

7. ACHIEVEMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MALLEEFOWL CONSERVATION SINCE THE FORUM AT MILDURA IN 2004

Carl Danzi
Western Australian Malleefowl Network Facilitator

Background

Malleefowl inhabit suitable habitat in the southern half of Western Australia, but their range and population trends in most of these areas are largely unknown. For these reasons Malleefowl monitoring in the next decades will be vital in deciding their management.

Figure 1 shows location of Malleefowl records and major Malleefowl groups in WA. The dark orange on the map shows the location of the Western Australian wheatbelt; most of this area has had its natural vegetation cleared for agriculture. Previous to

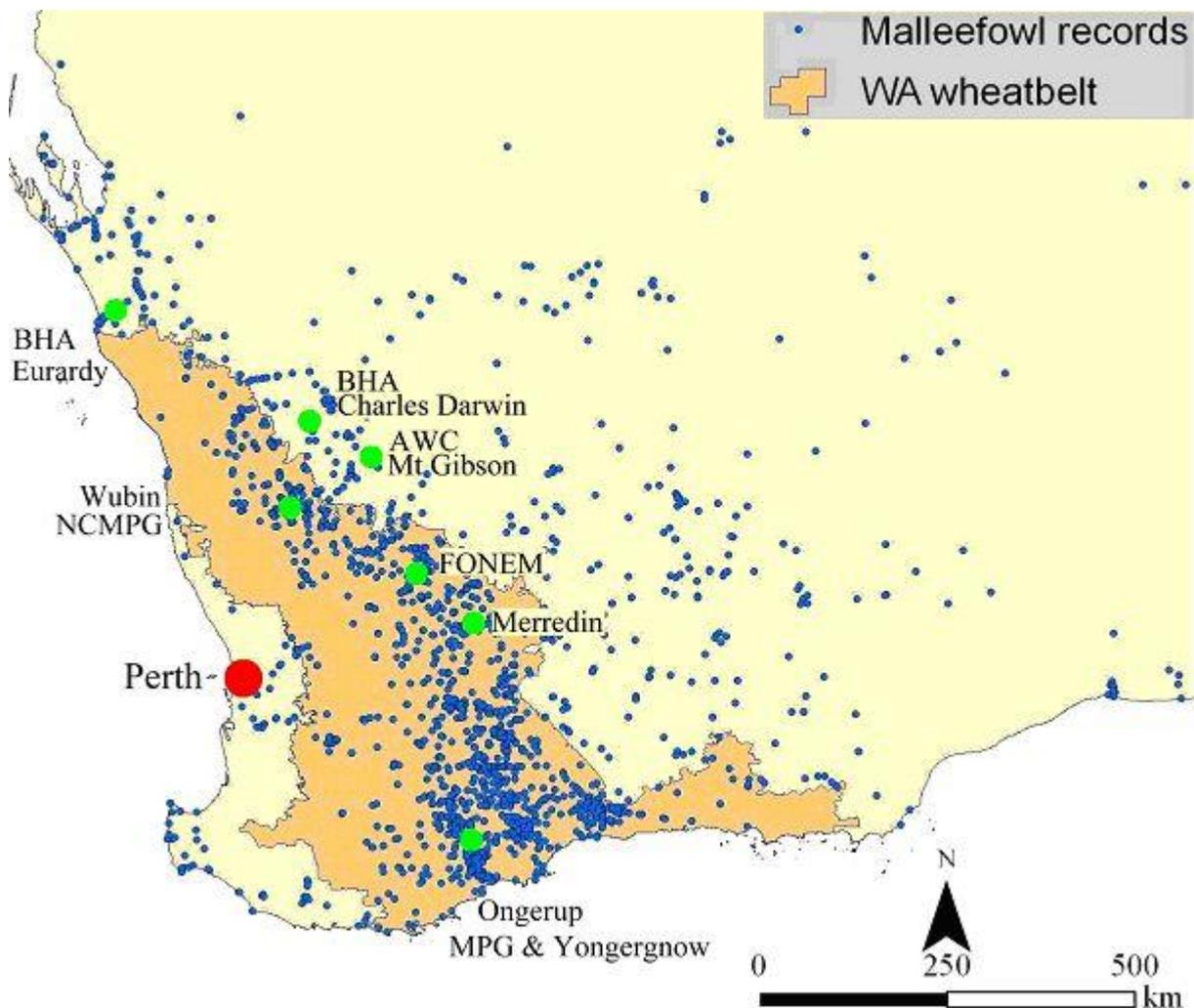


Figure 1. Location of Malleefowl records and major Malleefowl groups in WA. AWC – Australian Wildlife Conservancy; BHA – Bush Heritage Australia; FONEM – Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl; MPG – Malleefowl Preservation Group; NCMPG – North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group

land clearing this area provided large amounts of suitable habitat for Malleefowl but they are now found here only in and around larger areas of uncleared land. The area to the north and east of the

Western Australian wheatbelt is largely uncleared. The area to the south and west is a mix of cleared and uncleared land.

Blue dots on the map represent areas where Malleefowl were or are currently recorded as present. The eastern half of the wheatbelt has the highest concentration of Malleefowl records. North and east of this, records are sparse, probably due to this area being marginal for Malleefowl. South and west of the wheatbelt Malleefowl records are also sparse, and most of these are also old records and Malleefowl are now not recorded in much of this area.

Also shown on Figure 1 are areas where major Malleefowl groups are based, shown as green dots. In the southern part of the map is Ongerup, the home of the most well known and biggest Malleefowl group in Western Australia, the Malleefowl Preservation Group, established in 1992. The Malleefowl Preservation Group has done a lot of work in Malleefowl conservation since 1992. The Malleefowl Preservation Group has been heavily involved in Yongergnow that is based in Ongerup also. Farther north is Merredin where a new group the Merredin Malleefowlers are based. North west of Merredin is the north/eastern wheatbelt where Friends of North Eastern Malleefowl are based in an area where many Malleefowl records exist. North/west again another 200km or so is Wubin where North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group is based. The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group started not long after Malleefowl Preservation Group in the early to mid nineties and have achieved many good outcomes for Malleefowl since then. Two conservation Non-Government Organisations in Bush Heritage Australia and Australian Wildlife Conservancy have also been involved in Malleefowl conservation in recent years. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy at their Mt. Gibson Sanctuary and Bush Heritage Australia at their Charles Darwin and Eurardy reserves. The Department of Environment and Conservation are also involved in Malleefowl conservation at Shark Bay in Western Australia and are also often involved in surveys and other Malleefowl work with all groups.

Malleefowl Conservation - Informed & integrated community action

In August 2004 WWF-Australia commenced a project to assist in Malleefowl conservation in Western Australia titled 'Malleefowl Conservation - Informed & integrated community action'. This project is funded by Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by WWF-Australia through Avon Catchment Council. The project works in four natural Resource Management regions in Western Australian being Avon, South Coast, Northern Agricultural and southern parts of Rangelands, these being the areas where Malleefowl are present. The project is currently scheduled for completion in June 2008.

WWF-Australia have appointed a Western Australian Malleefowl Network Facilitator to manage the project.

Major achievements of the project to date are as follows:

- Set up the Western Australia Malleefowl Network. In Western Australian there are many stakeholders involved in Malleefowl conservation. These stakeholders include community groups, individuals, Non-government Organisations, Natural Resource Management bodies, consultants and private industry such as mining companies. The Western Australian Malleefowl Network is a conduit for all stakeholders to be involved in Malleefowl conservation. It is a way of sharing experiences and learning together rather than every stakeholder reinventing the wheel. The Western Australian Malleefowl Network holds meetings quarterly which stakeholders are encouraged to attend.
- The project has put together the 'Western Australian state action plan for Malleefowl'. This plan was put together by the Western Australian Malleefowl Network members by referring to the National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl and pulling out of it the aspects most relevant to Western Australia.
- A major part of the facilitators role currently and until the end of the project is to help stakeholders be involved in setting up sites and monitoring them to national standards in line with the 'National Manual for the Malleefowl Monitoring System' which was released at the Katanning National Malleefowl Forum. Also to provide training to the stakeholders to be able to achieve this.

