



around THE MOUNDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM AUTUMN 2015 EDITION SEVEN

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM

BY SHARON GILLAM, CHAIRPERSON



SHARON GILLAM

Welcome to the 7th edition of the national Malleefowl newsletter. The 2014 breeding season has drawn to a close, with the transfer and validation of valuable data captured by enthusiastic volunteers almost complete in the national database. Changes within the database are currently underway to ensure its long-term future, further explained by Tim Burnard.

2015 promises to be another busy year in terms of Malleefowl recovery, with a number of projects on the go, and new initiatives set to begin. Joe Benshemesh is leading a large camera trapping program in north-west Victoria to investigate the potential of capturing new data on Malleefowl predators and competitors, which, if successful, will provide further important data for the Adaptive Management project. NSW is now on board the monitoring program, with a

number of new sites and data from existing sites set to be entered into the database, and support demonstrated from a range of interested stakeholders. It has been a long term goal to gather data from Malleefowl populations across NSW, and exciting to see this new development. The Great Victoria Desert is also proving to be an another notable area in the range of Malleefowl, with monitoring programs underway using the skills of indigenous communities, and funding becoming available for research projects, all aimed at understanding more about this special bird and how we can better manage its habitat and threats. Kathryn Sinclair and Adam Pennington provide further insights on this topic.

From the Recovery Team, we say farewell to Kathryn Schneider, our Parks Victoria representative, who has changed position after a lengthy period of restructure within that department. Many thanks to Kathryn for her time and valuable input into the team and also the Iluka Malleefowl Management Committee, and her support to the VMRG. We wish her all the best in her new role as Fire and Environment Program Officer, North West District. And we welcome new member David Roshier, who represents the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) and fills a NSW vacancy on the team. David is the Regional Ecologist for the Southeast, and leads the science programs which operate on a number of AWC sanctuaries, including Scotia in NSW.

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In this edition you will find seasonal updates from the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group in WA, and from the South East and Murraylands regions in SA, plus snippets from Secret Rocks, Yongergnow and Moonabie Hill. Graeme Tonkin has sourced some delightful articles for our regular Mallee Post section; and Blair Parsons shares a bit about himself in our Recovery Team Member Profiles. Enjoy the read.

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM COORDINATOR UPDATE

BY TIM BURNARD

Graeme Tonkin steps up

Graeme has been on the Recovery Team for two and a half years. He became very involved in monitoring on Eyre Peninsula back in the 1990's when he lived at Cowell and then Port Lincoln. After moving to Adelaide in 2004 he has been regularly going to Eyre Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula, the South East and up north. If there's Malleefowl, then Graeme will go there. Pretty quickly Graeme started lending his technology skills to the job and became one of our most experienced validators and whizz at setting up mapping devices. He is now our go-to man whenever there's a question on using the smart phones for monitoring. This has all been a great relief to Joe Benshemesh who established the whole monitoring scheme and had been doing all of this work in the past.

This is a very important step for the whole monitoring effort. For years we had relied solely on Joe B to oversee the data collected by hundreds of volunteers is checked and entered to the database. Joe was also responsible for setting up the annual sequence that is uploaded to the smart phones at the beginning of the season and answering all of the queries associated with this work.

There's two main problems with this heavy reliance on Joe. First, we have expected too much from one person and second, it makes the whole system vulnerable: what if Joe fell under a bus? Now that the database is well established it's time to ensure it has a long future. The best way to do this is to train more people into the key roles so that the burden is shared, and there are people able to step up when needed. Also, this frees Joe up to get on with a growing number of special Malleefowl projects (Cameras, LiDAR, Adaptive Management project, trend analysis etc, etc).

At the March 2015 Recovery Team meeting the issue was discussed and agreed that we do need to train more people into roles of coordinator and validator, and while doing so we would formalise the situation as well. There was also general agreement between the coordinators that this would be a good thing too. To this end we came up with the structure on the right. It shows how all the data flows from monitors all the way to the database, with the names of people currently in those roles; including the new role of National Data Manager which Graeme has stepped up to.

We welcome Graeme into this new role.

Adaptive Management

There's been quite a lot of movement with the Adaptive Management project in the last six months with the strong feeling that we are about to enter a new exciting stage.

So far our main activities have involved building statistical modelling, based on the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database and talking to people who manage large tracts of Malleefowl habitat, seeking involvement in the project. This is a massive project looking to have twenty 10,000 ha experimental sites across the country.

As many now know, our first experiments at the 20 sites we are seeking will be to measure effectiveness of fox control on Malleefowl populations. We have now secured the interest of about 12 sites and feel very confident that we will get more as the project evolves. Having gained a significant amount of interest, we are keen to take the project to the next level and commence experiments.

During our discussions with all land managers the one common factor we have found is that there is little in common! That is, unless we count the desire to ensure that our work to protect Malleefowl is cost efficient and effective. We have discovered (not surprisingly) that the types of fox control, monitoring, funding and more, is extremely variable. How do

we combine all of these variables into one measurable project?

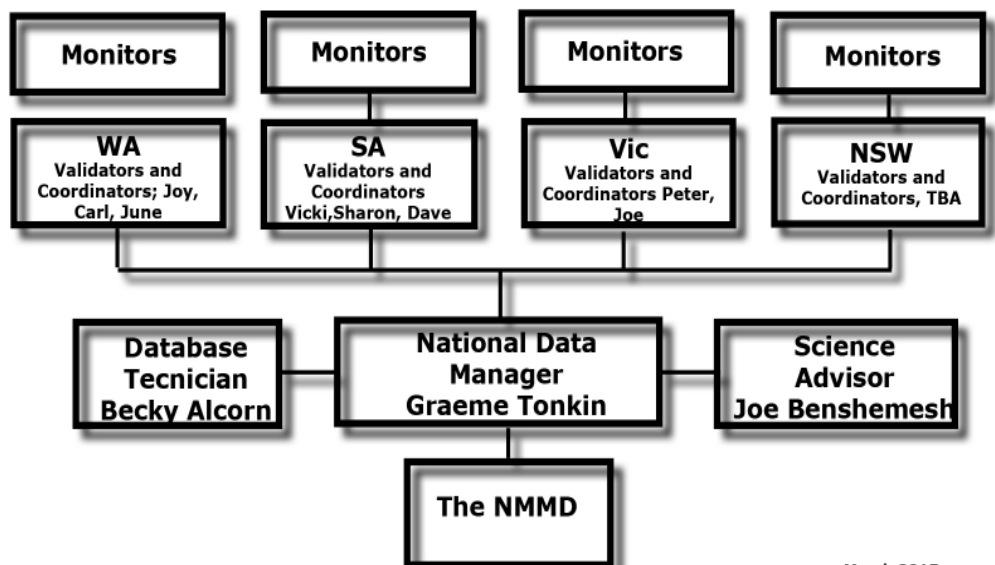
So, the question we have been asking ourselves is how do we progress?

