

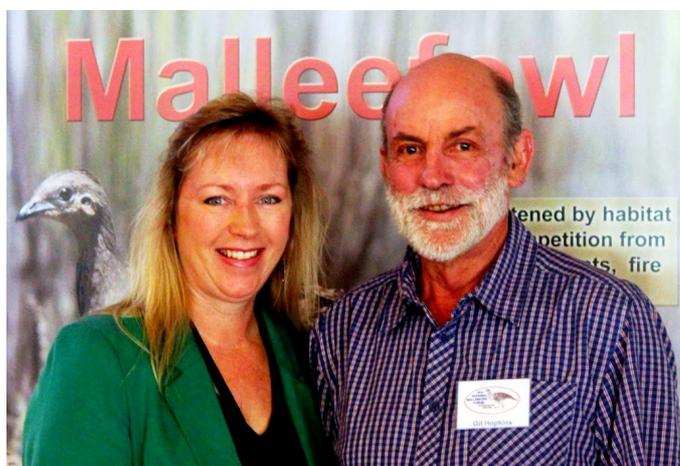


# around THE MOUNDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM SPRING 2014 EDITION SIX

## NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM

BY SHARON GILLAM, CHAIRPERSON



SHARON GILLAM WITH EDITOR GIL HOPKINS AT DUBBO MALLEEFOWL FORUM - PHOTO PETER WATERHOUSE

Malleefowl recovery activity continues across the country, as we strive towards halting and ultimately reversing the decline of this unique species.

The Fifth National Malleefowl Forum was held in mid September, and I am pleased to report that the event was very well attended by delegates from all 'Malleefowl' states, held in an excellent venue within the superb surrounds of the Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo, NSW. Equally pleasing were the range of presentations, delivered professionally and with passion, and keeping us all abreast of the latest in Malleefowl research, technologies and conservation actions. Well done to Melanie Bannerman and Tim Burnard 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 and field trips on the Monday. The weather was nothing

short of perfect during the whole event. We can now look forward to the Proceedings of the Forum which will be duly published, and to the Sixth Forum in 2017/18, which looks set to be held in Victoria.

The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (WA) recently hosted a very successful training weekend using the national monitoring system, attracting and inspiring a good crowd of potential new volunteers, and renewing the enthusiasm of existing team members. Likewise, the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group and the Malleefowl Preservation Group (WA) again hosted their annual events. Monitors around the states, including myself, are ready to go, eager to discover what this breeding season will reveal.

In this issue Michael Bode provides an update on how the Adaptive Management Project is tracking - maybe you can help in his quest for

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suitable experimental sites. You may ponder the question posed by Stephen Davies: "Why do Malleefowl lay so many eggs?", and gain some useful tips on preparing a presentation. Read about the proposed Monarto South project in SA, and what the Yongernow Research Centre in WA is up to. Catch up on Tim Burnard's latest report; learn more about the Threatened Bird Network, and more. I hope you enjoy the read.

# NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY PROGRAM COORDINATOR UPDATE

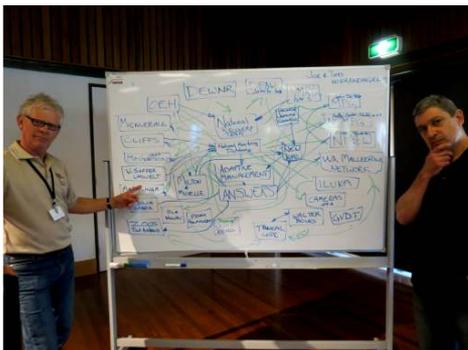
BY TIM BURNARD

Another six months have passed and there's a lot to report on.

Probably the most notable is the 5<sup>th</sup> National Malleefowl Forum held on 13-14 Sept in Dubbo. And what an event it turned out to be!

140 people came from across Australia (and even New Zealand) to discuss all things Malleefowl. There were some stand out presentations on the latest research and on-ground activities to help Malleefowl. Add to that the top notch venue and catering at the Taronga Western Plains Zoo and we had the makings of a grand event.

For me though, this was eclipsed by the opportunity for everyone to talk to each other and meet people we can normally just communicate with via email or phone. It was particularly gratifying to witness the huddles of people during breaks intently discussing the issues facing Malleefowl.



TIM AND JOE BENSHEMESH CONTEMPLATING THE NETWORKS - PHOTO CINDY HAUSER

The Forum has definitely achieved its main goal of allowing for the sharing of ideas and cementing relationships with likeminded people. I am confident that this will result in an even greater cooperation across the Malleefowl range.

Putting the Forum aside, there's a couple of other big events to report on from the past six months:- The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (NCMPG) are based in Dalwallinu WA and have been monitoring in that region for many years. Gordon and Glenda McNeil are President and Secretary of the group and this year held an extremely successful monitor training weekend that I attended with Joe Benshemesh. Joe and I were made so very welcome and it was a thrill for us to see the enthusiasm from the nearly 40 attendees. The outcome was a swag of

new monitoring volunteers keen to take part in further training during the coming season. Selection as a finalist in the Natural Resource Management (NRM) category of the Goodness Awards was a bonus and a really well deserved recognition for their efforts. The training weekend was made possible by a grant from the Gunduwa Regional Conservation Association.

