

5. VICTORIAN STATE ROUND-UP – ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE MILDURA 2004

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Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

Introduction

The theme of my presentation is Victorian groups working together for Malleefowl. In Victoria we place significant emphasis on collecting data by monitoring Malleefowl breeding density and using the analysed data to develop land management strategies.

Monitoring & Land Management is conducted by a range of groups comprising:

- Volunteer organisations
- Government organisations
- Catchment (Natural Resource Management) authorities
- Non Government organisations

Malleefowl monitoring sites in Victoria

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group is responsible for collecting all data from monitoring sites in Victoria. Malleefowl are found almost exclusively in the National Parks of northwest and central Victoria and smaller Fauna and Flora Reserves close to these National Parks. The Victorian map (Figure 1) shows the complex of national parks and reserves of Murray Sunset National Park, Hattah Kulkyne National Park, Wyperfeld National Park, Little Desert National Park close to the South Australian/Victorian border, and a small isolated remnant of habitat at Wychitella Fauna and Flora Reserve near Bendigo. The second map (Figure 2) indicates the approximate area of the monitoring sites within the National Parks and Reserves as at 2004.



Figure 1. Victorian National Parks and Reserves

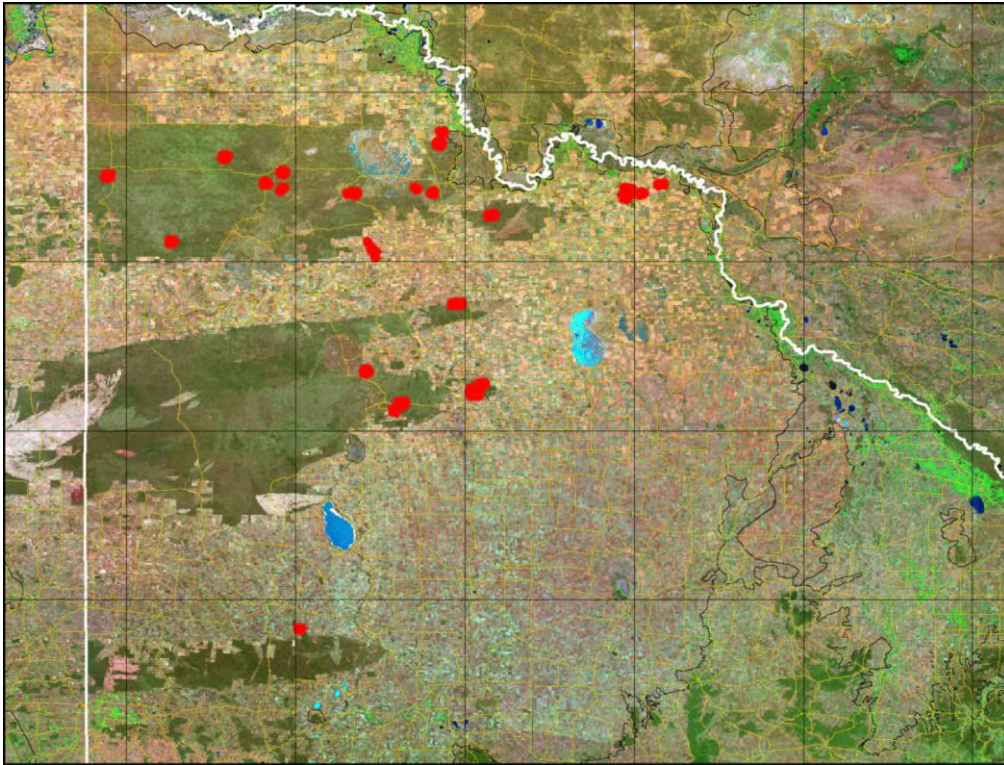


Figure 2. The location of Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group monitoring sites in 2004 are shown by red spots

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

History

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group has as its core purpose the monitoring of Malleefowl sites, but the role of the group has developed and changed significantly since Mildura 2004. A brief outline of these changes is important to explain the development of Malleefowl conservation in the past three years since Mildura. The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group is a totally volunteer group of approximately 90 members drawn from rural, farming and city communities. The common interest of the members is the conservation of Malleefowl, and the common activity is the monitoring of Malleefowl sites in Victoria. The common shared values of the group are dedication to accurate collection of data and a firm commitment to volunteerism.