We decided it was necessary to get together with the land managers and discuss the differences and similarities between our works and then look to see what needs to happen to form a united approach. This will likely include coming to an agreement on monitoring standards (fox and Malleefowl) that may overcome the different on-ground treatments we use.

It was not possible to get everyone across the range into one room so we have arranged for one meeting in Perth for Western Australians, and one in Mildura for SA, Vic & NSW combined. The workshops should be taking place about the time you get this copy of ATM.

An important outcome from the meetings will be that it will firmly cement in everybody's mind the huge scope of the project, and make clear what individual contributions would require. We think that, with just a few small changes to the way monitoring and management is undertaken, we can synthesise actions and make concrete progress on a truly useful environmental management problem.

Let the experiments begin!



March 2015

COORDINATOR REPORT CONTINUED BY TIM BURNARD



GROUP AT BEER ROCK

Secret Rocks

In October 2014 I visited Secret Rocks, the 26,000ha private nature reserve property of Katherine Moseby and John Read located in north east Eyre Peninsula, South Australia.

Each year, Katherine and John gather a group of friends to help monitor about 130 mounds on their property. Unlike many monitoring sites in less arid areas, the mounds here are quite some distance apart, often a few kilometres. Compare this with just a few hundred metres with sites further south and you can quickly appreciate the need for a gang of helpers to cover the area.

Whilst the Secret Rocks mound density is approximately one third of the average in South Australia it is still relatively high for an arid region due to the large area of intact habitat. A credit to Katherine and John's management.

Katherine and John like to top off the hard day's work on Saturday night with a few beers (or rums) at Beer Rock and a meal of camp oven lamb and vegies. No wonder there's always plenty of helpers.

NSW tales

In Dec 2014 Joe Benshemesh and I headed north on a mission to get greater representation from NSW on the national database. The feeling at the end of the trip was that NSW is looking very well positioned to have a far greater impression on the database map.

First stop was a meeting in Sydney at the OEH headquarters for a look at

the role of the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database (NMMD) in the NSW Iconic Species program where the Malleefowl is one of five species in focus. It looks likely that the NMMD will be adopted as the repository of all monitoring in the state. From there, reports based on the department's needs will be sent out.

We left Sydney on a Friday night at 4.30pm and drove for 3 ½ hrs to go 150km!! In Dubbo Marc Irvin, from NSW Office of Environment & Heritage, hosted a Malleefowl information session at Dubbo Parks office with about 20 people attending. Many were members of the Dubbo Field Naturalists. The following day we all headed out to Goonoo National Park for some real on-ground practice. It quickly became apparent how easy the androids are to use, with everyone catching on very soon. We checked out two mounds (both inactive) and then back to the Parks Offices for a BBQ lunch.

Then it was down to West Wyalong where David Kellett from Riverina LLS played host. We spent a full day meeting farmers and a team working with Riverina LLS to develop a Malleefowl management plan for the region. We visited a few Malleefowl mounds (2 active) in the Yalgogrin area with local Malleefowl expert, 17 year old Tommy.

We were both greatly encouraged by the high level of enthusiasm from local landholders. One Yalgogrin farmer said that they had previously been told that Malleefowl in the area were doomed. But Joe disagreed and emphasised that there was no reason the Malleefowl could not survive in the area: "It's all about managing whatever is lacking for the birds; we have seen many times across the nation that Malleefowl can persist in small reserves with appropriate management". On hearing this, the local promptly replied "I would have done much more if I'd known it was worthwhile!" This farmer seemed ready to back up that statement with increased effort to protect Malleefowl habitat on his land in the future, and other locals appeared similarly determined. We'll be on hand to help these landholders develop a monitoring program for their Malleefowl population – the first step to management – and armed with knowledge of what the population is doing the locals will be in a much better position to tweak management to improve the future outlook for the birds.

And then finally it was the drive down the Hume Highway back to Melbourne and then Casterton. A bigish drive but definitely worth it.

The enthusiasm we saw in NSW for helping Malleefowl was very encouraging. NSW looks set to play a far greater part in the NMMD in the future.



DUBBO FIELD NATURALISTS IN THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

CAMERA-TRAPPING ACROSS MONITORING SITES

BY JOE BENHEMESH, NMR TEAM



KeepGuard

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KeepGuard

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KeepGuard

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Ever wondered who's prowling around your monitoring site when you're not there...which of course is almost all of the time? Foxes and kangaroos most likely, maybe also cats? Dingoes? Pigs, goats or deer?

The remote camera project is about getting a handle on all the other species that co-exist with Malleefowl. We need to know what the introduced predators are doing, whether they are on the increase or decline, and whether they are responding to management actions the way we want them to.

Those of us who monitor Malleefowl breeding numbers typically visit our sites for a few daylight hours each year; we record prints and scats of various animals at the mounds, agonise over identification (fox? cat? dog?...nothing?), and hope that our collective observations will make some sense and reflect trends in the abundance of these animals. But even if such identification was reliable and easy (alas, it's not), how much does this information really tell us?

To see if camera-traps might be a more efficient way of obtaining data on predators and competitors of Malleefowl, in 2013 we bought 25 camera-traps complete with battery and solar panel, from our friends at Faunatech with the help of the Iluka Malleefowl Management Committee grant and installed the cameras at a couple of Malleefowl monitoring sites in Victoria. We wanted to measure background trends of other animals that were independent of Malleefowl or the existing monitoring, so we set the cameras up away from mounds at scattered locations.

The equipment worked very well, capturing over 100,000 photos over the initial 224 days. Most of these were nulls due to moving vegetation or shadows and we have learnt a lot about how to minimise these by modifying the camera setup. But there were also many thousands of photos

of animals of interest, especially foxes and kangaroos, but also Malleefowl, emus, echidnas, pigs, rabbits, hares, and cats.