And what now seems like a distant memory, Joe and I also travelled to Kalgoorlie in late May to attend the 3 day Goldfields Environmental Management Group (GEMG) Biennial Workshop. This was an opportunity for us to present the case for the National Recovery Team to a group of about 200 environment practitioners. This is important because many of the attendees are the very people who manage Malleefowl habitat and raising awareness of the needs of Malleefowl is one of the National Recovery Teams' greatest tasks. Joe and I would like to thank GEMG for ongoing funding to the Recovery Team as well as sponsoring our attendance at the Conference.

The Adaptive Management Team have been making progress over the past six months too. Our first potential experiment site has been identified near Kalgoorlie with the assistance of the local Department of Parks and Wildlife staff.

All of these stories and a lot more can also be found on our website [www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au](http://www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au) I recommend that anyone looking to learn more about Malleefowl take a look!

Anyone wanting to contact Tim Burnard can use email [tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au) or phone 03 5581 2205



2014 MALLEEFOWL STATE DATA MANAGERS - PHOTO ANDY MCQUIE

## OUR WEBSITE

[www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au](http://www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au)

is a great place to read the latest Malleefowl news from across Australia as well as 'Around the Mounds', a Library of papers and documents including research papers, an 'Important Websites' page, and our site is also an ideal place to tell any of your own Malleefowl stories. If you have any items or papers that should be added to the website please forward them to me at [Tim.Burnard@birdlife.org.au](mailto:Tim.Burnard@birdlife.org.au)



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Submissions for Edition Seven of Around the Mounds close on **Friday 13/3/15**.

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](http://www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au), alongside the National Malleefowl Database.

Other important websites for news, information and photos include [www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au](http://www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au), [www.malleefowl.com.au](http://www.malleefowl.com.au) and [www.malleefowl.net.au](http://www.malleefowl.net.au)

## A FERAL-FREE MALLEEFOWL SANCTUARY AT MONARTO SOUTH, SA

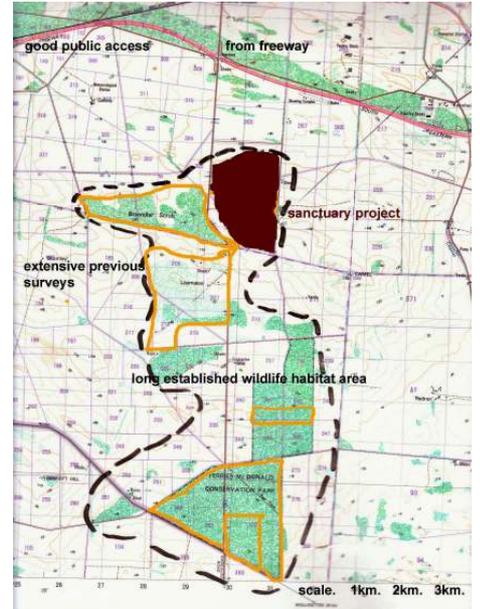
BY EMILLIS PRELGAUSKAS

On the western side of the River Murray in South Australia a remnant population of Malleefowl persists in Ferries McDonald and Monarto Conservation Parks and the area of privately held land in between. This population has been monitored over the years by government agencies (currently DEWNR), its consultants (Mallee Eco Services) and by volunteers undertaking grid searches. Since 2008 this effort has been augmented by local community members (Malleefowl Monarto) and supported by volunteers from BirdsSA, Scientific Expedition Group, and others with equipment loaned by DEWNR. These surveys have covered most of the private lands and some of the previously unsurveyed areas of Ferries McDonald CP and the entire area of Monarto CP. This work has been supported by local Natural Resource Management and Local Action Planning agencies. Through this further work, a better understanding has been gained of additional mounds and bird pairs beyond the known grid; and the distribution related to the less dense

vegetation and litter which typify this landscape.

Whilst this work has been undertaken by the environmental sector up to now, others are beginning to express interest in Malleefowl conservation. Older landholders are now beginning to consider matters beyond production farming and considering the legacy they leave. There are farmers who have lived their entire working lives in the area and have never seen a mound. One such farmer has experienced a significant shift in his thinking after seeing his first mound. This broadening interest base now sees the possibility of establishing a feral-free sanctuary on privately held land with good remnant vegetation at the northern end of the wildlife area.

Many pieces need to be brought together before this can be achieved. Two landholders are interested and supportive of the concept. Malleefowl Monarto has already developed the operating budgets and is seeking funding for the various components of the project. There is a possibility that a nearby proposed industrial development may be involved through Significant Environmental Benefit (SEB) obligations.



Malleefowl Monarto's attendance at the 5<sup>th</sup> National Malleefowl Forum in Dubbo was to promote the idea across a wider base. Details of the proposed project can be viewed at the web site [www.malleefowlmonarto.org](http://www.malleefowlmonarto.org) or on their Facebook page. History shows that persistence can achieve results. We look forward to an ongoing relationship with the National Malleefowl program.

## STRIDING IT OUT FOR THE MALLEEFOWL, SA

BY TAYLA BOWDEN, DEWNR, SA

The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) on the Eyre Peninsula has played an active role in the national approach to Malleefowl conservation, developing regional strategies to manage existing Malleefowl populations and continuing to show support through ongoing surveying in priority areas. These surveys play an important role in the monitoring of Malleefowl breeding behaviours, habitat distribution and population numbers.