The history of monitoring Malleefowl has changed considerably over time:

- **1960s** The breeding densities of Malleefowl were measured at several sites by communities who were motivated to reserve these habitats, eg:
 -
 - Wandown in 1969 by the Mid Murray Field Naturalists
 - Wathe in 1963 by local farmer Angus Torpey
 - Wychitella in 1969 by Bob Johnson and other interested local residents
 - Several sites by Government authorities in 1960s (data lost)
- **1980s** 12 sites were set up for monitoring as part of PhD studies
- **1990s** Government expanded the number of sites and the community started to assist with monitoring
- **2000+** Community take over all aspects of monitoring of about 30 sites in Victoria (about one thousand nest sites)

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group was the community group that formed in late 1990s with monitoring as its core business with the following operation:

- Focus on rigorous and efficient operations
- Funded through Parks Victoria community grants and occasionally other sources
- Data provided to government agencies
- Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group make a major in kind contribution to conservation and saves the government time and money

Monitoring 2004 – 2007

In 2004 the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group was monitoring 25 existing sites, including a constant 22 sites that form the basis of data analysis for trends in Malleefowl breeding numbers. As the number of members grew, it became possible to expand the number of monitoring sites.

By 2007 nine additional sites were added to the monitoring list of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group, increasing the total number of sites monitored from 25 to 34. The additional sites were set up in unrepresented areas in:

- » Little Desert
- » Western Big Desert
- » Wychitella

Searching Sites 2004 – 2007

The National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl clearly indicates the need to maintain the scientific integrity of monitoring data by re-searching sites every five years. The Mildura Forum recommended this as a priority action. The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group had until this point in time concentrated upon collecting data, but realised that if re-searching were to occur then it was the organization in Victoria to make it happen.

Sites in Victoria were last searched in 1997/8 when Department contractors were undertaking monitoring. The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group was faced with the daunting task of needing to search 25 sites in quick time and creative thinking was required to manage this task to find resources outside its own members to achieve this task.

In the three-year period 2004 – 2007 16 existing sites searched and 9 new sites established. The following groups were used:

- Greencorps
- Technical and Further Education Natural Resource & Management students
- Parks Victoria Staff
- Community Groups
 - Hopetoun Bikeriders
 - Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group members
 - Wedderburn Conservation Management Network
 - Hopetoun Kindergarten parents
 - State Emergency Service Nhill Unit

The principles applied to determine the location of new sites were:

- Under represented areas, eg
 - Western Big Desert
 - Little Desert
- Community interest
- Conservation interest - Wychitella
- Specific purpose to test impact of cropping on Malleefowl breeding
- Site establishment where data existed, but no monitoring was occurring

Training 2004 – 2007

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group places great emphasis on training volunteers for two purposes. It is important that volunteers are well prepared to collect scientific data, and secondly volunteers have a sound understanding of safety requirements whilst undertaking monitoring tasks.

- Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Monitoring Training has occurred annually, with the expectation that all those who intend to monitor will have attended training
- Search Teams needed special training, education packages and on ground training, as well as the development of Palm Pilot sequences to record details of the searches

Education 2004 – 2007

The role of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group has expanded to include the promotion of Malleefowl conservation as the success of the group's monitoring program has become more widely recognized within the community. The group has initiated numerous activities to meet its educational objectives since the Mildura Forum, including providing speakers, working with schools and developing publications.

- Speakers
 - Birds Australia
 - Bird Observers Club of Australia
 - Landcare
 - Community Groups
- Schools
 - Education Package
- Publications
 - Newspapers
 - Journals
 - Newsletters
 - Website
 - Track and Scat Manual

The most significant publications have been the website, www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au and the Track and Scat Manual.

Political Lobbying

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group has been surprised at the amount of land clearing that has been proposed in habitat suitable for Malleefowl in the past three years. The group never expected that it would need to take political positions to defend Malleefowl from this encroachment, but several key campaigns have been conducted in defence of Malleefowl habitat. As a consequence the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group has become well versed in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, Controlled Actions and Environmental Effects Statement Panel hearings.

