

9. NGANMARA IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S ANANGU PITJANTJATJARA YANKUNYJTJARA LANDS

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Abstract

Nganamara mounds in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands have been monitored since the early 1990s by Anangu, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management and visiting ecologists, primarily within the Walalkara and Watarru regions. Twenty-six mounds are recorded in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management database. No new active mounds have been recorded since 2005, some mounds have become inactive during the period of monitoring. Reasons for this remain unclear. Some concern has been expressed by traditional owners about the effect of predators; however more systematic monitoring of Nganamara and their predators will be undertaken before predator control is considered. Foot surveys led by Anangu from Watarru have recorded Nganamara tjina (tracks) in habitat to the east of recorded mounds and surveys will continue in this area and other areas with suitable habitat.

Introduction

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, in the north-west of South Australia, are a very large area to manage. There are quite a number of aboriginal communities of different sizes in the lands, and the lands are used in various ways. Cattle grazing, particularly in the north, but to the south, where it is extremely remote country, there is a limited amount of traditional land management, mostly in the Walalkara and Watarru areas. Sand dunes are common but there are some areas of mallee-spinifex. A biological survey was conducted in the area in 1995 and some further research work has taken place since then.

Survey Results

Nganamara (Pitjantjatjara name for the Malleefowl, *Leipoa ocellata*) mounds in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands have been monitored since the early 1990s by Anangu, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management and visiting ecologists. Records exist primarily from within the Walalkara and Watarru Indigenous Protected Areas and nearby country. Anecdotal records derived from Indigenous knowledge, rare sightings and the distribution of suitable habitats suggest that the species was once more widely spread throughout the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands. Thirty-eight mounds (Benshemesh 2007) are recorded in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management database (Figure 1).

Breeding success has been monitored (Figure 2) through the presence of eggs (ngambu), egg shells (nyiri) and tracks of young (tjitji). In 1998/1999 eggs were removed from mounds and measured. The size of eggs was considered to be within the normal range (Benshemesh 1999). Foot surveys (Figure 3), led by Anangu from Watarru, have recorded Nganamara tjina (tracks) in habitat to the east of recorded mounds. Future surveys will continue here and in other areas of habitat recognised as suitable for Nganamara by Anangu. An active mound was recorded in 2005 by Anangu from Walalkara after following tracks first found at an inactive mound.

Anangu have detailed knowledge of Nganamara habitat and food plants (eg. *Acacia ramulosa*, *A. kempeana*, *Senna artemisioides*, *Waitzia acuminata*). Robin Kankanpakantja (senior custodian from Walalkara) has been able to confirm that Nganamara were not in an area because food plants were either not available or not currently flowering/seeding. Anangu also continue to conduct patch-burning activities in *Triodia* (spinifex) grassland surrounding Nganamara habitat. However, resources currently limit Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management's ability to support and develop this activity.

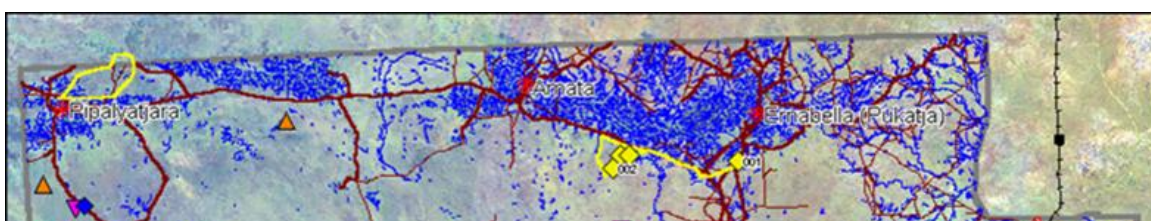


Figure 1. Malleefowl mounds recorded in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management database (Benshemesh 2007).

No new active mounds have been recorded since 2005. Some mounds have become inactive during the 15 year period of monitoring. Reasons for this remain unclear. Some concern has been expressed by traditional owners about the effect of predators. In March 2007 tracks at a mound showed that a dingo had been sitting on the mound and, when a Nganamara approached, the dingo chased it and it flew away. In 2002 and 2003 baiting for predators, dingos, cats and foxes, was trialled at the mounds and in the surrounding country. This was stopped due to concerns that it was actually attracting predators to the area. Lack of resources prevented adequate monitoring. More systematic monitoring of Nganamara and their predators will be undertaken before predator control is considered in the future.

Future work

Aims for future monitoring include:

- Develop more systematic monitoring of Nganamara activity across the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands
- Annually assess active and inactive mounds for signs of returning Nganamara
- Conduct extensive foot surveys into remote Nganamara habitat
- Develop and conduct predator monitoring at active and inactive Nganamara mounds and in country where other signs of Nganamara have been recorded
- Utilise Cybertrackers to assist Anangu with independent data recording



Figure 2. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management monitoring a Ngamamara mound at Walalkara, 2007.



Figure 3. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Management conducting a foot survey for Ngamamara tracks at Watarru, 2007.

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