

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

25 Belfast Street
Newtown Victoria 3220
annos@iprimus.com.au

Newsletter July 2004



Coming events

August 14,15 - Wychitella search
August 28 -VMRG Committee
September 25 to Oct 2 - Mid Murray Field
Naturalists, campout at Wandown FFR
October 9,10 - VMRG Training
See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

National Forum Feb 6-8, 2004

The National Malleefowl Forum hosted by VMRG in Mildura was a great success. Attendance of over 100 surpassed expectations, with representation from as far away as the wheatbelt of Western Australia.



Neil Macfarlane addresses the Forum

The Forum produced renewed support for a National Malleefowl Recovery Team, wider adoption of standardised monitoring practices, and efforts to establish new monitoring grids in areas where they are poorly represented.

It stimulated a lot of enthusiasm, initiated greater coordination and cooperation, and invigorated programs with directions and timelines.



June, Joe and Ann

National Malleefowl Recovery Team, April meeting

Victorian members:- Peter Sandell, Parks Victoria; Julie Kirkwood, Threatened Species Network; Peter Stokie, VMRG; Dean Robertson, Wimmera CMA.

1. Purpose of the National Recovery Team

- Major conduit for discussion for revised National Recovery Plan
- National coordination and sharing of information
- Possible National newsletter
- National level data storage and access
- A provider of contacts for people working within malleefowl environment
- Input into national policies through providing a focus and communication channel
- Development of specific policy documents and guidelines to be used across malleefowl range (eg fire, fox baiting, habitat protection)
- Linking national projects and regional projects across Australia
- Coordination of Annual Reporting on Recovery Plan, setting targets and reporting against targets, and outlining details of site specific programs
- Strategic advice on funding
- Integrate Annual Report with Birds Australia - State of Australian Birds
- Ensure that the National Recovery Team maintains 'a national focus'

2. Revision of National Recovery Plan

Commonwealth requires a revision by end of 2004, and has provided funds for this purpose. Joe Benshemesh has been approached to undertake this task. Ideas will be widely sought on the scope of the plan and what the plan should look like (forward thoughts to Joe or Peter Sandell)

3. National Convener

- It was agreed that funding for a national convener should be sought
- Julie Kirkwood agreed to develop a budget and seek out funding avenues
- The budget should include funds for a National newsletter

4. Appointment of a chairperson

Peter Sandell accepted the nomination

Extracted from notes from - Peter Stokie

Actions from VMRG March Meeting

1. Tim Connell be given access to the database for research
2. Wedderburn Conservation Management Network be given assistance in searching the Korong Vale block for malleefowl mounds
3. **Monitors to provide Peter Stokie with a 'mud-map' for their grids**
4. Safety Officer to address issues with trunking radios
5. Letter to be sent to Mark Stone, CEO PV advising him of the strong support given by rangers to VMRG monitors
7. Consideration be given to the development of individual safety plans for each grid
8. Ralph Patford and Ann Stokie to submit application for Parks Community Grants
9. **Training weekend be held at the same time and place, ie. Wyperfeld on the second weekend in October**



Afternoon tea discussion

10. Members be surveyed for opinions and the results be considered by the committee at the July/August meeting

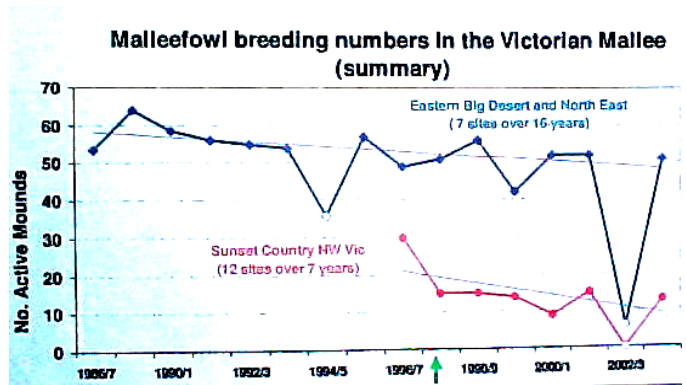
11. VMRG Representative on the National Recovery Team be Peter Stokie
12. That a statement be prepared for our members describing our present knowledge of the stakeholders in malleefowl conservation and our understanding of their relevant responsibilities
13. That a statement be published for members describing what happens to our data, and how it is used

Extracted from minutes from - **Ann Stokie**

Malleefowl monitoring 2003-04

Breeding - 2003 was a good rainfall year relative to the last few years, and Malleefowl rebounded remarkably well from last year's devastating drought. Only 8 mounds were active last year, the lowest number on record. This year, 107 were recorded as active, which is the highest tally on record.