- Community is a big part of Malleefowl conservation in Western Australia. As was seen earlier from other forum speakers, community volunteers can save about ninety percent of the funds compared with using paid expertise to achieve on-ground Malleefowl outcomes. Because of the volunteers' interest and passion for the cause of Malleefowl conservation, the quality of the work they provide can also be better than paid people. The Western Australian Malleefowl Network always welcomes new volunteers to be part of the programme.
- The project has been partly used to fund research into Malleefowl conservation in Western Australia; Blair Parsons research is funded by the project.

Research

There have been two main research projects in Western Australia since the Mildura Forum as follows:

Blair Parsons Research

Blair Parsons has been working on a PhD project at the University of Western Australia in collaboration with the Malleefowl Preservation Group, Wildlife Research and Management Ltd. and CSIRO. Blair has analysed old and recent sightings data from Western Australia. He has set up a link on the Malleefowl Preservation Group website to allow anyone with internet access to provide their current sighting to him quickly, easily and reliably. Many other sources have also been used by Blair for analysing sightings data, such as Western Australian Museum and North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group. Blair has also been doing research on the relationship between fire and Malleefowl, as well as developing models to predict the occurrence of Malleefowl in different areas.

Jessica van der Waag's Research

Jessica has been working on a project on how to support the recruitment of Malleefowl in small remnants. This project is a PhD project at the School of Animal Biology in the University of Western Australia. The fieldwork for this project has been in Ongerup and the work has been undertaken very closely with Malleefowl Preservation Group on one of their sites.

Education – Malleefowl Magic

Malleefowl Magic is a curriculum based education package that is aimed at primary schools; the package can be altered such that it is suitable for high school also. The program has been running for about 6 years and to date over 130 schools in Western Australia over the entire Malleefowl range area have been visited. Figure 2 shows location of schools visited.

Malleefowl Magic was developed by Malleefowl Preservation Group and introduced by Sir David Attenborough. Susanne Dennings who has been heavily involved in the Malleefowl Preservation Group has delivered the program since its beginning. Susanne has done many Malleefowl Magic tours since the Mildura Forum. The package consists of a small book, a large book, a teacher's manual and a CD that includes a Malleefowl song. Funding support for Malleefowl Magic includes the Natural Heritage Trust, Lotterywest and BHP Billiton.