As part of the surveying efforts Eyre Peninsula (EP) DEWNR staff and volunteers returned to Hincks Conservation Park and the Lock area in Central EP over late August 2014. The survey involved walking the 2 x 2 kilometre grid transects. The same transects are walked every 10 years in search of new and existing Malleefowl mounds to determine the level of Malleefowl activity in the area.

The conditions were perfect for bushwalking through Mallee country with clear skies and moderate temperatures on all survey days. In total 15 DEWNR staff and 4 generous volunteers attended the grid surveys and helped in the gathering of data on the location of Malleefowl mounds.

The Lock survey recorded optimistic findings, with three new mounds found within the transect area and several existing mounds noted as active. No new mounds were discovered within the Hincks grid area, however, what were thought to be two active mounds were observed. Mounds were believed to be active when there was an obvious presence of scratching activity and fresh compost and litter deposited on the mound.

DEWNR would like to thank all the volunteers (Phil, Darryl, Kylie and Sue)

who joined us in the search for the Malleefowl mounds. Their help is greatly appreciated and completion of the surveys in such a short amount of time would not have been possible without them. The enthusiasm of the Lock community volunteers made the survey an enjoyable experience and their hospitality was commendable.

Additional volunteers are always sought after, so anybody who is interested in helping out in future surveys or other Malleefowl projects is encouraged to contact Natural Resources EP on 8688 3111.



PETER WILKINS, DISTRICT MANAGER, ON A RECENTLY SCRATCHED MOUND IN HINCKS CP, EYRE PENINSULA

## THE MALLEEFOWL ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

BY MICHAEL BODE, MELBOURNE UNI, ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM



MICHAEL PRESENTING AT THE DUBBO FORUM

The term “Adaptive Management” has two very different meanings. As a colloquial term it means to *learn from our mistakes*, but that’s nothing new; in a sense, humans have always done this. There is another more formal use of the term that is far more relevant to our work with Malleefowl and it has to do with *‘learning by doing’*. This approach treats our environmental management actions as strategic experiments. Monitoring the ecosystem response to management is crucial, as it expands our database and permits adjustment to management actions when the evidence calls for it.

Malleefowl are the perfect test case for Adaptive Management. Over the past 20 years, volunteers have gathered an enormous amount of data on mound activity that can be used as baseline knowledge. Without this information we would have nothing to measure success against, and no idea what a “normal” site would look like. Malleefowl are also a key threatened species in southern Australia, and many managers are already taking them into account when

planning their management actions. The National Malleefowl Recovery Team is therefore committed to getting an Adaptive Management project started for Malleefowl.

Our first Adaptive Management experiment is aimed at *understanding the impacts of fox baiting on Malleefowl persistence*. This is a long-standing debate in Malleefowl management, and since fox baiting is a commonly undertaken management action, it offers a good opportunity to road-test our Adaptive Management machinery.

As a result, we’re looking for help. Our plan is to set up experimental locations in several areas across the Mallee, and to begin a process of data gathering that will eventually give a statistically significant answer to our question. We are therefore looking for land managers to cooperate with us in undertaking these experiments. To generate useful data for our analyses, we need to gather data from sites that have a couple of features:

1. The site has to have Malleefowl present in two (or more) locations with relatively similar environmental conditions. The locations should be more than 5 kilometres apart, to ensure that the populations respond to management independently.
2. Fox baiting should be going on at one of these locations (the “treatment” site), but not at the other (“control” site), and we’ll need information on the baiting strategy (e.g., intensity, frequency, timing).
3. We’ll need to have mound activity sampling in both locations, according to the Malleefowl National Monitoring Database protocols.

Now, from a data perspective, some sites will be more useful than others. For example, sites with larger Malleefowl populations will provide more information. Locations where baiting is more intense and consistent will also be more helpful. If the sites are already part of the National Database, that’s going to give us useful baseline information. It will also help if baiting will be ongoing in the long term. However, none of these are necessary. Any site that satisfies the three main criteria will provide us with valuable data.

A key point is that we’re not asking managers to change what they’re currently doing. One of the problems with conservation management in Australia is that the left hand often doesn’t know what the right hand (or either of the feet) is doing. There are almost certainly locations around the Mallee where managers are already generating data that could go straight into the Adaptive Management process. All we would have to do in those locations is collate the data on an ongoing basis. A central goal of this project is to ensure that these data are not just used once, but instead contribute to broader scientific research questions that will help us better manage Australia’s threatened wildlife.

If you know of any management projects that might suit the Adaptive Management project, we’d love to hear about them.

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## EXPERIMENTAL LEARNING: FOX BAITING FOR MALLEEFOWL CONSERVATION

BY JOSE J LAHOZ-MONFORT, ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

It is not everyday that one adds a new megapode species to the life list! I’m spending a few days on Tetepare Island, a great conservation initiative to preserve the largest uninhabited island in the Solomons, and it has Melanesian megapodes (*Megapodius eremita*). Brownish, inconspicuous and rather small, they roam around the traditional palm leaf house that serves as a lodge. This species resorts to external sources of heat to incubate the eggs, but unlike its cousin the Malleefowl it tends to use piles of decomposing vegetation or volcanically heated sandy soils.