Given that the technology performed well, the next question was what to do with all those photos! We devised a simple system for sorting the photos and tried it out on 14 VMRG members, and the results were very encouraging. In this exercise, 15 people were provided with sets of 5000 photos to sort and identify, and they were also asked to time their work. The average time to sort and identify animals was only about 45 minutes per thousand photos. Crowdsourcing proved to be as effective as it was popular: we had 75,000 photos sorted in a few weeks (about 60 hours of actually sorting, averaging about 4 hrs per person), and everyone seemed to enjoy the process and were keen to do more. Indeed just about everyone involved said they would gladly sort three times as many photos each year. As it turns out, this is not far short of the number of photos we would expect to obtain each year from a monitoring site using a refined setup that reduces nulls and redundancy. Assuming we need 6-10 cameras to monitor various animals at a typical site, it looks like one person will be able to sort the photos in 8-15 hours. Not bad for a year's worth of

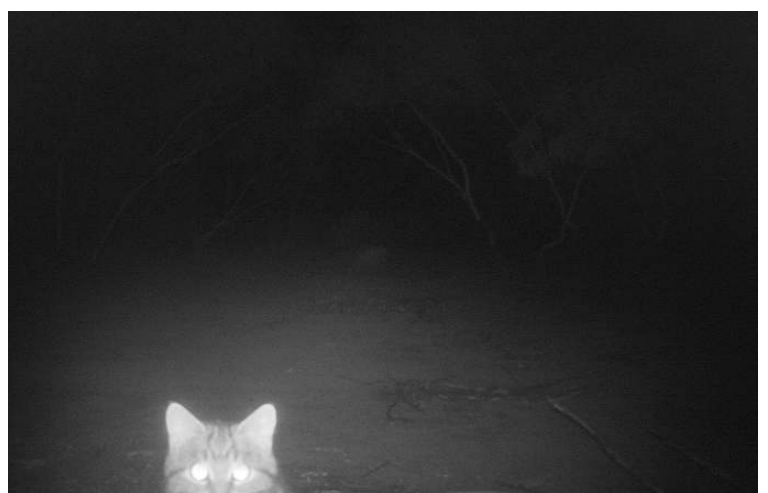
photos, and of course the task could be spread over many months and need not be a burden.

On the strength of these results and the willingness of VMRG members to undertake the work, the Iluka MMC has provided funds for another 50 cameras that we plan to install this autumn. Our plan is to install our cameras at selected sites where they will stay there indefinitely, powered by the sun and capturing the images of animals onto a memory card.

Each year, when we do the routine monitoring of the site, we will visit each of the cameras at a site and swap the memory card over for an empty one. The photos will then be collated and sent out for sorting. Once the sorted photos are returned, the location, date, time, and identification of each photo will be recorded on a database.

It's all looking very doable, and the resulting data is set to revolutionise our understanding and the management of species that are likely to affect Malleefowl. In particular, the data will be of great importance to the adaptive management project and to this end Rosanna van Hespden (Melbourne University) will be examining the data in detail this year to assess its potential for monitoring foxes.

AND THERE'S LOTS OF THESE IN SOME PLACES!



KeepGuard

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NCMPG REPORT BY GORDON MCNEILL

After a very successful monitoring training weekend at Dalwallinu in early August 2014 there were ten members who took part in monitoring this season with six travelling up to 300 kms from as far as Perth to help. There was even one visitor from Adelaide who found himself in the bush at 5.30am one morning monitoring Malleefowl mounds. Something I don't think he ever imagined doing!

Two groups of the people monitoring were treated to the privilege of watching Malleefowl working on their mounds and some good photos and footage resulted. It certainly is a rewarding experience.

The monitoring season at the four North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group sites was mixed with ten active mounds out of the 143 mounds monitored. Six of the active mounds

were at one site which has 36 mounds. So that site had a far greater activity rate than the other sites which only had four active mounds out of 107 mounds. Why?? I wish I knew the answer considering one site which only had one active mound out of 31 mounds is only about 3km across country from the site with greatest activity.

I have put forward the idea that the damage done by road kill (even a low rate of kill over the years) is a reason for Malleefowl decline in bush remnant sites. The two sites mentioned above are on roads with greatly different traffic densities.

NCMPG members also helped monitor at Charles Darwin Reserve owned by Bush Heritage and provided equipment for monitoring almost 300 mounds at the Mount Gibson Mining site north east of Wubin.



PETER WATERHOUSE, JOHN & ANDREW TANNER AND GORDON MCNEILL AT MILTON MCNEILL RESERVE



A MALLEEFOWL AT WORK AT SITE W 07
PHOTO BY MARYANN EVETTS

YONGERGNOW UPDATE BY VICKY BILNEY, YONGERGNOW BIOLOGIST/PROJECT MANAGER

Obituary – Jesus the Malleefowl

Jesus was Ongerup's, or maybe even Western Australia's, most renowned Malleefowl.

Sadly, his life ended too soon on a Wednesday morning last February, when he met his fate in the shape of a vehicle.

Jesus started his life as a participant in a research project about Malleefowl chick survival, in the process of which he was re-homed from his grounds of hatching to a small nature reserve north of Ongerup.

Jesus established a mound in this nature reserve, which was discovered on a Malleefowl survey run by the Malleefowl Preservation Group (MPG) in 2010. His mound was active every year since its discovery.

Susanne Dennings, one of the founding members of nearly everything to do with Malleefowl conservation in the Gnowangerup Shire, and former neighbour to Jesus' home reserve, developed a very special relationship with Jesus over the years.

Jesus was no ordinary Malleefowl (if you can call any one of those magnificent birds ordinary). Instead of fleeing when his mound was approached, he very curiously used to come closer and inspect his callers! He didn't do this cautiously, however, but often at full running pace to within one metre of the visitor. (This is highly unusual - even captive-raised Malleefowl who are used to contact with humans are usually shy by nature.) Susanne was his favourite, though - as soon as Jesus heard her, he'd be there, often right under her feet.

Jesus also formed many other

interesting relationships during his life.

Amongst others, he was introduced to Chris Darwin, Charles of evolution fame's great-grandson, enjoyed a visit by country singer John Williamson and starred in William McInnes' 'Hello Birdie' series.

Jesus can also be seen on YouTube (search for Vicky Bilney) representing the Southwest of Western Australia and its magnificent biodiversity.

"What a wonderful bird he was. I will never forget him", Susanne says. To everyone who knew him, Jesus was a very special Malleefowl. He was a true ambassador for his species, and we miss him. He was an icon and will live on in our hearts.