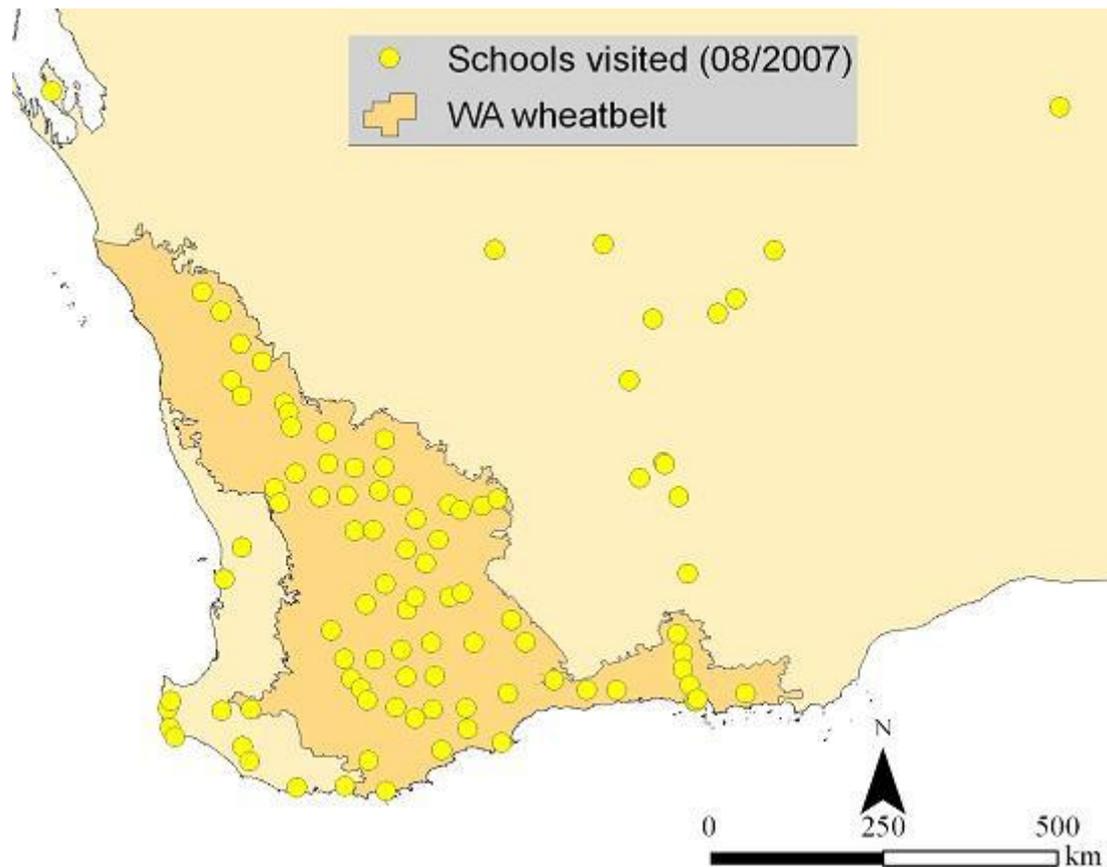


Figure 2. Location of schools visited by malleefowl magic education package

Surveys and Monitoring

Figure 3 shows Malleefowl sites targeted to have ongoing yearly Malleefowl monitoring to national standards by 2007/08 in Western Australia shown in green. Possible future sites are shown in red.

Starting with the green dots at the bottom of the map, Ongerup is where the Malleefowl Preservation Group is based and they have five sites in this area. Carl Danzi worked with the Malleefowl Preservation Group to get four of these sites monitored to national standards for the 2007/08 monitoring season and by doing so, the Malleefowl Preservation Group are trained to monitor these sites without assistance next season.

North from Ongerup on Figure 3 is Merredin. A survey by Malleefowl Preservation Group of a site of approximately 307 ha was conducted in Merredin at the Merredin Peak reserve in June 2006. This survey discovered about 31 Malleefowl mounds in the area surveyed of which nearly 10 had Malleefowl activity. Later that year members of the Merredin Malleefowlers group revisited the mounds with Malleefowl activity in June to discover all but one of the mounds were still being worked by Malleefowl. In late October 2007 Carl Danzi revisited and monitored all the mounds with the Merredin Malleefowlers. The mounds have therefore been monitored this year and the Merredin Malleefowlers should be able to complete the monitoring unassisted next year.

Mt. Jackson is a site outside the Western Australian wheatbelt which is being mined for iron ore. The mining company (Portman Ore) as part of their environmental works in the area is doing some Malleefowl work. The Malleefowl Preservation Group has done Malleefowl surveys coordinated by Susanne Dennings in the area each year since 2004. Each year a new area in close proximity has been surveyed. Carl Danzi is working with Bamford Consulting (Portmans Environmental Consultant) to get Mt. Jackson monitored to national standards. Bamford Consulting envisages they will be the environmental consultant for the life of the mine, approximately 20 years.

