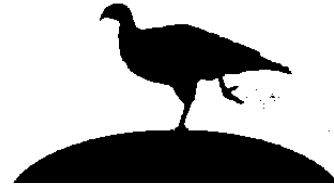


Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.

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Newsletter May 2007



Coming VMRG 2007 events

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Soon | -Committee meeting |
| July/Aug | -Newsletter |
| August | -Committee meeting |
| September 7-11 | -National Forum WA |
| September | -Newsletter |
| October 14, 15 | -Training weekend, AGM |
| October onward | -Nest monitoring |

See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

Morieson memorabilia

A set of 6 articles collected by John Morieson

1. Bill Harney's War

This story is an adaptation of the ABC radio doco of the 1950's produced by John Thompson. The printed version, published by Currey O'Neil Ross P/L has a foreword by Manning Clark. This excerpt is from pages 26 and 28.

Bill's trench is hit by a shell and he is buried alive.

"Everything was quiet. I didn't know what was happenin', a complete darkness. And I felt around and it suddenly dawned on me that I'd been buried....I shouted and yelled and kicked and bellowed and bawled, and nobody...and suddenly I could hear somebody....And I bellowed again....And then I started digging meself out like a mallee hen getting' out of a nest, when it's born...."

He discovers subsequently that the rescuers were only interested in finding the battalion rum supply that had also been buried by the same blast.

Bill signed up for the 9th Battalion in Queensland in 1915, served as a signaller on the Western Front and was discharged in 1919.

2. Lerps

The Inglewood Advertiser, 28 March 1861, from a letter to the Editor by Ferdinand von Mueller
SIR,- Professional engagements during the greater of this month in the Australian Alps has been the cause of my tardiness in acknowledging the receipt of some saccharine substance forwarded from Inglewood for my inspection. The saccharine matter found this season so abundantly around Inglewood is called by the

Aborigines of the Mallee Scrub "Loap" or "Lerp", and was brought to scientific notice from the vicinity of Avoca, where specimens for home transmission were gathered by Robert Cay, Esq. The little shell-like cups, covered externally with curled hair, and resembling flakes of snow, originate from an insect- the psylla eucalypti- the larvae and pupa of which exude the sugary substance from the extremity and articulations of its body.

This substance, passes usually under the name of "manna", but has no claim to such appellation, not containing the characteristic mannita, but resembling, in its saccharine contents grape sugar.

Dr Anderson's analysis establishes the following percentage chemical constitution of the Lerp:-

| | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Water.....</i> | <i>15.01</i> | <i>Sugar.....</i> | <i>49.06</i> |
| <i>Gum.....</i> | <i>5.77</i> | <i>Starch.....</i> | <i>4.29</i> |
| <i>Tunlin.. ..</i> | <i>13.83</i> | <i>Cellular.....</i> | <i>12.04</i> |

From this investigation it is apparent that the Lerp is free from unwholesome ingredients. It is entirely different in form, although similar in chemical character, to the crumb-like spurious manna, which occasionally during the summer season may be copiously collected under the trees of eucalyptus viminalis, improperly called, sometimes wax, sometimes peppermint trees. Although the Lerp can only be of benefit to cursory travellers, it possesses yet sufficient interest as to deserve a place amongst the natural productions of Victoria to be transmitted to the forthcoming International Exhibition. I beg, therefore, to call on any of your readers inclined to support the labours of the Commission now engaged to promote a worthy representation of our natural and industrial resources, not to omit the Lerp amongst the more important articles to be transmitted for exhibition.

*With sentiments of great regard, Mr Editor,
Yours &c., FERD. MUELLER,
Melbourne Botanical and Zoological Gardens,
26th March, 1861.*

3. Local news

Inglewood Advertiser Tuesday, February 18, 1861.
The Council of the Acclimatisation Society of Melbourne, acknowledge with thanks, a donation of one lowan, from Mr G Webster, of Kerang.

4. 1996 Inglewood mounds



1996 photos at Inglewood, with Margaret & Fred Watts, brother of Peter Watts VMRG

5. The Mallee Hen

From the Inglewood Advertiser Friday, May 10, 1861
The nests of this extraordinary bird which are to be found in the neighbourhood of Inglewood, have excited no small degree of interest, and the idea of domesticating the birds is by no means original. Some of the nests in the neighbourhood contain no less than ten or twelve cart-loads of earth, gravel and twigs, and are four feet high and twelve feet in diameter.

