

5. Report from the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (NCMPG) Western Australia

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Abstract

From 2011 to 2014 the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (NCMPG) of Western Australia has been involved in four main activities. The group has continued to monitor four sites of remnant bushland comprising 143 mounds in the Dalwallinu and Perenjori Shires of the wheat belt of WA. Malleefowl activity has varied across the four sites, with two sites having less activity and two sites maintaining previous levels of activity. Recently members of the group have received training to validate data from NCMPG sites for the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database. The NCMPG has also strengthened its ties with Mt Gibson Iron by providing monitoring equipment and expertise to their environment officer. Group members also attend meetings where decisions about the management of the environment of the Mt. Gibson Iron Ore mine are discussed. The NCMPG's third undertaking has been to participate as a founding member with partners in the development of a new regional conservation association known as Gundawa which has been funded by mining companies in the region. Through a successful grant application to Gundawa the NCMPG has provided direct support for the role of National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator and for Dr Joe Benshemesh for the processing of WA data in the national database. The grant has also provided funding for a program developed in the US, which can be used in the Cybertracker monitoring software to enable extraction and naming of photos. In 2014 the NCMPG intends to conduct a training weekend in monitoring for new volunteers interested in continuing the work of the group.

Background

The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (NCMPG) WA has operated as a not for profit group of volunteers for over twenty years and is based in the Dalwallinu Shire of Western Australia. Its work in Malleefowl conservation extends into the Perenjori and Yalgoo Shires. These shires are in the central wheat belt in the case of Dalwallinu and Perenjori and the pastoral area in the case of Yalgoo.

NCMPG WA over the years has been involved in activities such as:

- raising the awareness of threats to Malleefowl in the region through the use of display boards at agricultural shows and in permanent locations in information bays in the townships;
- coordinating farmers in the area to synchronise fox baiting, with up to 6,000 baits being distributed in any one year;
- encouraging farmers to fence bushland remnants to protect Malleefowl habitat with the aid of grants from various agencies;
- erecting Malleefowl warning signs on roads adjacent to known Malleefowl habitat; and
- identifying suitable sites to survey and monitor for Malleefowl activity.

Current Activities

The NCMPG WA has undertaken four main activities since the last forum in 2011. These are: the continued monitoring of mounds; the strengthening of ties with mining companies; the development of conservation partnerships and the renewal of group membership.



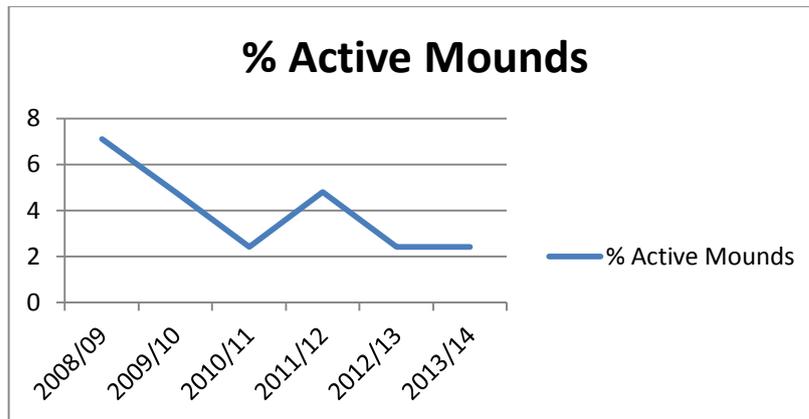
Figure 1. NCMPG covers agricultural, pastoral and mining areas northeast of Perth.