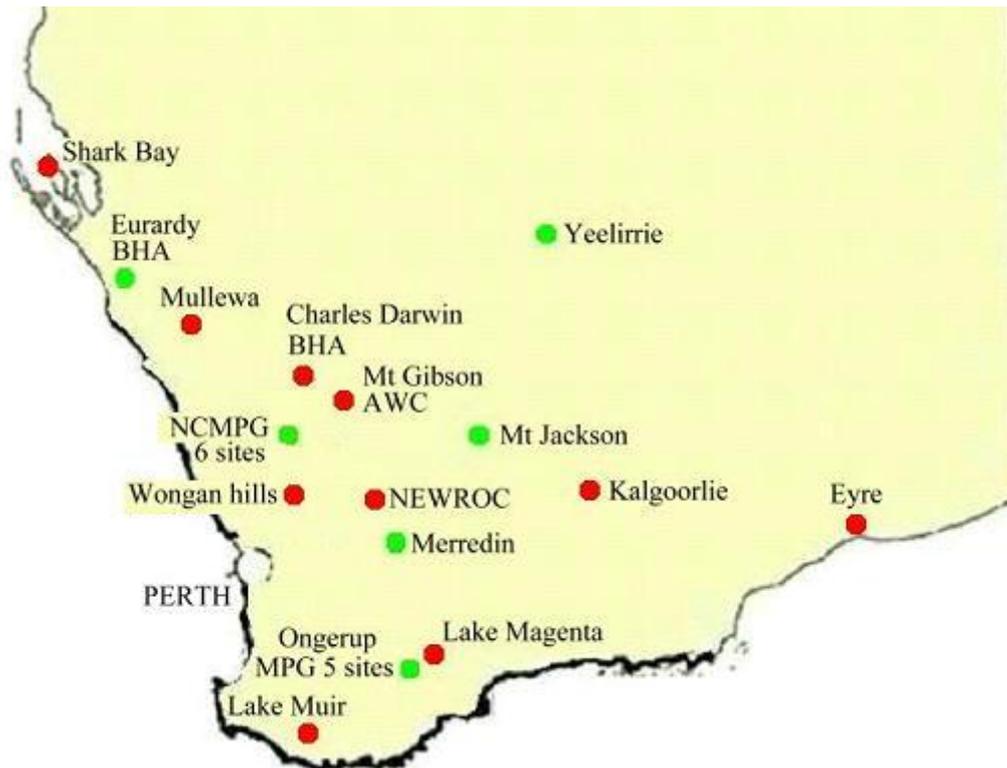


Figure 3. 2007/08 targeted Malleefowl monitoring sites (green) and possible future sites (red). AWC – Australian Wildlife Conservancy; BHA – Bush Heritage Australia; MPG - Malleefowl Preservation Group; NEWROC – North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils; NCMPPG – North Central Malleefowl Preservation group.

Wubin is where the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group is based. They currently have six sites in the area, last year the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group monitored all six of their sites to national standards and forwarded the data to the National Recovery Team. This is the only area in Western Australia that currently is being monitored to national standards and the group has plans to do this each year.

Yeelirrie in central Western Australia is an area that the Malleefowl Preservation Group again has had heavy involvement in surveying over the last 6 years. Susanne Dennings again has been the coordinator of these surveys. Parts of Yeelirrie are mined by BHP Billiton and they have been involved in the surveys. Last year monitoring data from Yeelirrie was forwarded to the National Recovery Team by George White who has been involved in many Malleefowl Preservation Group surveys; it is hoped this will be ongoing yearly monitoring.

Eurardy is a Bush Heritage Australia property. In August 2007, Paul and Leanne Hales (Eurardy managers) conducted a Malleefowl survey at Eurardy with the guidance of Carl Danzi. This was brought about by a number of Malleefowl sightings on Eurardy earlier in the year. The survey was very successful in many ways including community involvement. Three areas on Eurardy were surveyed in an attempt to find an area that Malleefowl used for breeding. Unfortunately only two old mounds were found in the area of the three with the most Malleefowl activity; this search also uncovered many fresh Malleefowl footprints in the area. The managers are keen to monitor the two mounds found in the area of 80 ha. Hopefully this area will be expanded next year to about 400 ha to bring it in line with national standards and uncover additional mounds in the process.

The red dots on the map of Figure 3 are possible future sites, some of these have already had surveys done and other preliminary work.

Eyre Bird Observatory in the east has had about 1200 ha surveyed and has interest but has the tyranny of distance and mandatory relatively expensive accommodation to contend with. There is talk of Eyre being included as a site as soon as 2008/09.

Kalgoorlie, Mullewa and Lake Magenta are sites the facilitator knows little about other than that they have been areas that in the past have been targeted as having Malleefowl sites. There are some old data from Lake Magenta and if there are still Malleefowl there it would be a good site being so close to the Malleefowl Preservation Group and also being such a large area of natural vegetation. All three of these sites are positioned well to help make a complete monitoring program in Western Australia.