Although the overall result is good, it was also a bit patchy and there are areas where the birds are not doing well, and some areas where they did unexpectedly well. In the North East (sunset country and Hattah) breeding densities in 2003/4 were about average, but still only about half that recorded in 1996/7.



Looking closely at the data for the North East and Big Desert, it seems the Wandown/ Menzies area has suddenly filled up to capacity again. In contrast, Moonah (23) does not seem to have recovered from the drought. Torpey's grid at Wathe continues to do very poorly, while the neighbouring Wathe SW did very well as it usually does.

Please note that it has been 7 years since the grids were last researched for new mounds and the situation is becoming critical.

Lerps - It turned out that the lerp outbreak never really happened. Was monitoring worthwhile? I certainly think it was! We now know that a lerp outbreak did not occur immediately following the drought. One never



really knows what is going on until measurements are made.

Extracted from a report from- **Joe Benshemesh**



Malleefowl seen during monitoring

VMRG monitoring data

VMRG is an inspiring example of conservation action by a small community-based organisation. They now visit some 900 Malleefowl mounds within 25 grids each summer and collect important data in a consistent and rigorous manner. As well as recording nesting activity, the volunteers collect fox scats for dietary analysis, and other information that might explain changes in Malleefowl activity. Data collected contribute to a long-term dataset of Malleefowl breeding numbers, which is important to the ongoing assessment of risk for this species, an indicator of the overall health of our Mallee habitats.

The contents of fox scats have been analysed as part of a parallel Parks Victoria investigation into risks to Malleefowl, associated with the decline in rabbit abundance due to Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (calicivirus).

*Extracted from a PV newsletter written by **Peter Sandell***



Old Mallee at Nowingi, near proposed site

Nowingi Waste Facility proposal

The response date for the draft guidelines of the Environmental Statement Hattah/Nowingi has been extended to August 15. VMRG is still refining its response and will post it on www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au.

Our website already has lots of details about the process, the waste site, and some photos and maps. Keep checking the site for updates.

For a download of EES process and maps of the waste site see the Govt. website www.majorprojects.vic.gov.au/industrialwaste

For information from the consultants ring 1800 440 902, or the above website, or email industrialwaste@doi.vic.gov.au

Ann Stokie has been interviewed on ABC radio by Victoria Adams regarding the site, and appeared at a public meeting in Red Cliffs before 1000 people.



Ann at a mound 1 km from waste site - June 2004

The proposed site is at Nowingi, over the highway and railway from the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, on State land that somebody forgot to include in the surrounding Parks. It's about 50 km south of Mildura and 50 km north of Ouyen. Some of the area (Raak Plain) was mined, I think for gypsum.

At the moment the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) Guidelines are available for public comment. Then the EES has to be prepared by consultants, then it is displayed for comment. Anyone who makes a submission **to the EES** can then appear before an Independent Panel Inquiry. The Panel Report and the modified EES are finalised and the Minister makes a decision, whether to go ahead or not. If they go ahead it will be under certain conditions, which may result from submissions to the EES and Panel, and before works occur there have to be works permits granted, again with provisions.

There is a long way to go, but it's important to have our say at all stages.

If the Govt. undertakes all works, some of the time and permit conditions can be reduced. Not usually so if it is privatised.

That's the way I understand it after years of academic and practical experience with EES, and it usually takes one year or more. Some proposals are even left in EES stage for 3 or more years until public interest wanes.

Gil Hopkins

**Any news or photos for the Newsletter?
Send them to Gil at
giliz@netconnect.com.au**

Victorian Malleefowl research

Part of my Master's research at RMIT is in the area of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). For the past few months I have been playing with the field-collected data to try and visualise any patterns or trends. There are limitations in what can be done, but it's a really good starting point to increase our understanding of the ecology of Malleefowl.

The VMRG database is – BIG! So much that in my limited time I have only been looking at a few sites where breeding activity has historically been greatest, like Wandown, Bronzewing and Wathe.

