

Foreword

The National Malleefowl Forum held in Mildura on 6-9 February 2004 was an engaging experience for the one hundred who attended: representatives from each state within the mallee belt of southern Australia. We were exposed to the significance of Malleefowl in Aboriginal mythology as evidenced by the naming of the constellation “Neilloan”. There were numerous insights into the effects of fire, loss and fragmentation of habitat, and foxes in influencing long-term outcomes for Malleefowl. The importance of Malleefowl as an indicator for the overall health of mallee habitats became very apparent.

We heard instances of ongoing decline of Malleefowl giving rise to pessimism about the future of this species within isolated remnants. We were also given cause for optimism based on evidence of the species persisting in arid areas of the Centre, in near-coastal areas of S.E. Australia, and points in between. The Malleefowl is clearly a very adaptable animal but one whose long-term survival remains in the balance.

The continuing community passion for the conservation of this “icon” species suggests that no effort is being spared at a local level in order to achieve better outcomes for Malleefowl. It was enlightening and heartening to hear of the work being done by volunteers in each state and region where Malleefowl still occur. There are many spin-offs of community action such as the school education programs, the social interaction, and even employment and investment in small towns.

In some cases, the community effort is obviously well coordinated; such as the Malleefowl Preservation Group in W.A. (MPG) and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (VMRG). In other cases, local people / groups are working in more isolated circumstances. In every instance, the work of volunteers can contribute towards an improved understanding of the status and risks to Malleefowl. The re-invigorated National Malleefowl Recovery Team can play an important role in developing an Australia-wide picture for Malleefowl based on common standards and practices.

The success of the 2004 National Malleefowl Forum was due largely to the efforts of the VMRG, and the agencies who sponsored the event - Parks Victoria, the Murray-Mallee Partnership, and the Mallee Catchment Management Authority. In particular, Shelley Heron played a crucial role in planning the forum and publishing these proceedings. I believe that the forum and the proceedings represent an important catalyst for the work that lies ahead in the cause of Malleefowl conservation.

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