We are hoping that Jesus' offspring will step into his shoes and continue making their little nature reserve a very special place - for both Malleefowl and the people who those magnificent birds mean so much to.



JESUS DISPLAYING FOR HIS SPECIAL FRIEND
SUSANNE DENNINGS
PHOTO COURTESY OF ROD SMITH.



MALLEEFOWL CHICK
PHOTO LENA GROSCHE

On the road (- again)?

On the same Wednesday morning in February on which Jesus the Malleefowl died, visiting German landscape ecologist and passionate birder Lena Grosche went for a walk along Foster Road north of Ongerup, when she came across a strange quail-like bird she was unable to identify. It was standing on the gravel road, and flew off just after she had taken the above snapshot of it.

Lena visited Yongergnow later this morning and showed me the picture - the bird was a Malleefowl chick! They are rarely ever seen in the wild, so when Lena heard what she had basically stumbled across, she was more than excited!

We know that there are active Malleefowl mounds in a private reserve less than a kilometre from where Lena had seen the chick. It was good to see that there was at least one survivor this year - and we wish the little fella the best of luck!

INVESTIGATING MALLEEFOWL IN AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST DESERT

KATHRYN.SINCLAIR, GVD BT COORDINATOR

Before reading further, a question you might ask yourself is...what is Australia's largest desert?

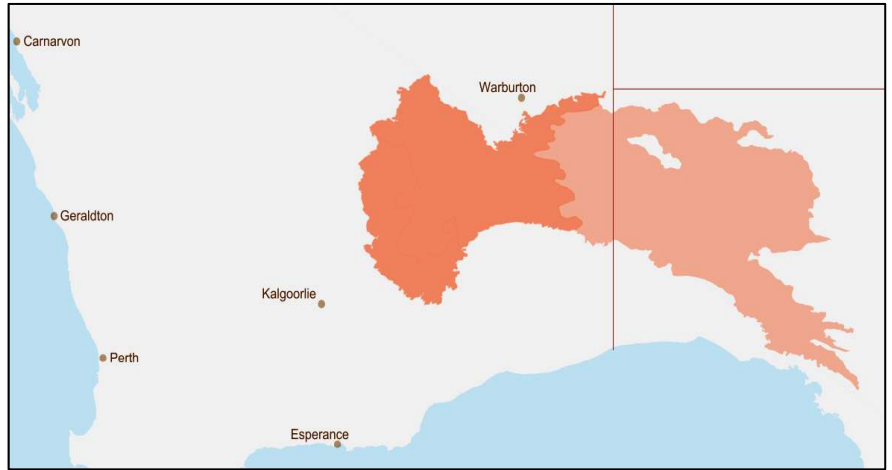
It's the Great Victoria Desert which sits just above the Nullabor. It has an area of 418,800 km² of land within Western Australia and South Australia and contains several populations of Malleefowl.

On the 25th of November 2014 the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust, together with the Department of Parks and Wildlife (WA) hosted a workshop on Malleefowl. The workshop brought together over 40 experts, government agencies, Traditional Owners, industry, not-for-profits and community members. The aim of the workshop was to determine the priorities for research and on-ground management activities to help conserve viable populations of Malleefowl in the WA Great Victoria Desert (GVD).

Presenters at the workshop included:

- Dr Blair Parsons who provided a talk a WA perspective on Malleefowl ecology and management
- Dr Joe Benshemesh focused on the monitoring effort including the community, databases and adaptive management
- Dr Rick Southgate detailed Malleefowl detection and occupancy in the eastern Great Victoria Desert
- Dr Scott Thompson who provided insights into high definition aerial photography to search for mounds
- Amy Mutton who provided an overview of the history and legislation surrounding Malleefowl

The Spinifex Land Management Rangers including Justin Graham,



Scott Baird and Liam Mulcahy provided a presentation on their on-ground work on the Malleefowl including utilising traditional knowledge and using this alongside technologies such as CyberTracker and motion sensor cameras to increase understanding of Malleefowl occupancy.

The entire group listened to the presentations and discussed priorities for research and on-ground activities to aid the survival of Malleefowl in the Great Victoria Desert.

The Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust will use information gathered from this workshop together with existing literature on the

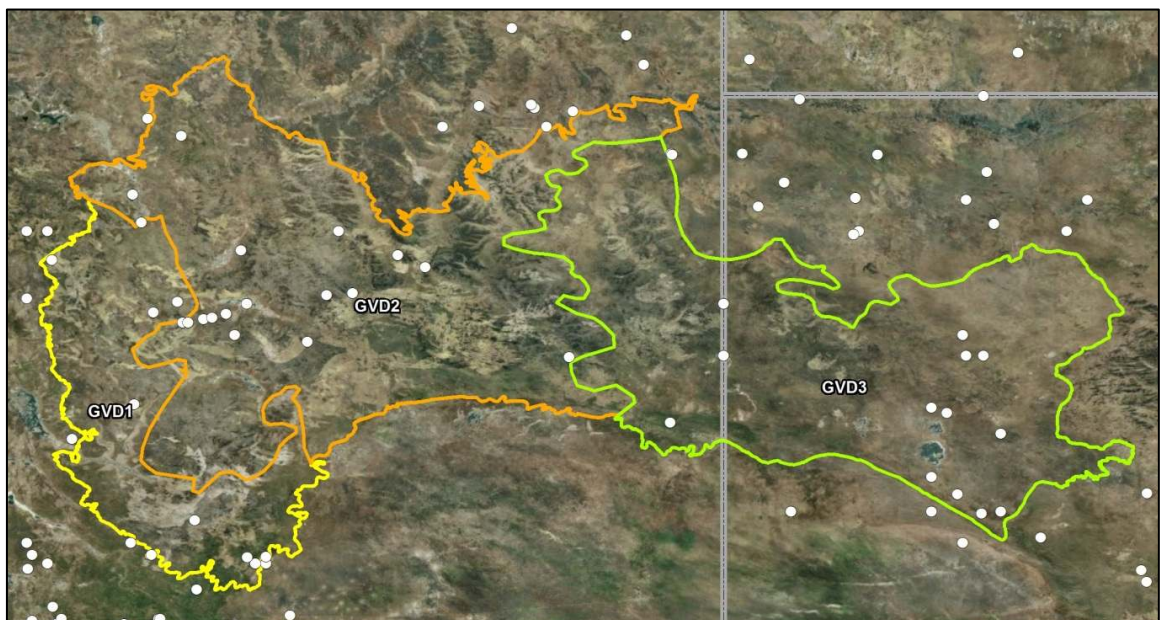
Malleefowl in the Great Victoria Desert to produce a report on priorities for conserving the species, especially in arid areas such as the GVD Desert.