Another important part of my project has been reviewing previous research on the species. In the State library I tracked down old copies of Emu (as far as 1909), and Volumes 1–3 of Australian Wildlife Research in a basement at Melbourne Uni. This information has given me good insight into the results of past research and allowed me to re-focus my project.



Tim at
Wyperfeld NP

I am certain that GIS can be further used as a tool to manage the collected data and assist in developing an understanding of mf ecology, as the GIS system should allow all the jigsaw pieces of the puzzle to come together.

The old saying that “the more you know, the more you realise you don't”, is certainly true, as every question leads to many more, followed by continued analysis and evaluation of the database. No doubt more exploring and ground-truthing of DSE floristic data, and further vegetation surveys will be needed.

I'm looking forward very much to continuing to be part of VMRG monitoring and assisting in the continued conservation of Malleefowl, and will forward my project to the VMRG Committee for comment.

Tim Connell

VMRG member survey

13 members returned the survey, with interesting and thoughtful ideas. The results will be discussed at the August committee meeting, then distributed.

It's clear that many members are prepared to work on planning and implementing projects, while others are happy to focus mostly on monitoring.

Peter Stokie

South Australian Mallee projects

Malleefowl are a 'flagship' species as they are widely recognised, and help to focus conservation efforts. In SA, projects target Red-lored whistlers (Billiard & GluePot Reserves), Emu-wrens (in Ngarkat CP), Mallee Whipbirds and Striated Grasswrens.

Results show that Malleefowl are more abundant in long unburnt Mallee, while Whistlers and Grasswrens are more abundant in habitat burnt in 1988. Mallee Emu-wrens have not responded to fire, have disappeared from areas where they were recorded, and now require special attention.

Using GIS, past data will be combined with landscape features to identify potential 'refuges' that support fauna during poor seasons, and need protection from fire.

Threatened bird distribution is now being compared to fire history maps for three Mallee States to help prepare a Mallee Bird Recovery Plan.

Email - gates.jody@saugov.sa.gov.au

Adapted from an article by - Jody Gates

Funding applications submitted are:

- Parks Vic Volunteer Grant – Successful
- Fed. Govt. Small Equipment Grant
- Threatened Species Network Community Grant – Wedderburn group for Wychitella

Malleefowl at Wychitella FFR

Recently a group of interested locals with support from DSE formed the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network, with many conservation objectives including recovery of Malleefowl.

It is believed there are three breeding pair in the Reserve, but only systematic searches will tell us so WCMN is getting organised.

The Network has:

- Prepared Recovery Plan with Peter Morison DSE & Lyndall Rowley
 - Held public meeting with Joe Benshemesh
 - Submitted monitoring & reveg. proposal
 - Organised VMRG to help search grids
 - Consulted widely with community, etc.
 - Started idea of Friends Group
- Further information



John at Wychitella

5438 3094

By Peter Stokie for - John Morieson

Spreading the word

A number of members have been speaking at meetings about Malleefowl and VMRG:-

- Ron & Gwyn Wiseman have been to service groups in Hopetoun, Patchewollock, and conducted tours of Wathe FFR
- Ralph Patford spoke to Whittlesea Rotary
- Peter Stokie has been to Ocean Grove Bird Observer's Club
- Ann Stokie spoke at Red Cliffs meeting and ABC radio

What have you done? Tell Gil and send pictures on giliz@netconnect.com.au



Little Desert new grid

The picture shows one of the nests seen during the June long weekend, when we were searching Nurcounng Reserve to set up a new grid. You may remember the weather wasn't much fun! But we found about 10 unrecorded old nests when we line-searched about 8 sq km of **very** dense mallee broombush.



"I reckon we should start in the east and work west!"

"Nah, I reckon we should work downwind!"

Ron, Neil and Peter

We worked through an area where the three Duff children were lost for 9 days in the

1800s, the 'Lost in the Bush' story we all read in our old school readers. Lucky we had GPS!



"We'll have a cuppa while they sort it out!"

Gwyn and Mary

Still plenty of work to do to set the grid up properly, but maybe we'll start monitoring the known nests and try and get GreenCorp to help search the rest of the grid. Fortunately there has been some research done on the Reserve, so we may know most active nests. There has to be an easier way than slogging through the broombush! **Gil Hopkins**



At Jane Duff highway park near Nurcounng FFR
Reflecting over the day's activities!



Just to remember what it's all about.

Photo - Gwyn