

Lowan Behold!

Newsletter of

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.

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October 2008

Coming VMRG 2008 events

October 11, 12 -Training weekend, AGM

October onward -Nest monitoring

November -Newsletter

See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au



Malleefowl discussion at Nurcough Hall

Envirofund Malleefowl

'Neighbourhood Watch' by Gil Hopkins

The first meeting with landholders near Malleefowl monitoring sites was held at Nurcough Hall, just south of the Little Desert. About 30 local landholders joined in a barbecue, followed by a discussion led by VMRG members Liz and Gil Hopkins with help from their daughter Wendy, a trained environmental community facilitator.

This program is funded by the Federal Government Envirofund to improve the long-term sustainability of Malleefowl by encouraging all landowners with property close to monitoring sites to participate actively in malleefowl recovery.

The Nurcough landholders were shown where megapodes exist in the world, the past and present distribution of Malleefowl, the VMRG monitoring sites, and some pictures of nests in the Nurcough area. We went through the life-cycle of Malleefowl and discussed important factors in their environment that allow them to live at Nurcough.

Wendy led a group discussion where landholders contributed local stories about Malleefowl, and developed ideas on how their local land management can help maintain and improve Malleefowl numbers.

Initially many of the landholders had come along to find out what the meeting was about, because the meeting did not involve Parks Victoria or Wimmera Catchment Management Authority or Department of Sustainability and Environment, but was held by a local member of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group. But they all left feeling proud of their area and its Malleefowl, with some wanting to be involved in our group. The most tangible result so far is to have another meeting in March or April to report on the 2008 season and further develop some guidelines for land management adjacent to Malleefowl areas.



Most farmers did not want an organised program with property signs or other recognition. They wanted more information about their area and their Malleefowl, better coordination between locals and groups entering the site, and more involvement in monitoring and searching activities. Some were interested in funding programs for revegetation or 'habitat management', carbon trading and offsets, and property management planning programs with local authorities. Others were interested in having more say in management of the Nurcough Reserve.

Our Malleefowl Neighbourhood Watch program will improve the knowledge and skills of landholders and increase their involvement in natural resource management activities, and so is essential to the long-term sustainability of Malleefowl populations. The program has positive benefits to the landholder, the Malleefowl and their habitat, agency staff, and to future programs.

If you are interested in being involved in helping with this program, please contact Gil on 5383 8207 or giliz@netconnect.com.au



Nurcough Malleefowl off on business

Mallee CMA Dry Lands Committee visit Bronzewing Reserve

by Ron Wiseman

On Tuesday the 12th August 2008 under the guidance of Ron Wiseman and Sally Williams the Mallee CMA Dry Lands Committee went to Bronzewing Reserve to learn a bit more about Malleefowl and their habitat needs. We visited the VMRG monitoring grid and saw a mound that was being prepared for the coming season.

Ron gave them an insight into how the mound was built over a period of time, the eggs hatched, and how the chicks reach the top of the mound and have to fend for themselves against predators and to find food.

We talked about the habitat required for mound building and the sources of food for Malleefowl. Yes, this included lerps, but there were only a few remaining.

Bronzewing had a good range of wildflowers including Desert Baeckea, Emu Bush, Groundsel, and a range of wattles. There were very few orchids, though along the railway line we did find Sun Orchid and Spider Orchid leaves and buds.

There were a couple of unused mounds and one had an old litter trail into it made up primarily of *Triodia*.

The Committee asked a lot of questions about Malleefowl ranging from how long they live down to how many chicks survive in their natural environment.

It was a great day and enjoyed by all.



Mallee CMA Committee learning about Malleefowl

The Safety Moment by Ross Macfarlane

- Think out of the square...

Get into the ring!

All of us have our favourites. We all look forward to that annual visit to our beloved Malleefowl mound on the top of the sand hill, down on the heavy crabhole flats, or in the middle of that impossibly dense pine thicket. Well, thanks to a fascinating insight at our training weekend last

October, contributed by Hattah Ranger-In-Charge Phil Murdoch, there's now one extra little reason to be glad of the months and years that the Malleefowl toil building their nests.

In VMRG's safety procedures and training, we emphasise the need to avoid getting caught in the mallee in bushfire conditions. We actively discourage monitoring on days of Total Fire Ban when temperatures and fire risks are extreme, and when fatigue can cloud your judgement.

There's always a chance, though, that you could get caught out – as my Dad and I nearly did in 2002, when lightning from a band of thunderstorms ignited fires in Bronzewing 5 km from where we were monitoring. So it pays to be prepared for all contingencies. But what would you do if you were in the bush, and found that you were trapped by an approaching bushfire?

Phil's advice is to try to place yourself on open or bare ground, where the fire-front can pass you by. You'll want to cover yourself up against radiant heat as much as possible – perhaps even bury yourself in the sand. And where can you reliably find bare, sandy ground in the mallee bush? Why, when all else fails, look for a Malleefowl mound.