Later in the year, the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust will hold a Grants Round to allow researchers and community groups to apply for funding to undertake activities related to preserving Malleefowl in the Great Victoria Desert. If you want to learn more about the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust visit the website:

www.gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/ or contact the Co-ordinator, Kathryn on: Kathryn.sinclair@gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au



MALLEEFOWL RECORDS IN THREE SECTIONS OF THE GREAT VICTORIA DESERT



NGANAMARA MONITORING IN THE GREAT VICTORIA DESERT

BY ADAM PENNINGTON, DEWNR



THE OAK VALLEY NGANAMARA SURVEY TEAM, FROM LEFT: ADAM PENNINGTON, HARTLEY QUEAMA, JOE BENSHEMESH, LYNDON PEPPER AND MILTON KUGENA
PHOTO NATHAN WILLIAMS.

The last week of October 2014 saw Indigenous Land Managers from Oak Valley and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands come together with staff from Natural Resources Alinytjara Wilurara (NRAW) and Joe Benshemesh to monitor Malleefowl (Nganamara) in the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands in the remote central Northwest of South Australia.

While Malleefowl are known to occur through vast areas of the Great Victoria Desert, developing a method to monitor the species when it is in such low numbers over such a large area is a great challenge. But it is of great importance to know how these populations are trending because they are important to Anangu, and to Malleefowl conservation nationally.

In 2012, Joe Benshemesh was engaged by NRAW to work with community members from Oak Valley to develop a technique to monitor Nganamara in the arid zone of the Great Victoria Desert. The result was development of a 'long walk' transect method whereby small groups cover 16-20 km of country in 2 km sections, walking parallel to a road approx. 100m in from the road edge searching the ground for signs of Nganamara, principally tracks and mounds. Data is collected using the CyberTracker program. A process is being developed to allow this data to be incorporated into the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database.

This methodology proved to be an efficient way of collecting data over a large area while spreading the work load, meaning people were not at risk of walking long distances in a remote area in potentially adverse conditions (i.e. very bloody hot or very bloody cold).

Two 'long-walk' transects were established in 2012 and provide a

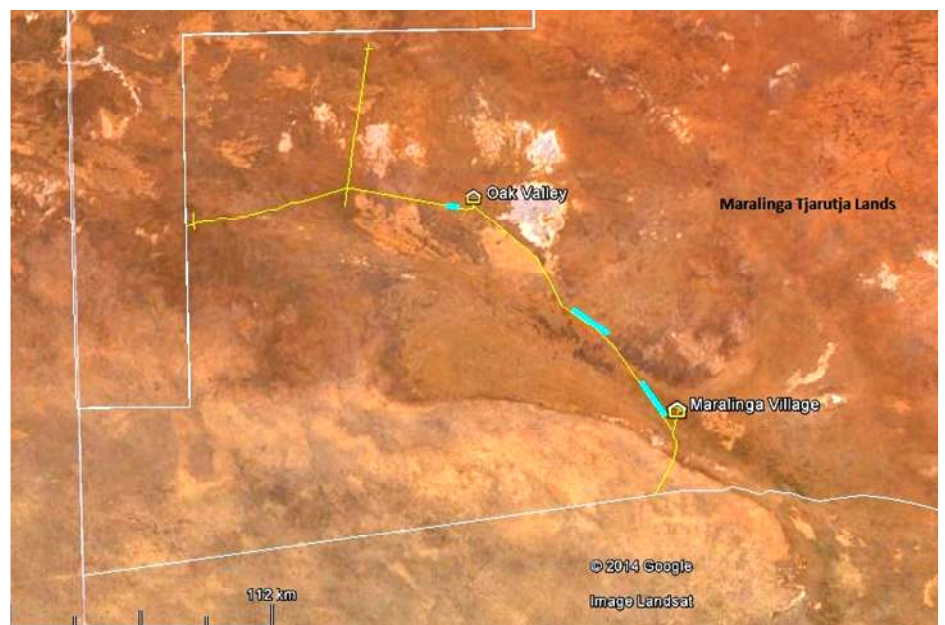
benchmark for the future. We will continue to monitor the occurrence of Malleefowl in these areas and plan to extend these as Anangu steadily search other areas for suitable Malleefowl populations.

The aim of the recent trip was to re-survey the two transects established in 2012 and teach staff from APY Land Management the new 'long walk' transect survey method. To that end, 12 staff from APY Land Management (9 Aboriginal Rangers, 3 non-Aboriginal Coordinators) made the 1200km journey to Oak Valley to undertake the work and learn the technique. APY Land Management staff combined with 16 community members from Oak Valley to cover 35 km of country across the two 'long walk' transects. Then, alas, the weather changed for the worse with wind, rain, lightning and fire and the opportunities for tracking disappeared.

Nonetheless, we were able to capture data over a key monitoring area, checked on ten previously found mounds (none active this year) and install some motion sensitive cameras at six of these mounds before conditions deteriorated and people dispersed.

During the course of the trip, it was overwhelmingly apparent that Nganamara is a great vehicle for land management and conservation activities. Through these activities, Rangers from Oak Valley and APY have not only gained practical skills in the use of GPS software and equipment but also knowledge of threatened species conservation and threat abatement processes. Nganamara monitoring has also provided a useful way of engaging the wider community in land management activities as community sightings are reported to Rangers who then inform the survey program. This, in turn, has seen cultural knowledge of Nganamara passed on from older to younger generations thereby reinvigorating traditional conservative use of Nganamara resources.

A return trip is planned for 2015 where Oak Valley Land Management team members will travel to southern APY Lands and work with APY Land Management during their Autumn Nganamara monitoring program. Informal discussions were also held about creating a Great Victoria Desert Nganamara community group consisting of Oak Valley, APY Land Management and Spinifex Land Management (adjacent to Maralinga Tjarutja Lands in WA) that will advocate for Nganamara in the Great Victoria Desert, coordinate surveys and share information between the groups. All of this is, of course, up to Anangu. It's their land, and their project. But that's where the group seems to be heading and we will do our best to nurture this aspiration and support the fine work they are pioneering.