Lake Muir is an interesting site in that its vegetation is different from other areas in Western Australia that support Malleefowl; it is mainly Jarrah forest based. According to the Department of Environment and Conservation Manjimup, Malleefowl have been sighted in the area occasionally and because of this they are keen to organise a survey of the area. The Department of Environment and Conservation and Susanne Dennings are working to do a Malleefowl survey around Lake Muir in May 2008. If this survey is successful in finding recent Malleefowl mounds the area can be included as a monitoring site.

Wongan Hills is an area where Malleefowl were found in the past and recent sightings have been made there. The Wongan Ballidu Bushcare group have shown interest in setting up a site in the area and earlier this year in May did a preliminary survey of a site at Wongan Hills. This survey of about 20 ha uncovered a few old mounds. It is hoped they will continue their interest and if a suitable site can be located in the area, it will be a monitoring site.

North-eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils is in the north/eastern wheatbelt of Western Australia and is where Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl are based. There are many sightings of Malleefowl in the area and there is strong interest in this area for Malleefowl work from Natural Resource Management, Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl and individuals. This area will be targeted to set up at least one monitoring site in the 2008/09 season.

North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group have been working with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy at Mt. Gibson Sanctuary and Bush Heritage Australia at Charles Darwin Reserve on Malleefowl conservation. These are both in areas outside the Western Australian wheatbelt and reportedly with strong Malleefowl presence, they will both be targeted as areas for future Malleefowl monitoring sites.

The final red dot is at Shark Bay in an area from which foxes have been almost eradicated but cats are still plentiful. Malleefowl were reintroduced to the area about 10 years ago. The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group surveyed an area of 400 ha at Shark Bay in July 2006 and found only two mounds, one of which was being worked by Malleefowl. The area surveyed was good for finding Malleefowl tracks and many tracks were found. This is an area that may be a possibility for a monitoring site in the future.

Highlights of Western Australian Malleefowl Groups

Malleefowl Preservation Group

Table 1. Summary provided by Malleefowl Preservation Group showing its milestones and achievements since 2004.

- 2004**
- **Membership** reaches 650
 - **National Malleefowl Forum (Mildrua)** – by Malleefowl Preservation Group key speaker presented paper and 5 posters
 - **WA Premier** launches Yeelirrie Report – Albany
 - **South West Station Country Survey** – (Bullfinch area) planning commenced
 - **Eyre Bird Observatory Monitoring** -partnership with Birds Australia
 - **Malleefowl Matter newsletter** – 33rd edition in March
 - **Garden Week Ecotopia** – 5 day display at Perry Lakes
 - **Mt. Jackson Survey** (north of Bullfinch) completed

- **“Malleefowl Believers”** film documentary sub-committee formed
- **Strategic Planning** – three day workshop held to review by Malleefowl Preservation Group future directions
- **Conservation Council** Committee Visit
- **Rossmoyne High School Bushrangers** –visit to office and malleefowl site
- **Foster Road Botanical Survey** – associated habitat report completed (Anne Rick and by Malleefowl Preservation Group volunteers)
- **Gnowijow Primary School Certificate** – awarded to Logan Smith, Ongerup Primary School

2005

- **Committee workshop** – implementing the new strategic plan (replacing Susanne’s roles)
- **State Conservation Conference “Empowering the Conservation Community** – March (paper presentation)
- **Tertiary Support** – University of Western Australia PhD students, Jessica van der Waag and Blair Parsons (in partnership with CSIRO) project given by Malleefowl Preservation Group backing.
- **Bullfinch Survey** – completed for Portman Ore, May 2005
- **Research Information Evening** – by Malleefowl Preservation Group joint projects with CSIRO and University of Western Australia presentations – Ongerup June 7th
- **“BHP Billiton Nickel West Malleefowl On the Nullarbor”** – joint project with Birds Australia -30 volunteers participated over two weeks- June 2005
- **Launch of “Give a Chick a Chance” campaign** – tax deduction fund raiser to help PhD research.
- **AGM Camp out Weekend** – Centre for Sustainable Living, Denmark
- **Malleefowl Magic** – All students from Hyden Primary School participated
- **International Megapode Conference** – by Malleefowl Preservation Group provide support for next Western Australian conference - appoint representative to coordinating committee
- **Peniup Survey Site** mounds checked – two active this year
- **Gnowijow Primary School Certificate** awarded to Ongerup Primary School student, Cathy Elliott
- **International Exposure** – Jessica van der Waag’s paper included in Megapode Newsletter December 2005

