

# The value of community input to malleefowl conservation in WA

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Fourth generation on the family wheat and sheep property, which was settled in 1911.

Ongerup is a small country town of less than 200 residents situated 400km. south east of Perth. The average rainfall is approximately 400mm. Last year we experienced the second driest year on record (less than 200mm). During this dry period, one of our grid study areas revealed a new malleefowl mound in a creek bed which yielded much breeding activity – maybe this bird knew more than our weather bureau...

I have been invited to speak at this conference on behalf of community involvement for malleefowl conservation. I want to give you a run down on our community group, the “whys and wherefores” etc. and what the future holds for groups such as ours.

In 1992, a well known local bird carver was commissioned by a shire councillor to carve a malleefowl for display in our shire office. The “Gnow” (aboriginal name for malleefowl) is part of our *Gnowangerup* shire heritage and our shire fauna emblem. Our group T-shirts bear the “It’s Gnow or Never” slogan as part of the West Australian malleefowl conservation push.

Our bird carver, John Davis, studied a malleefowl in captivity while working on the carving and during that time the bird was taken by a fox. This motivated John into immediate action. He returned to the area to gather concerned residents to take action on the malleefowl decline. So began the MALLEEFOWL PRESERVATION GROUP, electing John as the group’s first president.

Since 1992 the group has been extremely active concentrating on community awareness, setting up a permanent fox baiting station study, field studies and the establishment of a malleefowl distribution map by way of sighting forms.

Membership to the Malleefowl Preservation Group started with the local concern for the loss of our shire emblem, however it has spread to all parts of the state from station properties north of Geraldton, east of Sandstone, Kalgoorlie and south to Esperance and the Eyre Bird Observatory on the coast.

To date 5 study grids have been established in the Gnowangerup and Jerramungup Shires. Two of these areas are in large State Government (Department of Conservation and Land Management) reserves, two on private property in remnant vegetation, and the third is in a small reserve which has not supported malleefowl for over thirty years.

One of the private remnant study areas has revealed a staggering 5-6 active mounds per km<sup>2</sup>. The remnant of 138ha. is surrounded by cleared farm land – the initial study of this block revealed a total of 59 mounds of which 7 were active, 15 classed as recently active (within 1-4 years), and 37 old. A tractor break-down in the late 1950's is the reason we have this area left uncleared for the malleefowl.

The community awareness work of this group has concentrated on addressing schools, seminars and local shows as the members of the group feel strongly that without community support, any conservation project will not have the strength and following to continue. Since 1993 the group has grown to 250 financial members (approximately 600 individuals) and our "Malleefowl Matter" newsletter is our main source of communication to financial members.

We have received funding from the Gordon Reid Foundation (Western Australian Lotteries Commission) and Save the Bush (National Landcare Program). We commenced and remain a sub-committee of the local Landcare group however we have recently become incorporated in our own right.

To date 90% of the Malleefowl Preservation Group's work has been carried out on a volunteer basis. Malleefowl information and study sites in Western Australia are well behind – we have the highest populations of the birds, the least number of grids and the least access to information. The enthusiasm of the community can not be questioned however it is surely time that Western Australia is assisted by a major support effort from the Malleefowl Recovery Team and the National Malleefowl Research Plan Coordinators.