This morning I found a monitor lizard digging megapode eggs from a mound. This reminded me of foxes and Malleefowl,

and I started reflecting on the progress that the Adaptive Management Team has made over this year. Like the monitor lizard I was observing, we know for a fact that foxes prey on Malleefowl. There is even very graphic evidence from camera traps of foxes digging eggs from mounds. From the conservation management point of view, however, the real question is whether such predation compromises the long term survival of Malleefowl, and whether fox baiting – one of the main conservation actions currently undertaken – actually contributes to the recovery of the species. The evidence in the scientific literature regarding these questions is rather mixed.

Despite the challenges, the experimental

approach we propose is still our best shot to obtain a robust answer to the question of fox baiting as a management tool for Malleefowl conservation. A growing network of experimental sites will establish a solid base to provide the learning we need to improve management practices. And the methodology can be used more broadly, as it will serve as a blueprint to tackle other management uncertainties in Malleefowl conservation, such as the effect of fire regimes on Malleefowl populations.

It will take several years to gather enough data, so the sooner we start the better. In the Adaptive Management Team, we are really excited to see the progress so far, with several potential sites in WA and SA already under consideration. Stayed tuned!

## YONGERGNOW SANCTUARY, WA READY FOR RESEARCH

BY VICKY BILNEY, MANAGER

Thanks to a generous Lotterywest grant, Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre is in the process of finalising fencing-off 5ha of native bush (see photo on right), an area which will be known as the Yongergnow Sanctuary.

Fully vermin-proofed, the Sanctuary provides protection to the Centre's Malleefowl aviaries and Malleefowl chick raising pens as well as to all wildlife which inhabits it.

Bush Heritage Australia ecologist Angela Sanders will lead a fauna trapping project in the Sanctuary, which will give us an insight into which species of small mammals, reptiles and frogs are already present, and Perth's Whiteman Park will assist us in introducing small native mammal species which should inhabit the Sanctuary but presently don't.

Yongergnow biologist Vicky Bilney expects to receive her bird-banding licence later this year, and is planning to establish a banding site in the



Yongergnow Sanctuary.

### Update on Yongergnow's 'babies'

In the last edition of *Around the Mounds*, we introduced this year's four captive-raised Malleefowl chicks. These birds, two males and two

females, are now approximately nine months old, and have been transferred to one of our aviaries, where they can be viewed by visitors to the Yongergnow Centre.

## THREATENED BIRD NETWORK

BY JANELLE THOMAS, COORDINATOR

Nearly one in five of Australia's birds are in need of our help. Currently 238 species or subspecies are either extinct, threatened with extinction or near threatened. Over the past 250 years the status of birds in Australia has become progressively worse, with 39 species moving to a higher threat category in the last decade.

With limited funding for the environment and increasing pressure on birds from threats such as habitat loss and degradation, changes in fire management and predation and competition from introduced species, volunteers are becoming even more crucial in recovery efforts.

BirdLife Australia's Threatened Bird Network provides the link between volunteers and threatened bird recovery projects around Australia. We are a national program aimed at saving Australia's threatened birds through community engagement and direct recovery management. Since establishing in 1996, the Threatened Bird Network has contributed tens of thousands of hours in volunteer support to a diverse range of threatened bird projects, including French Island as shown in the photo. The Threatened Bird Network currently supports over 30 threatened bird conservation projects including Malleefowl. With an extensive network



of partners and volunteers we play an important role in getting information out into the community about threatened birds and community engagement activities, and contribute to skills development through training workshops and materials. We are also directly involved in threatened bird recovery through representation on recovery teams, on-ground management and contributions to key threatened bird reviews and legislative processes such as species listings.

Threatened Bird Network volunteers are of all ages and from all backgrounds, with a wide variety of

experience, from Australia and overseas. There are currently over 5000 Threatened Bird Network members that receive our *Volunteer* newsletter and regular updates on threatened birds and volunteer opportunities such as bird surveys, tree planting, nest monitoring and educational activities.

If you are interested in finding out more about Threatened Bird Network or would like to register as a member please contact [tbn@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tbn@birdlife.org.au) or visit

[www.birdlife.org.au/projects/threatened-bird-network](http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/threatened-bird-network)

## WHY DO MALLEEFOWL LAY SO MANY EGGS?

BY PROF STEPHEN DAVIES, CURTAIN UNI, WA

This is one of the questions that was not asked at the recent 5<sup>th</sup>. National Malleefowl Forum, but it is one that has caused me some thought. Many animals do produce very large numbers of reproductive units each year, but very few birds do. Most content themselves with 3 or 4 eggs, and some, like the albatrosses, lay one every two years. So why have Malleefowl evolved to lay so many?

There are probably several reasons. The environment of the arid zone prevents them from breeding successfully each year; the incubator mound may be destroyed by heavy rain or excessive heat in summer, or it may be destroyed by disturbance. Another possible reason is that the bird and its eggs have always been subject to heavy predation. This is thought to be a common reason for animals to produce large numbers of reproductive units each year.

Maybe the Malleefowl has always been subject to heavy predation. Other evidence of the evolution of protective behaviour against predation is that the chicks hatch just before dawn, rapidly move considerable distances from the mound as soon as they can run (within minutes of emergence) and begin to roost in high shrubs shortly after birth.