Eggs, as well as birds, were sold in Inglewood during the last summer, at high prices, both being remarkably palatable. We believe that the young birds cannot be easily tamed. One of them may be seen at the Newmarket Hotel. There can be no doubt as to the value of this bird as a domestic fowl, and it is well worthy of the attention of Mr Edward Wilson, who is devoting himself to that worthy object – the discovery and propagation of animals useful to man.

6. Game

Inglewood Advertiser Tuesday, November 12, 1861.
On Saturday last, Mr Roff the greengrocer, had forty brace of wild ducks which he sold at two shillings per brace. He had also a Mallee hen and several of the eggs of that remarkable bird. The latter are larger than a goose's and were sold at ninepence each. They were got from the natives, about forty miles from this place.

6. Mallee Hens

Inglewood Advertiser Wednesday, 8 July, 1863
Most diggers of the early days of the rush to Inglewood, Kingower and other diggings among the "Mallee Scrub" recollect the mallee hen's nests, their eggs, and a few have seen the very shy bird. Later comers cannot be gratified, for the birds have deserted the district and even the nests are difficult to find. There are a few, however, and beyond Maxwell's Reef, close to the roadside, is a good specimen. It consists of a very large basin scooped out of the earth and

lined with small gravel. One of the peculiarities is, that the stones are not such as found in the immediate neighbourhood, but must have been brought some considerable distance. The eggs are generally as large as would fill a half pint tumbler, and the shell so thin that it is next to impossible to cook without breaking them. The test [shell] is exceedingly delicate and pure. Those who are desirous of seeing the birds, may be gratified by paying a visit to the garden of Mr Bishop, of Kingower, where they can see two, which are the only ones that have ever lived in confinement. The owner has possessed others, which from some reason or another have died, but he entertains hopes that those now living will breed next season. The birds both male and female are much like turkey hens, only browner, and walk about with the same minikin, undecided step. These are the only living specimens in confinement, and Acclimatisation Society and others have expressed anxiety to obtain them, and liberal offers have been made, but the owner declines to sell them. He also possesses a spur-wing plover, a bronzewing pigeon, a Tasmanian jackass, a small bird which "chuckles" as it walks about, and a whole collection of parrots. They live in rustic cages in a pretty garden and seem as happy as birds naturally are.



John Morieson describing how aborigines made the 'signal' tree behind him – or is he describing how to find a Malleefowl at Kooyoora State Park?

Anything for the Newsletter?
 Anything you would like to see included?
 Contact Gil on giliz@netconnect.com.au

Analysis of fox scats

Adapted from a report by Peter Sandell DSE, March 2007

Collection of fox scats by VMRG monitors started in 1996 following arrival of calicivirus (RHD) as it was thought that decline in rabbit abundance would make foxes prey more heavily on Malleefowl. Scats collected over 9 seasons were analysed by Barb Trigg. She identified mammals by hair analysis and also recorded reptile, insect, egg shell, feather, or plant material.

The results show changes in relative consumption over time, and evidence of geographic variation in fox diet. Fox abundance is likely to have changed over time, and data show a decline in the number of fox scats collected, particularly in remote grids.

Results so far show a steady decline in rabbit in fox scats following RHD, assumed to be due to scarcity of rabbits. Scat analyses suggest that foxes in remote areas are less dependent on rabbit than in areas close to farmland.

In the case of Malleefowl, eggshell in fox scats was analysed and approx. 90% were Malleefowl, and there was a high level of egg predation by foxes following RHD virus. The proportion of fox scats containing eggshell was relatively high in 97/98 and has declined to about one fifth. There is no comparable decline in Malleefowl breeding activity, so it is assumed that foxes have changed and rely less on Malleefowl eggs. The feathers in fox scats also declined over 9 seasons, with only 5-20% of the feathers in scats thought to be Malleefowl. There have been two minor plagues of house mice over the past 9 seasons as evidenced from the fox scat contents. The incidence of small mammal remains in fox scats has also declined.