LOCATION OF NGANAMARA MONITORING TRANSECTS (BLUE LINES) LOCATED IN THE MARALINGA TJARUTJA LANDS

'THE DEATH ZONE' UPDATE SCENIC HIGHWAY TO MOONABIE HILL, SA

BY LORRAINE AND JIM WALFORD

Our first article about this area was written on 17/9/12 following the loss of 14 Malleefowl by roadkill, the first known to be 8/11/10.

This site is approximately 50km SW of Whyalla in South Australia and is adjacent to the Munyaroo Conservation Reserve and 10km west of the Munyaroo Conservation Park. There are heritage blocks on the NW corner of the intersection of the Lincoln Highway with the Scenic Highway, and on the east side of the road to the north of the Munyaroo Conservation Reserve.

In 1991 a bushfire burnt through this part of the Ironstone Hill Conservation Park south of the Middleback Range (which includes the Iron Duke Mine) and crossed the Lincoln Highway into surrounding areas. We know that the vegetation in this Park has since returned to pre-fire state.

The range of Malleefowl from the Scenic Highway to Moonabie Hill is approximately 16km.

In October 2012 there were two deaths, November had one, and December had two definite (possibly three as there were two sets of feathers at the same site).

January 2013 had two deaths, on March 1 and October 1.

A total of at least 23 Malleefowl were killed in this area between 8/11/2010 and 4/10/2013. We have travelled this road consistently from the year 2000. We saw our last live bird in the area on 24/2/13.

A prescribed burn was conducted on 8/10/14 and burnt about 700 hectares along the northern side of the Lincoln Highway in the Ironstone Conservation Park. Its primary objective is to reduce the fuel load next to the highway to help protect road users but also to protect large patches of spinifex and long unburnt Mallee. Regrowth is visible at the base of the Mallee trees.



MURRAY DARLING BASIN UPDATE, SA

BY DAVE SETCHELL, MONITORING PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The 2014/2015 season marked the eleventh year of an ongoing Dept. of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) program of annual Malleefowl grid monitoring in the SA Murray Darling Basin, part of the national monitoring program.

24 grids (531 mounds) were monitored this season on DEWNR reserves, private properties and Commonwealth land. This included seven grids monitored by BirdLife Australia volunteers on Gluepot Reserve and four grids monitored by Australian Landscape Trust volunteers on Taylorville Station.

33 active mounds were recorded, which was two better than last season, but this was only due to the addition of new grids to the annual monitoring program. Only five active mounds were recorded north of the Murray River. However, two of these active mounds were on one of the new grids at Taylorville, so there was a decrease in active mounds on the other grids.

A total of 383 hours of volunteer time was contributed to the monitoring effort and DEWNR thanks all the individuals and groups involved.

A good number of new volunteers were signed up this season but overall volunteer hours were down due to lack of availability and cancellations of group surveys due to hot weather.

Good opening rains gave us some optimism for a productive breeding season but the remainder of the critical May to September period was extremely dry with above average temperatures, much like the previous year. The grids at Peebinga and Bakara Conservation Parks were the notable exceptions, with both grids recording a marked increase in active mounds this season, possibly due to localised rainfall events through mid-2014 and ongoing feral animal control programs in both areas.

This season also saw a successful transition to using smartphones for recording monitoring data and taking mound photos. The smartphones were generally very well received by the volunteers.

We are always looking for volunteers to help with monitoring, particularly with some of the more remote grids in the Murray Mallee area. If you would like to become involved with the monitoring program, please contact me on 0428 873 090 or dhsetchell@gmail.com



ACTIVE MOUND AT BAKARA CONSERVATION PARK

2014 MONITORING SEASON SOUTH EAST SA

VICKI NATT, COORDINATOR, SE

Monitoring the five grids of the South East Region of South Australia for season 2014 started on October 21 and was completed by the end of October. These included Mount Boothby to the north, two grids in Gum Lagoon Conservation Park, (Coola Coola and Naen Naen), one in Mount Scott Conservation Park and the Coorong grid located in the Mallee of the Southern Coorong.

The weather was kind overall for monitoring at all sites apart from one fire ban day at Mount Boothby which was successfully negotiated by getting the monitoring done early before it got hot. The bush showed surprising resilience and looked reasonably healthy considering the dry spring conditions in the region this season.

In total, 153 (of a possible 198) mounds were monitored including three outside the Coorong site. Of these, 27 mounds found to be active, three less than last year and 6 less than the 2013 season possibly reflecting seasonal conditions. Though no active mounds were found on the Coorong site, two mounds site nearby were active.

A good turnout of staff and volunteers took part in the monitoring. Seven different individual volunteers and fourteen different staff members from various organisations, including DENWR, Coorong Tatiara Local Action Plan, Working on Country Cultural Rangers, Nature Glenelg Trust and the National Malleefowl Recovery Team participated on one or more days this season. Three volunteers and eight staff took part in the monitoring at Mount Boothby over two days. The

Gum Lagoon (Coola Coola grid) took a further two days in which two volunteers and six staff participated. Tim Burnard was kind enough to monitor the Naen Naen grid on his way home from elsewhere in SA. Mount Scott took two days to wrap up involving only two volunteers. The Coorong grid was completed in half a day involving six people in two teams of mostly indigenous staff, some of whom participated for the first time this season. Daryl Long rose to the challenge to be a team leader.

Chris Thompson was very helpful, using his contacts to find people to monitor three of the sites. Thanks Chris.

Margaret Emery and Chris Brien who have monitored a number of times at Mount Scott, had a change of scenery, monitoring at Mount Boothby instead. They took on the role of team leaders for the first time. New volunteer Joseph Defoe seemed to enjoy the Mount Boothby experience as well. All three camped overnight.

Bryan and Peter Haywood participated again, this time at Gum Lagoon Coola Coola grid. They camped overnight along with two others and spent some time exploring the area for other creatures as well as mound monitoring. The fire crew from Mount Gambier joined in for the first time on this grid.

Bryan is Senior Ecologist at Nature Glenelg Trust and has spent a lot of time working on the 'Review of Malleefowl Regional Action Plan for the South East of SA'. As part of that process he arranged for us to meet with Graeme Gates and James Darling, where their expertise and

opinions were sought about future management of Malleefowl. Ways to use remote cameras to see if Malleefowl are utilising revegetation areas in Morella/Martins Washpool Conservation Park were discussed. Bryan has organised for Malleefowl to be highlighted at the South East Field Days this year to raise awareness amongst private landowners, encouraging them to share information on where Malleefowl are on their properties. It is hoped that their input may enable us to map with more accuracy the current distribution of Malleefowl in the South East. Bryan's support has been invaluable.