Mound Monitoring

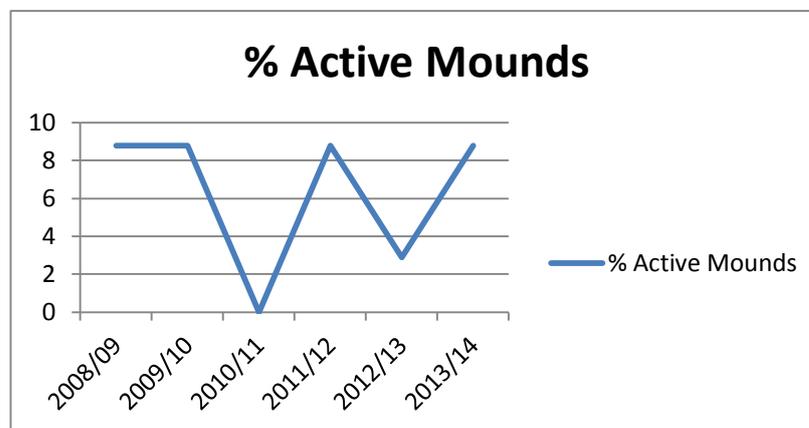
NCMPG is currently monitoring four sites: Nugadong (Site: W 01), Old Well (Site: W 02), Carters (Site: W 04) and Reudaveys (Site: W 07) and assists in the monitoring of two other sites: Mt Gibson Mine (Site: W 08) and Charles Darwin Reserve (Site: W 09). Data from these sites are uploaded onto the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database and recently NCMPG WA members have undertaken training to validate their own data on the database.

Three of the sites, Old Well (Site: W 02), Reudaveys (Site: W 07) and Mt Gibson (Site: W 08) have maintained activity levels since data have been collected, while at Nugadong (Site: W 01) and Carters (Site: W 04) there has been a decline in activity. For the last two seasons there have been no data collected at Charles Darwin (Site: W 09). While lack of rainfall at the critical time of May to September may affect the total number of active mounds over all sites in any one year as we presented at the last forum, it does not explain the variation in activity between the monitored sites in a given year. Based on evidence from our four remnant vegetation sites, our poster presentation at this forum suggests that road kill of adult Malleefowl is the major threat in agricultural areas where populations are confined to bush remnants.

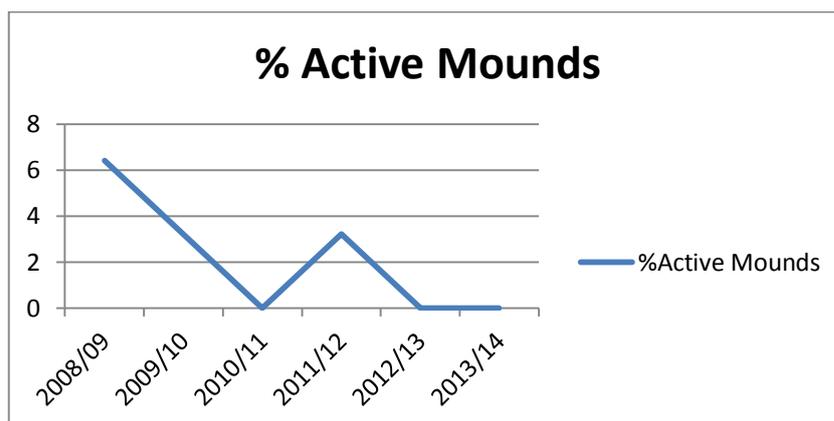
The following graphs show the percentage of active mounds in the four NCMPG WA monitoring sites for the years 2008-09 to 2013-14.



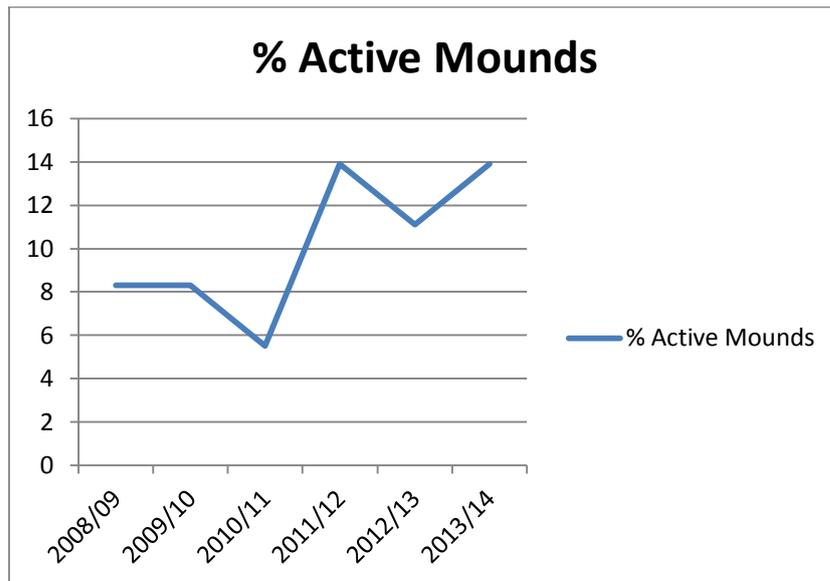
Graph 1. Nugadong (Site: W 01).