- The Victorian Government proposed to place a Toxic Waste Dump at Nowingi in Malleefowl habitat and in the centre of an important corridor. The hearings were held over a record 57 days and the proposal was finally rejected
- A sandmining proposal will also impact on Malleefowl habitat, and preparatory details are being gathered by the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group to oppose this development
- Horticultural clearing of thousands of hectares for olive and almond plantations have impacted on existing Malleefowl habitat especially in and near the best breeding sites, and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group are pursuing offsets for this development
- State Fire Plans have recently been opened up for public scrutiny and submission, and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group have responded to the plans with the aim of ensuring that planned actions are beneficial rather than detrimental to Malleefowl
- The Victorian Biodiversity White Paper recently released for public submissions provided the opportunity for the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group to argue for changes to land use policy and land management to improve the prospects for the long term conservation of Malleefowl

Malleefowl Monitoring Reports 2004 – 2007

Annual reports on Malleefowl Monitoring have been produced for each year 2004 – 2007. The detailed reports contain information on breeding trends, data analysis, fox presence analysis, data collection and individual site trends.

The following general observations for the Monitoring Reports 2004–2007 are worth noting:

- 2002/3 – Cybertracker introduced
- 2004/5 – Lowest result on record since 1996 (except 2002/03 drought year)
- 2005/6 – Best results since 1996
- 2006/7 – Another drought year, but better breeding mounds – (85 active mounds compared to only eight active mounds in 2002/3)
- 2006/7 - Cybertracker used for all mounds

The following chart, Table 1, lists the number of mounds monitored each year, the additional mounds added to the monitoring list each year, the number of active mounds identified through the monitoring, and the number of active mounds in the original 22 set sites on which the annual reports are based (Figure 3).

Table 1. Data collected from annual reports 2004 - 2007

Year	Number of mounds	Increase in mounds	Number of active mounds	Number of active mounds in set sites
2002/03	850		8 active	8 active in 22 sites
2003/04	945	+ 95	107 active	83 active in 22 sites
2004/05	960	+ 15	93 active	68 active in 22 sites
2005/06	997	+ 37	123 active	93 active in 22 sites
2006/07	1043	+46	90 active	85 active in 22 sites

Each report contains detailed information, too lengthy to be presented in this paper, so a summary of the 2005 Monitoring Report is included as a typical example of what each report contains.

The 2005 Monitoring Report in summary

- Highest record of active mounds ever recorded in Victoria
- Greencorps searched 6 sites – 28 newly described mounds – 2 active
- Trend details (Figure 3)
 - Positive trend, but still below mid 1990's
 - Higher in north west, but still two thirds of 1996/7
 - Eastern Big Desert below numbers prior to 2002 drought
 - North east unusually high numbers

Trends in breeding numbers 1994 - 2007

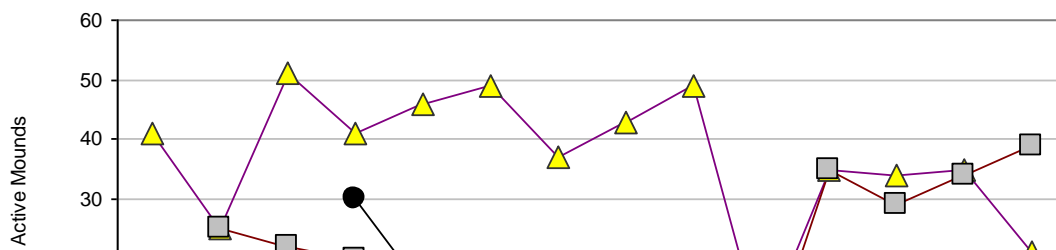


Figure 3. Trends in Malleefowl breeding numbers at 22 set sites over the past 11-14 years. The graph represents three distinct monitoring areas

- *Eastern Big Desert comprise 6 sites over 14 years (triangles)*
 - *North East comprise 4 sites over 13 years (shaded squares)*
 - *North West comprises 12 sites over 11 years (solid circles.*
- (Note: 1994/5, 2002/3, and 2006/7 were major drought years).