Another reason for animals producing many offspring is that the offspring have difficulty finding enough food when they become independent. Perhaps the young Malleefowl, that are independent at birth, have difficulty finding enough food, many dying of starvation before they learn to do so, and that may be a reason so many eggs are laid.

At the Forum Taneal Cope told us that she had evidence that Malleefowl were, at some time in the past, confined to Western Australia and that was why they were immune to 1080, as are many animals in Western Australia. This is related to the abundance there of *Gastrolobium*, a pea plant that contains 1080. It produces small seeds that are very suitable food for young Malleefowl. But one of the difficulties is that the seedlings of this, and other small peas (legumes), are very attractive to rabbits, and few are regenerating in remnants that at present support Malleefowl.

One of the objects of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team, quoted in the third paragraph of the 2013 Terms of Reference for the Recovery Team, is "The stated overall objective of the

National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl is to 'secure existing populations across the species range and achieve de-listing of Malleefowl under the EPBC Act within 20 years'. The securing of existing populations can only be assured by ensuring remnant populations survive. Many of these are very small, even though the areas of the reserves they are in are large enough to hold more birds. The density of Malleefowl can be high. Tom Carter (1923) reported that when surveyors went through the Broome Hill district in Western Australia in 1910, moving in straight lines, they found seventeen egg mounds per mile (1.6 km). It therefore seems to me that we should encourage people who control small reserves to make every effort to provide good conditions for the survival of chicks, and this includes ensuring there is an abundant food supply.

The evidence that rabbits are destroying the seedlings of potential food plants and that Malleefowl are immune to 1080 emphasises the possibility of greatly improving the food supply for chicks. Poisoning rabbits with 1080 at every opportunity and thereby encouraging the regeneration of small legumes will greatly enhance the abundance of the small seeds that the chicks eat. Many small reserves are fenced against stock, so poisoning for rabbits with 1080 should be possible without risk to farm animals. I suggest that the Recovery Team emphasise this recovery action at every opportunity and actively support applications for funding to do so. The evidence is strong in support of its value and it does not need a lengthy adaptive management study to discover it. The birds' biology and the behaviour of the chicks have evolved to counter predation, but evolution has not provided a means for protecting the chicks from the absence of important food plants and the competition for food. The improvement of the food supply for very young chicks could boost populations substantially.

Ref:-

Carter, T. (1923) Birds of the Broome Hill District, Part 1. *Emu* 23:125-142.



MALLEEFOWL EGG: PHOTO SHARON GILLAM

## PREPARING A TALK

BY STEPHEN DAVIES

At the recent 5<sup>th</sup>. National Malleefowl Forum we heard a number of very interesting presentations, including many from volunteers. Some people found the preparation of a talk quite a challenge and it occurred to me that it may be worth while, at the many training sessions that are run to help people monitor Malleefowl mounds, to include some training on the preparation of talks for presentation in public.

Here is an outline of preparation that I have found useful; it is by no means the only way to prepare a talk but if you don't have much experience in doing so, it is not a bad way to start.

1. Make a set of notes of the points you want to convey.
2. DO NOT WRITE THE TALK OUT IN FULL
3. Speak the talk from your notes into a recorder.
4. Listen to the recording and amend your notes to improve it.
5. Speak the talk again into a recorder, using the amended notes. This should get rid of the "ums" and "ers". Listen to it again and amend the notes to a final set that you will use for the presentation, omitting unnecessary points that make the talk exceed the time scheduled.
6. DO NOT speak it again until you present it; it will be boring the fourth time you speak it.
7. Allow 30 seconds for each slide.
8. Each slide should have no more than ten words on it and these should be in large enough type to be readable from 20 metres.
9. At the presentation speak into the microphone from 5-10 cm away from it.
10. You may be asked to write a manuscript of the talk but DO NOT SPEAK FROM IT.

Good luck



TANEAL COPE MARKING EGGS DURING HER GENETICS RESEARCH. SHE FOUND 20 EGGS IN ONE NEST.

## VMRG HIGHLIGHTS

BY PETER STOKIE, PRESIDENT - CONDENSED FROM REPORTS

Current membership is 113 adult members and 12 junior members, with 12 new members.

We searched Toosan State Park (V38) with a combination of VMRG members and locals mainly from Natimuk who covered 180 Ha in early August and found six additional mounds, two of which showed signs of recent Malleefowl activity

The Reporting Meeting held in Tooleybuc in April was attended by 40 people, who heard 2013/14 monitoring results and reports of fires and projects. A tour of the Kooloonong area and the O'Brees site was held on the Sunday.

The new information brochure was launched and distributed to more than 30 outlets including tourist information centres and Parks Victoria offices.

Ten interpretive signs installed during 2013 were checked by Ralph Patford during 2014 for damage, durability and weather effects. All signs are standing up to the diverse Mallee climate and have received no damage whatever. Six more signs have been funded for the Wimmera area.

Malleefowl Management Committee: The Iluka offset funds (\$700,000 over 7 years) are now in the fifth year and 23 projects have been funded including:-  
The National Malleefowl Monitoring Database; The ARC Adaptive Management Project; Fox scat analysis; websites development; Malleefowl Interpretive Signage and VMRG information brochure; Monitoring site searches; Remote Sensor Camera Trial and Android

Monitoring Devices; Landscape Malleefowl Corridor Links investigation; Data Analysis Review 2005 to 2014; National Newsletter; National Forums; and National Malleefowl Coordinator.