Fox scat analysis indicates that insects, carrion, reptiles, and even plant material (fruits) are all important components of fox diet in the Mallee. Reptiles are a more important dietary item in remote areas, whereas carrion and plant material are important close to farmland.

It appears that foxes currently exert less predatory pressure upon Malleefowl than immediately following arrival of RHD virus. The effective long-term management of rabbits (and mice) may be just as important for Malleefowl as the direct control of foxes.

| Grid | WPP | LPP | MN | MHM | FTD | CD | BTP | SM |
|------|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|----|
| 01 | √ | | √ | √ | | √ | | √ |
| 02 | √ | √ | | | | | | |
| 03 | | √ | | √ | | √ | √ | |
| 04 | | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | |
| 05 | | | | | | | | |
| 07 | | √ | | | | | | |
| 08 | | √ | √ | | | √ | | |
| 09 | | | √ | | √ | | | |
| 11 | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | | |
| 12 | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | | |
| 13 | √ | √ | √ | | | √ | | |
| 14 | | | | √ | | | | |
| 15 | | | | √ | | | √ | |
| 16 | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | | |
| 17 | √ | | √ | | | | √ | |
| 18 | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | | |
| 19 | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | | |
| 20 | | √ | | √ | | √ | √ | |
| 21 | | | | | √ | | | |
| 22 | | | | √ | | | | |
| 23 | | | | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| 30 | | | | | | | | |

Grid names 01 Dattuck, 02 Torpey's, 03 Wathe SW, 04 Bronzewing, 05 Colignan, 06 Annuello, 08 Powerline, 09 Mt Hattah, 11 Mopoke, 12 Pheenys, 13 Bambill Sth, 14 Menzies, 15 Wandown, 16 South Bore, 17 One Tree Plain, 18 Washing Machine, 19 Cowangie, 20 Lowan, 21 Dumosa, 22 Denning, 23 Moonah, 30 Lendrook. Mammals are Western Pygmy-possum, Little Pygmy-possum, Mallee Ningai, Mitchell's Hopping Mouse, Fat-tailed Dunnart, Common Dunnart, Brush-tailed Possum, Silky Mouse

*Are you in a group who needs funds?
 Re-searching monitoring sites can earn
 your group \$1000.
 Contact Peter 5229 8648*

The view from the back - VMRG March meeting



Lowans at Wyperfeld

submitted by Gwyn Wiseman from Hopetoun Times July 31, 1953 written by Norman McCance, Weekly Times.

For 16 years Mr Frank Gloury of Jeparit has been patrolling Wyperfeld National Park for the Fisheries and Games Department. His observations of the Lowans (Mallee Hens) that have almost their last Victorian stronghold there are invaluable as authentic records of a vanishing race. He agrees with me that they are disappearing fast enough without our exporting them to the USA and doubts very much if the six recently shipped to there from Adelaide will survive the journey. Mr Gloury writes "In 1946 I had four mounds under observation, all within 300 yards of each other. You stated that the male bird arranges the eggs pointed down. This is not so. The eggs are never moved by either bird. I have on different occasions watched the male bird open the mound and watched the hen come in to lay an egg".

"Examining the egg as soon as the hen left the mound I found the egg pointed end down. I have laid an egg on its side and reversed another that is pointed egg up. Opening the mound 13 days later, I found another two eggs had been laid and the egg I had put on its side and the reversed egg were in the positions I had placed them. Two months later I opened the mound and found both eggs had hatched".

"Opening a mound one day I heard a chick about 15 to 18 inches from the surface. I filled in the mound. It took the chick one and a half hours to come to the surface. It rested for 12 minutes and then took off into the dense wattles. I chased it but never saw it again".

"Opening another mound I found a chick six inches from the top of the mound. I picked it up and it did not struggle. The wing feathers of a chick, the development of such a young chick, and the bristles over the nostrils to keep the sand out, which runs like water, have to be seen to be believed".

It was an error that I stated recently that Lowans were not found in South Australia. I forgot that the Mallee extended across the border. Mr Alex D. Selby of Kallista (Vic) corrects me in this and states that at the Coorong near Salt Springs, the Mallee country comes almost to the water and he saw mounds there that had been in use fairly recently. At Pinnaroo he saw the Lowans in a patch of Mallee about 14 miles south of the

town, also a mound full of eggs. This was in December 1950.