Three people from the South East attended the Malleefowl Forum at Dubbo which was a great experience for several reasons. It meant a visit to a completely different area with different issues (and some of the same); it was a chance to learn about the latest research and innovations and to network with lots of people with a common interest in 'bush chooks'.

I am grateful to the Coorong Tatiara Local Action Plan for supplying the funding for me to continue as project officer.

A special thanks to Graeme Tonkin for his time (and patience) once again to deal with the technical stuff including instructions on how to get Cybertracker up and running, ironing out equipment problems and validating all the data.

A big thankyou to everyone who participated this season, especially those who volunteered their time, travelling all the way from Adelaide, Mount Gambier and 'over the border'.



SITE MONITORING GUMLAGOON OCTOBER 2014



MONITORING TEAM GUMLAGOON OCTOBER 2014



THE MALLEE POST ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES

BY GRAEME TONKIN

Malleefowl from the thoughts of 'Young People'.

The Sydney Mail (NSW) 4 January 1911
TOLD BY THE MALLEE HEN.
 BY DORIS R. CAMPBELL (Aged 14 Years).
 Young folk may not all be acquainted with these birds — poor, strange things, which lay their eggs on the ground, and, after building a mud mound over them, go away. The eggs hatch, and the young birds scratch their way out. Then they seek in the bush for their parents. When I woke I found myself scratching away at a brown mound of earth. I was in utter darkness, and was scraping away as fast as ever I possibly could. After a long while of strenuous working, I at last tossed aside the final layer of dirt which hid me from the world, and stood for the first time in broad daylight. All round were immense green trees, and thick latticed creepers, twining up tall, gaunt gums. There were mountains, too, and dense scrubs. Making a general survey of myself, I proved to be a very fine creature for my age— tall, well-feathered with long, strong legs. My mother had evidently been an elegant person. It was pleasant walking along, nibbling weeds and catching insects as I went. What a long day it was! Full of joyful surprises. So many pretty trees and famous resting-spots. At nightfall I slept in a crevice near a rocky cave. It was extremely comfortable. In the morning my breakfast consisted of delightful grubs and penny-royal. Once more continuing my travels, I encountered a rock-wallaby by a fern valley and we chatted amiably together. For a week I lived in this manner, always moving forward in the hope of finding Mother Mallee. It was a strong ambition, and I longed to see my dear parent. There is a country miles from civilisation, where the Mallee parents always go, after leaving their eggs to hatch. I struggled along, sniffing the air and swallowing insects. One day, finding myself on a bleak hill, I fully imagined that my death would take place. For there was no water in sight, and only dry thistles as food. Wearily keeping on, I reached a spring, and just saved my life in the cool, fresh pool. There were constant hardships, which proved most trying to endure. Few bush-creatures lived in this dry and tedious country. Mountain-maggies, lizards, ant-eaters, iguanas, etc., were in plenty, but the plain-loving animals were seeking green pastures elsewhere. Falling over a stone one night, I hurt my legs very much. A kind-hearted 'possum fed me on gum-leaves till recovery was prominent. Then I continued on the long journey. There were times when I felt very

lonely and weak with walking and climbing hills. But one day, at the foot of a tall mountain I saw green grass, and sparkling water. It was with a beating heart that I pushed forward. Emerald grass underfoot; flashing birds among the vines and flowers; lazy lagoons of clear water. Mallee-hens were playing under the gorgeous trees— handsome mallee-hens, that welcomed me tenderly. Someone put loving wings round me. It was mother. "Dear little hen," she said, in her native tongue. "After many troubles, you have reached us!" I had found the Happy Land at last.

Weekly Times (Vic) 14 July 1917

The Mallee Hen

by Elsie Symes of Walpeup, Vic.

Elsie Symes, who lives at Walpeup, writes: Dear Aunt Connie,-I will take for my subject the "Mallee Hen, as told by itself. It is as follows:- "When I was hatched in the ground I was a yellow, fluffy little thing, just like a duck, only my beak was like a hen's. When I got all my feathers I was dark grey. My mother taught me to fly, and after I was older I could fly away up in the air. Once when I was running through the bushes I saw a man with a gun and three little boys with him. I did not fly; I kept running from bush to bush and hiding from them till I was well out of sight, so they did not get a shot at me. After that I found a mate, and I built a nest. I scratched up a heap of dirt about 3ft. high, and I made a hole in the centre of it and put a lot of leaves and rubbish in it. Then I waited for a shower of rain to come and damp the leaves. Then I laid some eggs in it and covered them with dirt. I had one nice row of four eggs and three bad boys came and took them, and then I had to start and lay again. When the young ones were hatched they lay on their backs and scratched their way out. They then began to look around for food.

I am 11years and 4 months old. My birthday was on January 7. Please may I write again?

(I shall be pleased to hear from you again, Elsie. -Aunt' Connie.)

The Mail (SA) 12 October 1935

The Mallee Hen

By Lorna M. Latz, Ashton, S.A.

Although pheasant is the correct name of this timid bird, it is more commonly known as the mallee hen. It is a brownish colored bird about the size of a fowl and is mostly found in sandy mallee country.

Being naturally quick and alert, it is difficult to catch sight of, as the least sound causes it to flee, with its head bent low and body close to the ground, until it and the earth become as one. When surprised away from cover it rises to a height of about 10 ft from the ground, and with a loud whirr flies swiftly away until cover is reached, when it lands once more and is soon lost from sight. Pheasant shooting was, I believe, considered excellent sport, but lately these timid birds have been protected under penalty of a heavy fine. They are said to be excellent eating, but I could not eat them as they are so fascinating to watch. When mating time comes the hen sets to work to build her nest, and what a task it must be for the little bird. A clearing in the heart of some mallee trees is chosen, and the hen places a layer of leaves and a layer of earth alternately until she has a nest of from 12 to 16 ft. in diameter and about 9 in. high. As the eggs are laid they are covered with leaves and earth, a small, round hole or tunnel being left leading from each egg to four or five inches from the top of the mound, where more leaves and earth cover the openings. The nest, now completed, is from three to four feet in height and may hold from 10 to 25 reddish brown eggs, each five or six inches long. Having completed her job, the hen goes away again, leaving the leaves and earth to rot and so provide sufficient heat to hatch the eggs. Three months and out come the young pheasants. Not from the nest, however, for having broken the shell of the egg, they commence eating the grubs and insects which they find among the rotten leaves, until they are quite strong. Then up the tunnel they go, and scratch away the earth left on top until at last they are free. As seen at this stage, they are about the size of a week-old chicken, and resemble a young turkey in color. From the time they are hatched until they are full grown they fend for themselves, and consequently are strong and healthy. And so, although the hen has a strenuous time while building her nest, she has no worry of looking after her young as have most birds. It is interesting to note that the claws of a mallee chicken of about a month old are so strong and sharp as to make a person cry out with pain when the flesh is gripped by them. As these are their main means of getting food, it is small wonder they are so strong and sharp.

