

5th NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL FORUM

PRESENTATIONS – ORAL

1. Welcome

Sharon Gillam, Chair, National Malleefowl Recovery Team; Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources South Australia

On behalf of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team and the Forum Organising Committee, I would like to welcome everyone to the fifth National Malleefowl Forum.

In the words of Harold Frith, “The Malleefowl is unique to Australia, and one of the continent’s wonders.” It is through the pioneering work of Frith in the 1950’s, who studied this unique species and brought to light the strange, hardworking life of the Malleefowl and the threats it was facing then in the 1950’s, that has over time endeared us to this amazing bird and given reason to promote the conservation of this species across the southern half of the country.

We have come a long way since Frith’s work some 60 years ago, with more pioneering studies undertaken, the formation of a national recovery team in the late 1980’s, and eventually a national recovery plan. At the same time, community groups have also come together to promote the cause of the Malleefowl, ranging all the way through Western Australia to Victoria. The 1000’s of hours that are collectively contributed each year by volunteers alone are a tribute to their dedication to the bird’s ongoing preservation.

Previous national forums have been held in Adelaide, South Australia (1995), Mildura, Victoria (2004), Katanning, Western Australia (2007), Renmark, South Australia (2011), and now Dubbo, New South Wales (2014), with continued and, in many areas, growing support for the Malleefowl shown across the breadth of its range. The progress over the last three forums in particular has been significant, particularly through the successful acquisition of a number of Commonwealth and state-funded grants, and more recently, through offset funding via a mining company. Important achievements during this time include a well-established national monitoring system complimented by a national monitoring manual, and a formidable national Malleefowl monitoring database which continues to be improved. These two initiatives have formed the basis for an Adaptive Management Framework, which has gained considerable momentum since the 2011 Forum with funding achieved through an ARC Linkage Grant. Two other noteworthy initiatives are the successful re-establishment of the national Malleefowl newsletter, *Around the Mounds*, and our very first part-time paid National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator, which came into fruition in April 2013. During the course of this weekend, many of these initiatives will be described in more detail to give you a better understanding of how they are contributing to the conservation of Malleefowl.

At a national level, the Malleefowl is listed as Vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, and is recognised as threatened in all the States in which it occurs. The species is threatened by a range of factors, with loss and fragmentation of habitat a major contributor to small and isolated populations. Extensive monitoring of Malleefowl populations over the last few decades has shown declines across SA, Victoria and NSW. As with many threatened species, populations are continuing to decline, ranges are contracting, and threats are increasing, calling for immediate management actions to preserve them. Whilst we continue to improve our understanding of ecosystems and species, there are still many information gaps and uncertainties in exactly how these systems work and the threatening processes that impact upon them, leading scientists and managers to be unsure of what needs to be undertaken to preserve them. The Adaptive Management Project offers a solution to this dilemma through a more formal process of mathematical techniques that assists managers to experiment with and learn from their management while keeping the goal of conservation firmly in sight. The Adaptive Management Project features in the forum program on Sunday, where we will learn more about how this process can provide an effective way forward for Malleefowl conservation and management.

Around the states various programs and projects are being conducted by agencies, landholders and community groups, often working cooperatively together, with current knowledge and technologies that are available, and often limited resources, on recovery actions that in some way aim to provide benefit to Malleefowl. We will hear today through our state-wide updates and other presentations throughout the weekend, exactly what some of these programs and projects are and what they involve.

Our interest in conserving Malleefowl has brought us together and provides an opportunity for community groups, conservation agencies, industry and interested individuals to hear the latest updates on research, technologies and conservation activities, as well as discuss strategies and actions to further progress the cause of Malleefowl conservation. Overall the forum will hopefully provide motivation to continue in the work that we do, provide inspiration to look at and tackle new ways to help this species, and provide an avenue to meet new people and catch up with others, who have a shared interest in this special bird.

I would like to thank Tim Burnard and Melanie Bannerman for coordinating our fifth National Malleefowl Forum, and for putting together a wide-ranging program, that will have something of interest for everyone.