In Bronzewing Reserve more than 14,000 Ha were burnt in an extremely hot fire. We monitored 600 Ha this year to assess the impact of the fire to decide if we keep monitoring the site on annual or on five-year basis until birds return.

The National Malleefowl Monitoring Database is now fully operational, so all monitors are able to print all the documents required after access by their password.

VMRG was successful in gaining a grant of \$10,865.00 from the Foundation of National Parks and Wildlife. There is only one grant provided to each state and it was the significance and quality of the data we collect and the reputation of our organisation that was significant in our successful application.

We can now accept tax deductible gifts as a Registered Environmental Organisation.

Several VMRG members helped in the highly successful trial of 24 motion sensor cameras, with installation, or sorting of thousands of photos. A further 40 cameras will be purchased so they can be placed in more sites. VMRG volunteers will contribute significantly to the project by installing the cameras, downloading data and sorting the multitude of captured images.

It is pleasing to report that the VMRG is, and will remain, a strong organisation as we endeavour to

protect Malleefowl and act as advocates for sound and appropriate management strategies to enhance the survival of Malleefowl in Victoria.

### Challenges

There are a number of recent Government policies that will need to be addressed in the next three years.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract government funding for a volunteer group such as the VMRG to continue its work and other funding avenues will need to be found.

The VMRG needs to liaise closely with PV during the monitoring period. There is considerable restructuring within Parks Victoria, and the outcomes of the restructuring are not clear yet, but the VMRG may need to find ways to fit into the new structure to maintain the level of support currently provided by PV.

Fire is a huge issue for Malleefowl, and on two levels, the VMRG needs to voice our concerns. The frequency and intensity of bushfires is increasing but there is no credible government policy to address climate change at a national level. The Victorian Government response to major bushfires arising out of the 2009 Royal Commission was to set up a regime of 5% targeted burns on public land in Victoria. To achieve this target large sections of prime Malleefowl habitat is subject to a burning regime that over time will destroy all long unburnt habitat bringing Malleefowl to the brink of extinction. We sometimes feel that we are a voice crying in the wilderness, but it is important not to become disillusioned that our voices appear not to be heard.

## VMRG TRAINING WEEKEND BY GIL HOPKINS

Bernie Fox (below left) is the new VMRG president, picking up on challenges mentioned above.



Paul Burton (above right) gave us some of the history of VMRG, including setting up the monitoring sites and monitoring all nests in each site (with Joe Benshemesh) using compass for direction and pacing to measure – a long arduous task. Can we imagine?



Left - New VMRG Committee, with weighty matters hanging over them

Below - Groups refreshing GPS, MobileMapper, trunking radios, satellite phones and learning android phone use for monitoring.



# DUBBO NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL FORUM



PARTICIPANTS AT THE FORUM - YOU CAN FOLD PAGES 8 AND 9 TO GET ONE PHOTO - BOTH PHOTOS BY PETER WATERHOUSE

SOME OF THE SPEAKERS - PHOTOS PETER GOWER



UNCLE JOHN HILL  
WELCOME TO COUNTRY



PAUL ANDREW  
MALLEEFOWL CHICKS AT DUBBO ZOO



TANEAL COPE  
MALLEEFOWL GENETICS



DR WALTER BOLES, GUEST SPEAKER  
HISTORY OF MEGAPODES THROUGH TIME



WAITING FOR THE OPENING - PHOTO ANDY MCQUIE

TWO MORE SPEAKERS - PHOTOS PETER WATERHOUSE



DR JOE BENSHEMESH  
DATABASE, SENSOR CAMERAS



IAN FRASER, DINNER SPEAKER  
HOW AUSTRALIAN BIRDS WERE NAMED



PHOTOGRAPHERS:  
ANDY MCQUIE  
LEFT

PETER WATERHOUSE  
RIGHT



ANOTHER SIDE OF THE AUDIENCE - PHOTO PETER GOWER



HEALTHY TASMANIAN DEVIL BREEDING PROGRAM AT DUBBO ZOO

PHOTOS GIL



MALLEEFOWL BREEDING ENCLOSURES AT DUBBO ZOO



ANYWAY, WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT MALLEEFOWL? - PHOTO PETER WATERHOUSE



WA REPRESENTATIVES AT THE FORUM - PHOTO ANDY MCQUIE



## THE MALLEE POST ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES

BY GRAEME TONKIN

### Harold James Frith (Harry)

Harold James Frith was a well known Australian wildlife biologist and conservationist, and in 1962 published a book on the biology of Malleefowl called *"The Mallee-Fowl - The Bird that Builds an Incubator"*. This book was to become the "The Bible" of Malleefowl biology.

The final paragraph of Frith's book reads: *"Surely a little effort now - and it need only be a little effort - is worth while to ensure that the mallee-fowl goes on with its work in the inland scrubs, to the joy of future generations."*

The following was taken from an article published in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 17, (MUP), 2007 by Libby Robin.