Lorna M. Latz (17), Ashton— Four marks.

ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES (CONTINUED)

Western Mail (WA) 17 May 1945

Mallee Fowl

by Marge Longbottom of Darradup, W.A.
PRIZE LETTER.

DEAR "Aunt Mary." -In this letter I'm going to tell you about the Mallee Fowl. The Mallee Fowl is to be found among the scrub in the inland districts of Southern Australia, and also in the coastal regions of the south-western corner of Western Australia. This bird is beautifully coloured. It is a mottled grey, brown, and white, and is about the size of a domestic turkey. Many weeks before laying their eggs, the birds scrape together loads of dead leaves, decaying vegetable matter, sand and sticks to construct their mounds. When the mounds are completed, they are about 35ft in circumference and 5ft in height. They are usually built in a sunny position. Time is allowed for them to become sufficiently

warm to provide a natural incubator. The Mallee Hen then opens the top of the mound, scratches down to a depth of about two feet, and deposits each egg in an upright position with the pointed end downwards. This procedure is carried out each time, and when the nest is opened the eggs are found in a circle, about 9in apart. The eggs are a light salmon in colour, large and thin shelled. After the eggs have been deposited in the mound, they are allowed to remain there until they are hatched. It takes about nine weeks. The chicks are soon able to fly off to the branches of the trees. They are very fast on their feet and lead an independent existence. Some of these mounds have been found to contain three or four clutches at a time. Your loving niece,
MARGE LONGBOTTOM, Darradup

Receives a book for her letter.

INTERESTING MALLEEFOWL AND MOUND PHOTOS

If you have any interesting photos send them to tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au



Above is a photo I took on my farm in the Eastern Wheatbelt of WA (Mt Hampton/South Bodallin area). You can also see a Malleefowl in the distance.

Basically we were drinking a few beers around an old shed when these two Malleefowl came up to within 3 metres of us and moved past us towards the access road. The Malleefowl in the photo is about 10 metres from the sheds.

This is probably the fourth time I have seen Malleefowl in the same area. I have had a brief look for the mound but no luck yet.

Jack Harma 0418 265 617
jack.harma@hanking.com.au

Mantung Maggea Land Management Group, SA

BY GLENDA HALL

The Group formed in 1991 and is a group of landholders within the Mantung Maggea area about 40km west of Loxton who work together to complete coordinated rabbit and fox control programs, and also to protect and enhance the local Malleefowl population.

Photos on the right are supplied by Henry Short



CONTACT US

National Malleefowl Recovery Team Chairperson

Sharon Gillam
sharon.gillam@sa.gov.au
08 8463 6927

Editor

Gil Hopkins
giliz@activ8.net.au
03 5383 8207

Submissions for Edition Seven of Around the Mounds close on **Friday 12/9/15.**

For editing, articles are best sent by email 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.com.au and www.malleefowl.net.au



ScoutGuard

11.17.2013 07:22:50



ScoutGuard

11.29.2013 09:05:55

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM MEMBER

BLAIR PARSONS, WA



My first genuine exposure to Malleefowl was with CSIRO when conducting bird surveys in the fragmented WA Wheatbelt in 2001.

I was part of a team working on a landscape ecology project looking at the habitat requirements of avifauna (ie. How much bush is required? How big? How connected?). During this project, the Malleefowl was identified as a key declining species, and one that captured the community's imagination. I came across a few mounds and birds during the surveys and I was hooked.

I followed on from this work with a PhD (2005 -2008) looking exclusively at the Malleefowl and their patterns of decline, distribution, habitat use and response to fire within the WA Wheatbelt and beyond. This project allowed me to work with a range of people doing amazing things to manage and conserve the species, including the Malleefowl Preservation Group and North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group.

In 2008, I moved to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, whose sanctuaries encompass some important parts of the range of the Malleefowl, not the least being Mt Gibson Sanctuary, approximately four hours north-east of Perth. Here, and on Bush Heritage's adjacent Charles Darwin Reserve, Malleefowl appear to be quite prevalent, as informed by monitoring initiated in 2010 and continued annually. The habitat within these sanctuaries is great for Malleefowl and represents one of a few remaining examples of contiguous habitat with much of it having been cleared within the agricultural region. I was lucky enough to be involved in the design and

conduct of these surveys and it is great to see important data being collected year upon year.

My current role is as an environmental consultant with MWH (Outback Ecology). The Malleefowl is often a focus as infrastructure, mining and resource development projects intersect the range of the species, primarily throughout the mineral-rich Goldfields and Murchison regions of Western Australia. As the species is nationally listed, any impacts from proposed developments must be assessed, and the species is often monitored during project operation to ensure that management for the species is adequate and any impacts are minimised.

Currently, I am hopeful for a continuation of the great work that has been occurring to conserve the Malleefowl and its habitat across the WA Wheatbelt and I look forward to seeing new activities commence in other important areas of the species' range, including the Great Western Woodlands and the Great Victoria Desert.

My special Malleefowl Monitoring moment.

BY TIM BURNARD

Everybody knows that I'm relatively new to the Malleefowl Monitoring world but this year Vicki Natt trusted us to monitor our own site solo! The site is in South East SA and has been monitored for eight years.

We set up camp on night one and at about 5.45pm, we were amazed to see a Malleefowl wander through the camp just 30 metres away. It was easy to follow the bird's path until it went into the bush...then of course it just disappeared!

Next day was monitoring and a very interesting day it was. Three live mounds, an egg presumably predated by a fox and an amazing wedgie nest with over a dozen shingleback lizard skeletons lying at the base.

That night I determined to get the most show-offy Malleefowl monitoring photo by setting up the

table and wine just in case the bird wandered through again. Right on schedule he turned up and I started snapping away. But oh the joy...this was going to be the most show-offy

Malleefowl ever; because the partner showed up and joined in on the photo. Feel free to send in your picture, but I reckon this photo is pretty up there! tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au

