

4. Update from the National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator

Tim Burnard, National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator

Abstract

Tim Burnard has been employed by the Recovery Team since April 2013. This update will inform the Malleefowl community what has been achieved in this time.

The Malleefowl is listed nationally as Vulnerable and for every threatened species in Australia there is a Recovery Plan. Our Recovery Plan sets out all of the actions necessary to stop the decline of, and support the recovery of Malleefowl. Basically, my role is to assist in implementing actions from the National Malleefowl Recovery Plan. In the short term this includes assisting people across Australia in the National Monitoring Program. Over the years, the number of people involved in Malleefowl monitoring has grown to hundreds of volunteers that gather data from over 3,500 mounds each year. One of my jobs is to ensure data is gathered in a uniform way and fed into the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database. This underpins the Adaptive Management Project, which will use database information to help answer the question of why a population might have gone up or down. Assisting the Adaptive Management Team to identify sites where we can implement experiments is another major part of my work. Other tasks have included raising the profile of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team through establishment of a website and coordination of the 2014 National Malleefowl Forum.

Update

When I started as National Coordinator to the Recovery Team I was excited because I hoped the job may involve a bit of travel into Mallee country where I might get to see a Malleefowl if I was lucky. It has certainly exceeded those hopes. While 90% of the job is seated behind a desk at home in Casterton Victoria, I have managed to get out and about and meet many people and even a few Malleefowl.

A bit of background to this position first. While the Recovery Team has been operating since 1989, it was only 18 months ago that the team employed me as its first ever staff member to assist in delivery of its objectives. On reflection that's quite amazing because the team had already established the Recovery Plan, the National Monitoring Database, an Australia wide network of monitors and commenced the Adaptive Management Project.

It took a little while, but I now understand how big this project is. In summary, the input from people around Australia is phenomenal. One hundred and twenty odd sites have been searched by foot and about 150 people go to these sites and record about 25 measurements at 3,500 mounds each year. All of this data is uploaded to the database where it is gone over and verified that the data is clean. Here it sits as beautiful clean data ready to be analysed. It was thoroughly scrutinised in 2007 to produce a trend analysis and is in the process of being gone through again to tell us where we stand today in the face of a changing environment. This would be a magnificent achievement for any endangered species but our project goes further. We are now using the database as a foundation for far greater understanding of the threats to Malleefowl. I suspect this is the greatest example of citizen science and endangered species monitoring in the country.

In essence my position is about communication. You could say that my job is simple...to ensure that we keep getting the data into the database and then assist the Adaptive Management Team to use the data. So, in order to justify myself to all the people who trusted me to do this I am presenting a quick roundup of what we have done over the past 18 months.

There have been three trips to WA; the first as a general meeting of people with a visit to Babakin for the MPG training days, Yongergnow Malleefowl Centre in Ongerup, Kalgoorlie to meet GEMG people who sponsor some of my position, Koolyanobbing with Cliffs Natural Resources, and then to Dalwallinu to meet NCMPG people and visit the AWC Mt Gibson Sanctuary. Next trip, Joe and I attended the GEMG conference to further spread the National Team word, and finally just last month we attended the NCMPG training days.

This is my second trip to New South Wales this year. In March I met up with Milton at Mt Hope to see the amazing work being done there and then on to Dubbo to meet Mel and help select the zoo here as the venue for this Forum. In Victoria where there is such a strong community voice in the VMRG I have taken part in a site search at Tooan near Mt Arapilles, attended a Committee meeting near Bendigo and the Wyperfeld training days. In South Australia I have attended a search in Cowell (Eyre Peninsula), and been monitoring with Vicki in the South East, Karte with David and the Sporting Shooters SA group, monitoring at Innes NP, and even managed a visit to Lew Westbrooks property. I also went to Mildura to meet the Iluka team that have a large impact on our funding.

During all of this I have attempted to spread the word of the importance of ongoing monitoring and how it is all heading toward the grand Adaptive Management Project that will eventually answer some of those nagging questions on the main threats facing Malleefowl. The Adaptive Management Project has also been a big challenge. Working with the team from Melbourne University has been an honour. I'm extremely excited that the project has advanced to the point where we are about to engage in our first experiments. We'll hear more about this in their presentations tomorrow.

In between all this travelling about the nation we have also produced two Fact Sheets, the Malleefowl banner, distributed numerous articles for a range of publications and established the website. I recommend that anyone wanting to know more about Malleefowl, visit the site which is regularly updated with fresh news and is home to an extensive Malleefowl library.

Looking forward, I hope that my work will grow the already strong monitoring base across Australia. There are still a number of areas that are not covered by our monitoring. I hope that we get all 20 sites for the Adaptive Management Project established and that as the results start coming in, I will be spreading the word on what management actions are important to pursue. The most enjoyable part of this position is meeting all of the great people involved in Malleefowl work. The downside is the feeling that I am never quite doing enough. There are so many people with such differing issues that it is a real challenge to match their effort.

None of this would have been possible without the support and guidance of many people. Sharon, as Chair of the Recovery Team spends a huge amount of time managing the team, seeing that articles come in for our national newsletter 'Around The Mounds' and ensuring the money flows so that I can get paid. Individuals from each state have helped tremendously: Peter Stokie in Victoria, Sally, Gordon and Glenda from the NCMPG and Joy, June and Carl from MPG in Western Australia and Graeme Tonkin in South Australia who very patiently guides me through the database entry stuff. And Mel here in Dubbo who has worked so hard to make this Forum work. And then of course there's Joe who has never complained about my endless stream of phone calls asking for advice.

I must also thank the organisations that fund my position. They are: Goldfields Environmental Management Group, Gunduwa Regional Conservation Association, five Natural Resource Management Boards from SA, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and Iluka Resources.

Many of you that I have met on my travels will know that I rarely travel alone. Donna's input into so many parts of the job has freed me up to the main tasks. Donna would never seek or expect any recognition for her work but I can assure all here that her input is as great as any PA.

Finally I have to thank all of the volunteers or as you are sometimes called, Citizen Scientists. I cannot express how greatly I admire your commitment to this great task. Your efforts are truly remarkable.