**Harold James Frith** AO (1921-1982) was born on 16 April 1921 at Kyogle, New South Wales. Harry was a keen pigeon-shooter from the age of 8 and an excellent naturalist. He was educated at Lismore High School and Scots College, Sydney, and then studied Agricultural Science at the University of Sydney (B.Sc.Agr., 1941; D.Sc.Agr., 1964). Despite gaining good results, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 5 September 1941 instead of completing the honors course. He was posted to the Middle East and then to Papua. He took part in the Buna campaign and became interested in the rich wildlife of the area. He was promoted to sergeant in April 1943 and returned to Australia in October of that same year. In November he married Dorothy Marion Francis Killeen, a research assistant. Commissioned as a lieutenant in September 1944, he was made inspector, food supplies, at Land Headquarters, Melbourne. His AIF appointment terminated on 19 October 1945.

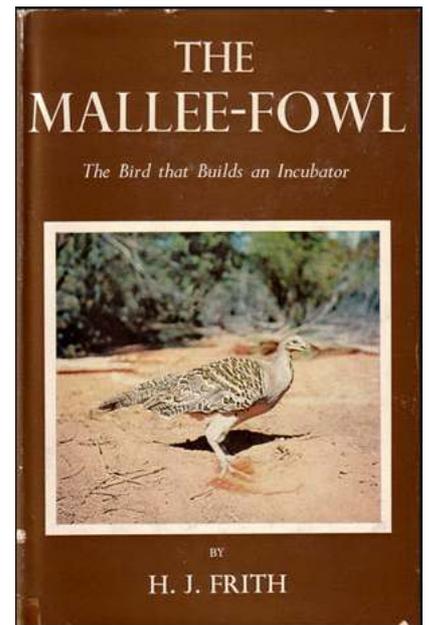
Frith and his wife then moved to Griffith, New South Wales, where his first job was as assistant works manager and technologist at Griffith Cannery Pty Ltd. In 1946 he joined the nearby irrigation research station of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization from 1949). His first projects concerned the cultivation of citrus trees and experiments in frost

protection using wind fans, but he found himself increasingly drawn to the zebra finches nesting in the trees, rather than to horticultural experimentation. In 1951 the officer-in-charge of the wildlife survey section of CSIRO sought Frith's help with monitoring the spread of the newly released myxoma virus among rabbit populations. Frith seized the opportunity to make wildlife biology the centre of his research, transferring formally to the section in July 1952. Fascinated by birds, Frith studied their ecology and behaviour, both at work and after hours. His 'unofficial' work on the Malleefowl, *Leipoa ocellata* attracted international attention.



As well as nine scientific papers on the species, he wrote an important popular book, *The Mallee-Fowl* (1962), which suggested guidelines for its conservation.

His 'official' work built on his long interest in wild ducks and geese. In 1955 the CSIRO asked him to go to the Northern Territory to establish a scientific project on the magpie goose, perceived by the rice-growing industry as vermin. He followed the geese well beyond the experimental



rice-farming areas and became familiar with the monsoonal swamps ranging from 'Goose camp', near the Alligator rivers, to the southern Daly River.



FRITH STUDYING MAGPIE GOOSE EGGS

Frith found himself increasingly responsible for overseeing the scientific work of others. His leadership style drew on practical 'bush ecology'—getting things done despite obstacles. A naturalist by inclination, he liked to work closely with animals in the wild. His down-to-earth qualities endeared him to 'people in the out-country', but sometimes alienated leading theoreticians. His biological theory was largely self-taught, learned as required. He naturally linked 'basic' and 'applied' science, and was intolerant of well-educated 'fools' who could not make the necessary practical connections.

Best known as a bird specialist, Frith was interested in other animals too.

## ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES (CONTINUED)

He expanded the Australian Bird-Banding Scheme to include bats. In 1959 he started a major project on the ecology of the red kangaroo, which required an understanding of embryology and endocrinology. He co-authored *Kangaroos* (1969) with John Calaby.

In 1956 Frith moved with his family to Yarralumla, Canberra. By April 1961, when he was appointed the Officer-in-Charge of the wildlife survey section of CSIRO, he had spent significant periods in all ecological regions of the continent and also in New Guinea. In 1962 the wildlife section became a division of CSIRO, with Frith as its chief. From major centres in Canberra, Perth and Darwin, his division reviewed and planned many national strategies for conservation, always beginning by understanding the ecology of the animals concerned. Numerous small remote stations were established to pursue particular projects, especially in northern Australia. Under Frith's guidance, conservation concerns moved beyond reserves to include production landscapes: 'many important species can be adequately conserved only on sheep stations, irrigation areas and in wheat fields'. He also opened discussion with water conservation engineers, recognising the links between irrigation, salinity and land degradation, and the plight of wild ducks. In 1965 he declared unfashionably: 'we must ensure flooding of the rivers—even if this does damage the nation's economy'.

Frith was proud of his success in monsoonal Australia, in having the Kakadu area, which included his beloved 'Goose camp' declared a national park. The rich birdlife continued to enthuse him throughout the 1960's and 1970's, and he managed, despite his commitments as a manager, to undertake parts of the fauna surveys critical to its status as a World Heritage listed area.