Land Management

Land Management is undertaken by four organisations and a summary of their responsibilities and current actions are presented in this paper.

- Wedderburn Conservation Management Network
- Parks Victoria
- Department of Conservation and Environment
- Catchment Management Authorities

Wedderburn Conservation Management Network

- Established September 2003
- A network of remnant vegetation patches, their managers and other interested people
- A partnership and cooperative arrangement between public and private land managers
- Aims to improve the conservation management of the Wedderburn-Wychitella area, especially the Wychitella Fauna and Flora Reserve
- The Malleefowl is a Flagship Species for the group

The group was in the formative stages when the Mildura Forum was held, and a list of their achievements since then is remarkable.

- Erosion control of creeks in the Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Revegetation with Malleefowl food plants of 100 hectares of cleared land adjacent to Malleefowl habitat
- Weed control of Bridal Creeper and Wheel Cactus
- Monitoring of grazing in bush land, especially kangaroos
- Fox control through an extensive baiting program
- Line searches for malleefowl mounds
- Fencing of 70 hectares for stock exclusion especially in corridors
- Working with the Wedderburn Secondary College to assist students in developing a greater understanding of their local environment

The aim of all of these works is to release captive reared Malleefowl into the Reserve.

The Bush Heritage Trust has purchased 800 hectares adjacent to Skinners Flat in the Wychitella Reserve, and is conducting rabbit control on its land as well as on the Reserve.

Parks Victoria

- Responsible Public Land Managers
- Pest and Plant Management
 - Fox
 - Kangaroo and Goat
- Partnership and funding body for Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group monitoring
- Individual membership of Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

Department of Sustainability and Environment

- Overall Land Managers
- Responsible Private Land Managers
- District Fire Protection Plans
- Fire operations to minimize risk of landscape scale fires
- Support for Wedderburn Conservation Management Network

Catchment Management Authorities

- Mallee Catchment Management Authority
 - Greencorps Site Searches
 - Fencing of remnant reserves
 - Publications promoting threatened species
 - Project Manager for Natural Heritage Trust Malleefowl Project
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- North Central Catchment Management Authority
 - Funding for fencing of remnant reserve
 - Funding for fencing and erosion control contractors

Non-Government Organisations

During the past three years a number of Non-Government organisations have worked with Volunteer Groups and Government organisations in initiatives to assist with Malleefowl conservation. WWF, The Wilderness Society, Victorian National Park Association, Bush Heritage Australia and Trust for Nature have given invaluable support to:

- Promote threatened species initiatives
- Advise the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group
- Assist with publications
- Provide support for Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group initiatives
- Arrange and support grants approvals
- Campaign to protect Malleefowl Habitat from clearing

National Malleefowl Recovery Team

The structure of the representation on the National Recovery team has been unique to the team as it is based on collaboration between each group involved in Malleefowl conservation. The four allotted representatives are drawn from:

- Government organisations – Parks Victoria

- Catchment Management - Mallee Catchment Management Authority
- Non Government Organisations - WWF
- Volunteer groups - Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

The next three years

- Little Desert will be a priority to establish monitoring sites
- Adaptive Management strategies will be implemented
- Education will be an increasing priority of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group
- Support for the National system and monitoring will continue
- Interaction with the National Database will be a priority

Concluding Remarks

Positives

- The success of the long term scientific study of Malleefowl
- The recognition of the value of volunteers and the contribution they make to the study of Malleefowl
- Public lands are well managed in Victoria

Areas for improvement

- There are obvious gaps in knowledge in public lands
- Issues for managing Malleefowl on private lands have not been addressed
- Co-operation between stakeholders can be strengthened

The cooperative arrangement for conducting Malleefowl monitoring and research in Victoria is outstanding. Malleefowl and Victoria are indeed fortunate to have a situation where scientists, volunteers and Land Managers (especially Parks Victoria) and Non-government Organisations's such as WWF, The Wilderness Society and Victorian National Parks Association operate together on public lands in mutual support.

Long may this continue and be strengthened