Mr Chas Mann of Boorookpi tells me that the Lowans are still fairly numerous in parts of South Australia. He contends that the Lowans lay an 8 oz. egg and not 2 oz. as stated. I had in mind a large hen's egg, but I can hardly believe that a Mallee Hens the size of a White Leghorn pullet lays an egg weighing half a pound.



Photo Meryl-Ann Wiseman

News from your Committee

- Accounts were approved, and Treasurer will investigate tax deductibility.
- VMRG members may have travel subsidised to attend National Forum in Western Australia.
- Fuel reimbursement will be for monitoring and Committee meetings, upon request, of the actual amount spent, to a maximum.
- Multi-Regional Malleefowl Project Education Package is needed, please contact Ann to help.
- New sites still to be fully established at Paradise, Nurcung, Broughton's Waterhole and Broken Bucket.
- After Peter's monitoring survey, instructions and training have been changed slightly, annual fox scat analysis to be more detailed.
- Members need to nominate how they would prefer to receive the newsletter and cost difference needs to be covered.
- Approval given to request funds to conduct an educational program for local landholders bordering Parks, and may have Malleefowl on their property.
- Need for sub-committee to organise re-searching. Existing sites still to be searched - Washing Machine, Pheeney's, Annuello, One Tree Plain & 1 Tree BNT, Powerline, Wandown, Dennying, O'Brees and Bambill.
- Iluka KWR Sand mining proposal is awaiting a meeting and release of revised EES
- Clothing with VMRG logo available from Ralph
- National Forum WA (2007) will present site re-searching paper and poster on Track & Scat Manual
- Dara Foundation Grant Proposal 2007 to search all tracks in Little Desert and conduct three more site searches.

News from VRMG March meeting

- National Malleefowl Forum in WA in September 7-11 discussion.
- 2006/07 nest monitoring & trends technical report from Joe Benshemesh (available on VMRG website).
- Lerp monitoring discussion followed. Joe requested volunteers undertake lerp counts.
- Fox scat analysis report (see this Newsletter)
- Monitors' survey results were outlined by Peter, who indicated that in total 768 hours and 17,920 kilometres went into collecting this year's data.
- National Malleefowl Project 2006–7. Joe and Ann outlined first year's achievements and next activities (see this Newsletter).
- Re-searching sites. Peter outlined progress and the need to organize a number of researches quickly. Another 8 sites need to be searched in the next two years.
- Hattah/Nowingi. Ann reported on the successful campaign to oppose the Long Term Containment Facility at Nowingi, and thanked all those who had assisted, especially Hawtins who provided accommodation, all those who attended hearings, and Joe for participation in VMRG presentation. Moved that VMRG write to the Minister in appreciation of the Government's decision not to proceed with Nowingi, and highlighting concerns about the potential adverse impacts sand mine proposals will have on Malleefowl.
- Iluka Sandmining Proposal - EES for this project will be closely scrutinized, and submissions prepared to ensure malleefowl habitat protection.
- Birds Australia Important Bird Areas and Malleefowl - Joe outlined details of the project. The VMRG, through Joe, will request all Malleefowl areas that meet criteria be considered as Important Birds Areas.
- Wandown/Menzies - Neil reported on the continuing campaign to limit impact of horticultural development on Mallee habitats in the Boundary Bend locality.
- Gil Hopkins outlined a proposal to apply for funding from the Enviroworld for an educational program for local landholders. This project was approved
- Bernie Fox & Peter Sandell agreed to work on a article on malleefowl for the Sunraysia Daily
- Peter Sandell sought feedback from VMRG members on a Mallee CMA proposal to carry out fencing of the Denning Channel, Ralph Patford agreed to discuss this in detail with Peter.



Some of the NHT Project meeting in Melbourne

UPDATE by Ann Stokie

National Heritage Trust Malleefowl Monitoring, Population Assessment and Conservation Project

The NHT Malleefowl Project is now two thirds completed. The first year involved collecting and collating monitoring data from across Australia, then putting this data through rigorous statistical analyses to determine whether any trends could be established.

