

## Malleefowl at Eyre Bird Observatory

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Eyre Bird Observatory is the most remote of the RAOU observatories. It is situated on the Nullabor coast about 1200km by road from Perth and about 500km from Norseman, the closest town. The nearest habitation is the roadhouse at Cocklebiddy, 50km and one and a half hours away, on the Eyre Highway.

Such is the location of one of Australia's Malleefowl study sites.

Since 1989 investigations into the status of the Malleefowl at Eyre have taken the form of one-week or two-week courses in which the participants thoroughly searched three discrete tracts of woodland totalling 13 square kilometres for Malleefowl mounds. In two years all the mounds within those tracts were assumed to have been located.

The position of each mound was recorded after being determined by hand-held compasses and pacing. In 1990 and 1991 corrections were made to the recorded positions by two university students who applied their surveying skills and GPS knowhow.

In 1992, 1993 and 1994 Malleefowl were trapped and colour-banded. Only two birds were able to be captured each year and it seems likely that many more than that use the study area. Each mound in the largest search area is visited annually in October by which time it is likely that all active mounds are established. Active mounds are recorded, as are all sightings of Malleefowl. Apart from the two weeks each year, the observatory wardens visit active mounds and record bird sightings through the year.

Typically, three mounds are active annually (out of 25) and the locations of the active mounds vary from year to year. It is uncommon for a mound to be used in successive years. Three of the six banded birds have been observed since capture: one on the same mound later that season, one on the same mound in the next season and one in the same breeding season 500m from its mound. Each bird was captured on a mound which it was working. Each is assumed to be a male.