Frith was a driven leader, and CSIRO's executive appreciated his 'rough diamond' style, and valued his practical management skills and excellent publications. His fluent writing style translated easily to a general audience and his natural history books included *Waterfowl in Australia* (1967), *Birds in the Australian High Country* (edited in 1969), *Conservation* (co-edited in 1971 with Alec Costin) and *Wildlife Conservation* (1973). In 1976 he edited the first *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*, writing the accounts of fifty-six species himself. Elected a fellow of the Australian Academy of Science (1975) and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences (1976), he was a fellow of the ornithological unions of Australasia, Britain, Germany, France and the United States of America. In 1979 and 1982 he was awarded the (G. P.) Whitley medal by the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales. He was appointed AO in 1980.

In 1974 Frith persuaded the International Ornithological Congress to come south of the Equator for the first time since its establishment in 1884. Despite logistical difficulties he organised in Canberra, an exemplary meeting that greatly excited the distinguished visitors. He refused to admit to the personal discomfort he felt throughout the year leading up to the congress, following a serious motorcar accident.

A second blow struck him four months later, when Cyclone Tracy flattened the homes of the scientists he had located in Darwin. He became increasingly depressed about the division and retreated to his own work, focusing on the aviary of pigeons he had built adjoining his office at Gungahlin. His failing health led him to announce that he would retire on his sixtieth birthday. He purchased land near his boyhood home, where he started to re-create a piece of rainforest.

His last year at CSIRO was anxious, and he suffered a heart attack. Survived by his wife, and their two daughters and son, he died of another myocardial infarction on 28 June 1982 at Lismore and was buried in the local lawn cemetery.

Greater detail is provided in Australian Academy of Sciences memoirs [sciencearchive.org.au/fellows/memoirs/frith.html](http://sciencearchive.org.au/fellows/memoirs/frith.html)

## INTERESTING MOUNDS

If you have any interesting mound photos please send them to Tim Burnard at [tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au)



LEFT  
INNES NATIONAL PARK, SA - SHARON GILLAM



RIGHT  
COORONG NATIONAL PARK, SA - SHARON GILLAM



LEFT  
NURCOUNG FLORA RESERVE, VIC - GIL HOPKINS



RIGHT  
WYCHITELLA NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE, VIC  
- PETER STOKIE

## NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERS

### JOHN DEJOSE



I grew up in New York state near “Great Gatsby” country, where rich estates had preserved much natural habitat. Accustomed to exploring the pristine woodlands surrounding mansions and manicured gardens, I was shocked at an early age to see my favourite woodland knocked down for housing. This moment set me on a long and varied career in conservation that brought me to Western Australia, on the opposite side of the planet (at [www.antipodesmap.com](http://www.antipodesmap.com) you'll see Perth and New York are almost antipodal).

Before leaving the US aged 27, I'd attended 3 universities; not quite finding satisfaction. Not till I lucked into work with a breeding collection of 1,200 ducks, geese and swans from all over the world

did I find my niche. Transitioning to zoos required migration to Sydney; landing as Curator of Birds at Taronga Zoo in 1979. A transcontinental migration brought me, as the world's youngest zoo Director, to Perth Zoo in 1984 (where I fell into every trap for the young player).

Finding my feet with the aid of the rush to prepare for the America's Cup defence (a famous ocean race the Aussies had recently snatched after 100 years of US domination) I was blessed with a perfect storm of increasing environmental awareness and ecotourism. In a decade, Perth Zoo was credited with transformation from a menagerie that embarrassed its citizens to place in the top 3% of global zoos by Prof David Bellamy (the famous British conservationist, on the London Zoo Board). I'm proud of rebuilding Perth Zoo from the ground up for conservation and being chosen by peers as president-elect of the World Zoo Association.

After time in consulting and aquaculture, I accepted a role to bring WA's largest animal shelter up to modern standards. Later I worked as CEO of a national advocacy NGO, the Invasive Species Council; trying to convince governments to do a better job of protecting our

environment from all manner of introduced weeds, pests and diseases. The extent to which governments at all levels and parties of all persuasions ignore the slow-moving catastrophe of invasive species was a shock to the system. I re-dedicated myself to motivating people to conserve our unique environment and all the essential services it provides.

As CEO of the Malleefowl Preservation Group, I'm fortunate to work with our members, landholders, agencies and other NGOs to bring an adaptive management focus to bear on WA's considerable NRM challenges. Frankly, very little which has been done by the conservation movement or governments in Australia for the last 6 decades has slowed environmental decline to any appreciable degree; now it's up to the people.

It is my privilege to work with great people helping secure a better future for the Malleefowl, the bush on which it depends, the people who live and work there and all the living creatures which keep Earth fit for humans. Nothing else but that thin film of life stands between us and oblivion – think about it...



NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERS AT THE DUBBO FORUM

BACK - GRAEME TONKIN, SA; JOE BENSHEMESH, VIC; STEPHEN DAVIES, WA; MICHAEL BODE, VIC (AM PROJECT); TIM BURNARD, NMRT COORDNATOR

MID - BLAIR PARSONS, WA; JOHN DEJOSE, WA; PETER STOKIE, VIC; SALLY CAIL, WA; MILTON LEWIS, NSW

FRONT - CHRIS HEDGER, SA; MELANIE BANNERMAN, NSW; SHARON GILLAM, SA; CINDY HAUSER, VIC (AM PROJECT)

ABSENT - GERARD HOGAN (ACT), VICTOR HURLEY (VIC), KAREN NALDER (VIC), MANDA PAGE (WA), KATHRYN SCHNEIDER (VIC) PHOTO BY ANDY MCQUIE