Ross Macfarlane who reminded members about the importance of following all the safety protocols while out in the field. The Mallee can be a harsh environment if people are not prepared sufficiently and many of the sites that are monitored are remote. It is therefore essential that all monitors ensure that the communication equipment they have with them is appropriate for the area in which they monitor, and call

their safety officer at the end of each day's monitoring.

The group then divided into 'Old Monitors' and 'New Monitors'. Those who had monitoring experience had the opportunity to review the use of the equipment and up-date skills needed to monitor.

Newcomers were introduced to Monitoring by Peter Stokie and Joe Benshemesh. After a brief introduction to the preliminary procedures that need to be completed before going into the field, the group headed out to the Lowan site where they were allocated GPS and data collecting Android phones. Joe and Peter then led participants through the scrub to two Malleefowl mounds and demonstrated how data are measured and entered into the Cybertracker app on the phone.

Imagine the excitement experienced when, on reaching the second mound it was found to be active! A wonderful experience for both novices and 'old-hands'.



Saturday evening was a great social affair, with the VMRG friends catching up with each other and Corey and

Fiona's wonderful camp-oven extravaganza for the evening meal.



On Sunday the VMRG AGM was held in the Picnic Shelter. After the formal proceedings and committee elections, Alys Young, a research student from Melbourne University, presented a summary of her project which concerns using satellite imagery to assess Malleefowl food resources. This is a fascinating project that in future may provide another method for predicting the likelihood of finding Malleefowl in an area.

Joe Benshemesh also outlined a new project that uses Motion-sensitive Cameras in remote Malleefowl sites to gather data about which other animals also frequent these sites. This data can be compared with the Malleefowl activity data that is collected by VMRG monitors, hopefully to establish a better understanding of how animals such as foxes, cats, goats and kangaroos affect Malleefowl survival. By monitoring the numbers of these animals, research may be able to determine what impact individual species have on the Malleefowl population in an area.



PHOTOS - MICHAEL GOOCH