Graph 2. Old Well (Site: W 02).



Graph 3. Carters (Site: W 04).



Graph 4. Reudaveys (Site: W 07).

While all other factors such as predation, recruitment, natural deaths and wildfire appear similar across all of these sites, the sites in bush remnants at Nugadong (Site: W 01) and Carters (Site: W 04), where the percentage of active mounds has been decreasing, differ in that they are on busier roads than those in bush remnants at Old Well (Site: W 02) and Reudaveys (Site: W 07).

Strengthening of Ties with Mining Companies

NCMPG WA has continued to work collaboratively with Mount Gibson Iron and Asia Iron strengthening the relationship through the sharing of Malleefowl expertise and monitoring equipment with the Senior Environmental Engineer and through attendance at meetings where updates about the management of the environment of the Mount Gibson Iron Ore mine are discussed.

From the perspective of NCMPG WA these mining companies are not only providing funding for conservation management but are helping to shape conservation initiatives by providing expertise to develop policies and address environmental issues in our region. For example, this year Mount Gibson Iron funded the trial use of a winged aircraft to survey for Malleefowl mounds on their lease. The results were very promising and may have positive ramifications for future surveys of sites in our region. NCMPG WA is also grateful to have received funding from Mount Gibson Iron to assist members to attend this national forum and the previous forum held in Renmark.

The Development of Conservation Partnerships

NCMPG WA is a founding member of the Gunduwa Regional Conservation Association which is a new regional conservation group engaging with local government, non-government organisations, pastoral businesses, mining companies, community groups and state government agencies to stimulate practical biodiversity and conservation initiatives across the region. Gunduwa is funded through the lease agreements and interests of Asia Iron and Mount Gibson Iron. Its coordinating committee intends to develop strategic research and landscape conservation within the region. Participation in this new association has allowed NCMPG WA to build stronger partnerships with conservation groups and government sectors working in the region, in particular Bush Heritage Australia (BHA), the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council (NACC) and the Shires of Dalwallinu, Perenjori and Yalgoo.

In 2013-14 Gunduwa offered grants of up to \$20,000 for conservation work in the region and the NCMPG WA, with the assistance of Tim Burnard, was one of four groups successful in gaining a grant. Through the grant NCMPG WA has provided assistance to Dr Joe Benshemesh for the processing of WA data in the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database. The grant has also provided funding for an extraction and naming project completed at Cybertracker in the US which enhances all monitoring in

Australia and has provided some support for the role of a National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator in Australia.

Renewal of Group Membership

The Gunduwa grant also funded a training weekend in Dalwallinu in August 2014 to attract new volunteers to NCMPG WA. The emphasis was on the use of iPhones for the monitoring and collection of data for the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database. National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator, Tim Burnard and Principal Researcher, Dr Joe Benshemesh, were guests at the workshop and the training was provided by Carl Danzi. This training will ensure that areas in our region will continue to be monitored and that new conservation regions such as Charles Darwin Reserve will be monitored again this year and into the future. The strengthened partnerships with other conservation groups built through involvement in the Gunduwa Regional Conservation Association and with mining companies in the region have provided NCMPG WA with the opportunity to renew its membership and as a result continue and expand its work.