2006

- **State Monitoring Workshop** – PALM instruction workshop (Peter Stokie Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group). Attended by 4 Malleefowl Preservation Group members (January)
- **National Survey Data** – Carol Nicholas collating all survey site results for National data base (Joe Benshemesh)
- **Birds Australia WA Report** –Partnership Project presentation
- **Malleefowl Magic Education Extension** – amongst others, Augusta, Margaret River, Nannup, Nyindamurra, Karridale, Cowaramup, Bridgetown, Pemberton, Denmark, and Walpole Primary schools were visited.
- **BHP Billiton – Nickelwest – Yeelirrie** Malleefowl survey
- **Portman Iron Ore Pty Ltd** – Mt. Jackson Malleefowl survey
- **Fox baiting** – coordination of fox baiting program in the region
- **Malleefowl Magic Education Extension** – Augusta, Bridgetown, Cowaramup, Denmark, Karridale, Margaret River, Montessori, Nannup, Northcliffe, Nyindamurra, Pemberton, St Thomas More, Walpole, Cascade, Condingup, Esperance Christian, Esperance, Grass Patch, Jerdacuttup, Jerramungup, Munglinup, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Ravensthorpe, Salmon Gum, Scaddan & Wangatha Aboriginal Schools were visited

2007

- **Malleefowl Magic Education Extension February/March**– Broomehill, Yealering,

Tammin, Wyalkatchem, Wongan Hills, Cadoux, Kalannie, Dalwalinu, Wubin, Coorow, Carnamah, Morowa, Perenjori, Buntine, Bencubbin, Mukinbudin Christian Community School, Mukinbudin District High School, Westonia, Quairading, Babikin, Corrigin, Lake Grace & Dumbleyung schools were visited

- **Opening of Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre** – attended by 300 participants – relocation of Malleefowl Preservation Group Office
- **Portman Iron Ore Pty Ltd** – Malleefowl survey at Mt. Jackson
- **Fox baiting** – coordination of fox baiting program in the region, conclusion of 2006 project
- **Malleefowl Magic Education Extension – July** – Southern Rangelands schools visited

North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group

The group has had three major highlights since Feb 2004 as follows:

- In 2006 North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group monitored their six Malleefowl monitoring sites to national standards. They are the first group to do this in Western Australia and now have the knowledge and skills to continue monitoring their own sites and, if they have time, help other stakeholders especially near them to do the same.
- North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group had a successful application in round 8 of the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust, WWF-Australia Threatened Species Network community grants program for 2005-06 titled Signage and Baiting in the Shire of Dalwallinu for Malleefowl Conservation. The signage consisted of three interpretive display boards erected in Dalwalinu, Wubin and Perenjori. The baiting part of the grant was for fox baiting, and North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group have been very successful in getting a high level of community involvement in the Northern Wheatbelt.
- Successful application in Natural Heritage Trust, WWF-Australia Threatened Species Network grants program in 2003-04 titled Recovering the Malleefowl in the Northern Western Australian Wheatbelt. As part of this grant North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group were able to survey two sites and then record the mound information using Palm technology used for national standards. There was an urgent need to review the status and conservation requirements for Malleefowl in the northern wheatbelt where Malleefowl had not yet been properly studied. The group worked with local farmers, Natural Resource Management groups, the CSIRO, Birds Australia (WA) and Department of Environment and Conservation to determine the abundance, distribution, habitat use, movement and management actions needed to recover Malleefowl in this landscape.

Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl

The Friends of North Eastern Malleefowl, is a non-incorporated group of interested individuals, shires and others from Western Australia's north-eastern Wheatbelt, that are working together to protect and promote Malleefowl and their conservation in Western Australia, between Wyalkatchem and Westonia, and from Trayning to Tampus.

In 2003, with the support of the 'Better Bencubbin' Progress Association, the Shire of Mt. Marshall and the Threatened Species Network, members erected 12 Malleefowl Crossing signs along main roads that cut through known Malleefowl habitat across the shire of Mt. Marshall.

Since then Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl have also supported a number of local projects aimed at fencing Acacia shrublands where Malleefowl are known to occur, more than 200Ha has been fenced. As a small group, Friend of the North-eastern Malleefowl has so far focused on

awareness raising, collecting sighting data and supporting local projects that benefit Malleefowl. They have developed a sightings database for the North East wheatbelt area.

In the future, Friends of the North-eastern Malleefowl hopes to establish a site in the northeast Wheatbelt, and train locals to monitor a large (about 400 ha) patch of Malleefowl habitat to national standards.

Working with the Western Australian Malleefowl Network, the group hopes to provide useful data on Malleefowl activities from this little studied area & coordinate these activities.

Please contact Mick Davis for More information – 0429 473 567

Private Land Conservancies

As stated previously in this manuscript two private land conservancies have been involved in Malleefowl conservation in Western Australia as follows:

- Bush Heritage Australia at their Charles Darwin and Eurardy reserves. North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group have been involved with Bush Heritage Australia at their Charles Darwin Reserve on surveys for malleefowl. Being an organisation protecting nature Bush Heritage Australia have been involved in fox baiting not only for Malleefowl but also for the benefits it has for other species. Fire management is a priority on nature conservation land especially when large areas of natural vegetation are to be protected. The priority is not to let large hot fires happen. At their Eurardy property Bush Heritage Australia did a Malleefowl survey in August 2007 with the plan to monitor the mounds found annually to national standards. Two very old mounds were found in an area of 80 ha. These two mounds are to be monitored and the site expanded to be large enough to reach national standards.
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy at their Mt. Gibson Sanctuary. As can be seen from the map on Figure 3 Mt. Gibson is relatively close to Charles Darwin Reserve, these are both in similar habitat on uncleared land. Because of this and the fact that the managing organisations have similar aims their management is similar in terms of factors such as fire management and fox control. There have been bush fires on Mt. Gibson Sanctuary over the last ten years but again, similar to Charles Darwin, the aim is to reduce large hot fires. Over the last three years the Australian Wildlife Conservancy have been implementing a fox control program on Mt. Gibson and it seems this may be having a good effect on Malleefowl numbers. North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group have been assisting Australian Wildlife Conservancy with surveying areas on Mt. Gibson for Malleefowl mounds for the purpose of setting up a monitoring site. The facilitator has mentioned setting up a site at Mt. Gibson to Australian Wildlife Conservancy but this has not been possible to date.

Future Challenges in WA

The Western Australian Malleefowl Network has been set up and has been instrumental in helping achieve meaningful outcomes for Malleefowl in Western Australia for the last three years. The challenge now is to keep the Western Australian Malleefowl Network alive into the future and to go on helping to achieve the most meaningful outcomes for Malleefowl in Western Australia.

Western Australia is in the early stages of getting a state-wide nest monitoring program to national standards under way. It will be a challenge to do everything required to get this to happen in Western Australia from establishing and surveying sites to getting monitoring of the sites happening on an annual basis. Also to get enough of these sites set up to be able to get reliable data representative of all areas in Western Australia that support Malleefowl.

Once the state-wide monitoring program is set up it will also be a challenge to take the data and work out what is happening with the birds in Western Australia. Are they declining? Why are they declining? How do we stop them declining? These are all questions of developing trends and using adaptive management to help Malleefowl.

Probably the biggest challenge for Malleefowl conservation in Western Australia is how to get people involved and how to keep them involved in the work the Western Australian Malleefowl Network is doing to help Malleefowl survive in the wild in Western Australia. This is a big challenge for any environmental group or for that matter any community group at all with all the various options people in Australia now have to occupy their spare time.

Acknowledgments

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