In Phil's words: "I would not like to have to try it out, but a mound would be better than nothing to shelter in or behind". Hopefully it will never happen, but just in case: it's good to know that in the direst of emergencies, the malleefowl might – just might – come to your rescue.

We all know we love them. This is just one more reason why...☺

Editors note – some of the eggs in mounds at Wathe after the fire were too hot to pick up with gloves!

News from your Committee

- We still need a coordinator of 'winter' activities. Please think about this and talk to Peter Stokie at the Wyperfeld weekend
- Some re-researching was done, some postponed due to bad weather
- Because Parks Victoria and DSE have processes in place controlling Malleefowl egg 'capture and release' the Committee have decided we do not need to have a VMRG policy, but agree that a planned scientific adaptive management approach is essential
- Various burning plans were discussed and letters sent to DSE officers
- Training weekend has a few changes
- VMRG has made submissions to Green papers
- Malleefowl Education kit has been launched at Hopetoun and to biodiversity seminar at Halls Gap
- VMRG is discussing an Iluka Mining proposal to fund Malleefowl habitat rehabilitation near Ouyen VMRG webpage will be upgraded
- Planning is underway for habitat corridor between Wandown and Annuello blocks

Malleefowl 'swarm' by Keith & Cynthia Willis

Last year (October 2007) while monitoring Malleefowl at Wandown Flora and Fauna Reserve, we were pleasantly surprised to observe something we have not seen in all our years of observing the fowl.

In an area that had been cleared some years ago there were up to 10 – YES - ten fowl feeding on the seed of wild sage, which given the severity of drought was probably one of the very few plants that set seed this year. We continued to observe this each morning and evening (with the numbers varying) for the next 5 days after which (having completed monitoring) we headed home.

We weren't the only ones to have the privilege of this sight, as Phillip and Jeanette Cattach (who introduced us to it) were doing monitoring a couple of days earlier and came upon the sight.

We did take photos but because the sage was taller you can only see the back of some of the fowl!

Malleefowl Adaptive Management

adapted from 2007 Forum talk by Joe Benshemesh

Adaptive management is a pragmatic and collaborative process of 'learning by doing' that confronts uncertainties and seeks to gain reliable knowledge. Key components include experimentation, modelling, field management treatments and monitoring, all structured in a way that shows which management alternatives work under particular conditions. The most effective management treatments are then adopted and used where they can have best effect.

Adaptive management allows management to be changed in response to **observed** changing results, and changing circumstances like drought and climate change.

But it all depends on continuous consecutive reliable information! So this is where VMRG and the National Recovery Team comes in. Our consistent annual monitoring across the whole Australian habitat gives a huge data base that can be compared with the past and between each site, allowing comparisons and hence development of best management principles, especially if we can include all the records for the weather and management at each site.



Training for consistent monitoring

Present VMRG Committee Roles

Voting at AGM on October 11 or by proxy
- President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Equipment Officer, Safety Officer, Newsletter Editor, Grants & Fund Raising, Publicity, Education, Membership, Publications, Documents & Archives, Threats (official responses), Liaison with Organisations, Future Planning, Excursions & Events, National Recovery Team Representative, Web Page Co-ordinator, Technical Advisors, Public Officer, Winter Coordinator

Nganamara in the Southern

Alinytjara Wilurara NRM Region

adapted from Ward & Bellchambers 2007 Forum report

In the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands there are historic records of Nganamara (Malleefowl) and their signs, but no regular monitoring occurred.

A recent survey of bird tracks across Maralinga lands found six locations with fresh Malleefowl tracks, confirming their continuing presence in the region. Habitat of these signs varied from dense mallee to open mulga woodland.

A survey in August 2007 involving Anangu Pitjantjatjara people searched around known mounds and new areas. Mounds were monitored according to National Malleefowl Monitoring protocols.

53 sites were assessed with Nganamara recorded at 20 sites. Nests were located at 8 sites and birds observed at 5 sites. 6 unknown nests were located during the survey, and all observed tracks were in areas where tracks had not been previously recorded. Many tracks were single birds travelling to feeding areas or mounds, while others were of pairs of birds.

Editors note – on our way across to the Malleefowl Forum in WA we passed through the southern end of this area. We were impressed with the range and variety of mallee country from Victoria across into Western Australia, but were extremely concerned with the amount that had been cleared for cropping, and in many areas the crops would not justify harvesting. My conclusion was that best Malleefowl habitat has been cleared, and we are the greatest threat to Malleefowl, but now also its greatest promise!

Ann Stokie demonstrating GPS and Palm in similar country, but in WA. Interesting that the trackers also identified the ages of the bird and how old the tracks were. Makes our Little Desert tracking proposal a bit more challenging!



Remember to send your information and requests to giliz@netconnect.com.au