The involvement of the VMRG has been significant in this process. Firstly all of the VMRG/Victorian data was in excellent shape, and could be fed into the statistical analysis without much difficulty. The SA and WA data was not so straight forward, as a lot of the data was still on paper sheets and not entered onto a database. VMRG came to the rescue, and with the help of Alec & Sharon Hawtin, Ralph & Wendy Patford and Ron & Gwyn Wiseman, thousands of SA & WA records were transferred from paper to Palm and then onto the database.

Year one tasks were essentially Joe Benshemesh's responsibility. We formed a VMRG State Steering Committee to provide a forum and feedback group for Joe. This committee comprised Joe, Shelley Heron, Julie Kirkwood (WWF), Ralph Patford, Ron Wiseman and myself.

Three major reports from the first year of the project: are

- Review of existing data (inventory/state data collection)
- Gap Analysis of monitoring and associated data, and an update on data collection
- Trend analysis of Malleefowl data

The third report provides the results of the statistical analysis, especially for Landscape variables, Rain, Fire and Foxes.

Ralph Patford has placed these reports on the webpage www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au in the section on the National Project.

The last task for year one was to present a full report to the Mallee CMA Reference Group. I attended this meeting in December and presented the first year findings in a PowerPoint presentation. The report was accepted with a high degree of praise.

h

Year two concentrates upon applying the findings of year one results to our future monitoring efforts.

There are two main tasks, as well as the National Forum and a final report

- Review of the national monitoring program and revision of the national monitoring manual
- A series of recommendations to relevant catchment bodies, state agencies, regional landcare groups, and non-government stakeholders to assist with management of malleefowl conservation

Following widespread consultation across Australia, and two major workshops, a final draft National Monitoring System and Manual has been finalised.

The system is essentially the current Victorian monitoring system with some modifications to the data we currently collect. The full monitoring sequence for every mound in every site will now only be conducted once every five years. A shortened sequence (omitting most of the none/some/lots table and all measurements except height) will be conducted from year one to four.

Some mounds (if they meet stringent scientific criteria) will not be monitored at all except in the fifth year. The most important criteria for omitting mounds for annual monitoring is height, with a mound less than 10cm being considered for non-monitoring. It is important to note that **no mound will be removed from the database** unless it is obliterated or deemed to be something other than a malleefowl mound.



Some members will stoop to any lengths



NHT Malleefowl Project April meeting in Adelaide

The revised manual explains all of these processes, as well as chapters on:

- Monitoring existing sites in all states
- Mound/site visitation
- Mounds outside of site boundaries
- Setting up new sites
- Re-searching new sites
- Monitoring by aerial survey
- Monitoring in arid lands
- Training volunteers
- National database
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Additional on ground data collection

The next steps are to develop the recommendations for land managers, establish two new sites in Victoria in the Little Desert and the Big Desert, and to develop a Schools Education Package. A presentation of the whole project will be made at the National Forum and later to the Mallee CMA Board and Technical Reference Group.

If there are any questions or points of clarification in this update, please contact me at 03 52298648 or by email annos@iprimus.com.au

VMRG Committee Roles

| Position | Person |
|---|------------------------------------|
| President | Ron Wiseman |
| Vice-President | Neil Macfarlane |
| Treasurer | Ralph Patford |
| Secretary | Ann Stokie |
| Safety Officer | Ross Macfarlane |
| Equipment Officer | Peter Stokie |
| Newsletter Editor | Gil Hopkins |
| Grants, Fund Raising | Gil Hopkins |
| Publicity | Kirsty Malley |
| Education | Ann Stokie |
| Membership | Ralph Patford & Ann Stokie |
| Publications | Ralph Patford & Peter Stokie |
| Documents and Archives | Neil Macfarlane |
| Threats(official responses) | Kirsty Malley |
| Liaison with Government Organisations | Ron Wiseman & Ann Stokie |
| Liaison with Non-Government Organisations | Ron Wiseman & Ann Stokie |
| Future Planning | Peter Stokie & Kirsty Malley |
| Excursions & Events | David Thompson |
| National Recovery Team Representative | Peter Stokie (dep Ross Macfarlane) |
| Web Page Co-ordinator | Ralph Patford |
| Technical Advisors | Joe Benshemesh & Paul Burton |
| Public Officer | Shelley Heron |



Others just get right down to it!