

Lowan Behold!

Newsletter of

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.

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Winter 2009

Coming VMRG 2009 events

- Various site re-searches TBA
- October 10, 11 - Training weekend, AGM
- Spring newsletter
- Annual monitoring program

See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

or contact our Secretary Ann Stokie

Conservation genetics of Malleefowl

- August update *from Taneal Cope*

Things have been progressing with my project, with a lot of time being spent inside the genetics lab and not enough time in the sunshine!

Since I last saw VMRG members, I have been in the lab extracting DNA from samples and testing different primers on Malleefowl DNA. At this point I am at Melbourne University extracting DNA from the 200 tissue/blood samples that have been collected by the SA museum. I will be extracting DNA from the VMRG feather samples using Ancient DNA Techniques (usually applied to old, decaying samples such as fossils). This process ensures that minute amounts of DNA are able to be extracted. I'm planning a trip to the Ancient DNA laboratory facilities in Adelaide around September/ October this year.

At the moment, I am also trying to sequence mitochondrial DNA in Malleefowl from WA, SA and Vic to see what level of genetic difference there is across the country. Mitochondria have their own DNA that evolves much slower than the rest of the body's DNA. So, by looking at differences in mitochondria we are able to track ancestry and historical relationships. At the moment this is a pilot study, meaning that I'm testing only a few individuals to begin with. I'm trying out new primers that will hopefully allow me to be able to classify structure in populations of Malleefowl.

Other than that, I am busy with ethics applications and plans for the field season. Field work will involve catching, banding and blood sampling adult Malleefowl; digging up mounds; potentially incubating some Malleefowl eggs; and sampling end of season mounds (for eggs that are

not going to catch or survive). As the plans develop further I will be able to send out requests for volunteers for some of these catching trips.



Taneal in the sunshine at a Malleefowl mound

A big thank you to everyone for the recent feathers collected by VMRG. Hopefully see you soon, in the sunshine, when I get out of the lab!

Funds for fuel - a change of nomenclature *by Ralph Pattford, Treasurer*

Since its inception VMRG has been trying to meet some fuel costs associated with monitoring and attendance at Committee meetings. Many thousands of kilometres are racked up each year by volunteers. Currently, the estimate is that members collectively spend in excess of \$4,000 per year in monitoring alone. This does not include travel to the Training Weekend, Reporting Back Meeting and other activities such as Grid Searches. The overall figure is likely to be at least twice that. VMRG does not have the resources to reimburse all costs, hence the current policy of providing funds to those who request them, to cover some of the fuel costs of monitoring and attendance at Committee meetings. In hindsight, the use of the term 'fuel reimbursement' is a bit misleading, so from now on the term '**fuel subsidy**' will be used. This should convey a more accurate notion of what the policy is about. The actual dollar amounts remain unchanged, ie. for monitoring a subsidy equal to the cost of fuel to a maximum of \$80 for 2WD vehicles and \$120 for 4WD vehicles where they are necessary, and for Committee meetings a maximum of \$80.



Contemplating all the beautiful bush discoveries?

Re-search at Wathe Reserve

from Ron Wiseman

On Sunday April 19 a group of Hopetoun and District Pre-School parents and friends along with members of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group re-searched the 03 grid at Wathe Reserve. The grids are re-searched every four to five years to check if there have been any new mounds built in that time or if some may have been missed when the initial search was done.

We divided into three teams of 8 searchers with VMRG members at each end of the line. The volunteers were spaced at 20m intervals and guided from each end with walkers holding palm computers connected to a GPS. As each mound was found (whether new or known) it was recorded on the palm computer and a GPS location recorded as well. At lunch time the walkers had covered 4km and everyone was able to partake of chicken and salads with fruit salad and tea, coffee for dessert.

The afternoon was getting quite warm as they set off on the final walk with tired legs. They all finished the re-search around 4.30pm.



Re-searchers at sunny Wathe

The re-search funding for the Hopetoun and District Preschool was made possible through a grant from Threatened Species Network, and we thank them for that. There are a couple of things that I would like to acknowledge and they are the great effort of two of our members who drove up from Geelong Sunday morning leaving around 3am to get there by 8am with the equipment, and a special thanks to all who volunteered or were conned into helping in some fine way. Your legs were appreciated very much. So thank you to each and every one of you.

Do you have any pictures of unusual Malleefowl mounds? Or stories about Malleefowl? Or stories about 'Malleefowl people'? Send them to giliz@laharum.vic.au

VMRG Committee *by Gil Hopkins*

Treasurer Ralph Patford reported a balance of \$61,375.24 which includes various committed but unspent amounts totalling \$35,703.56.

Peter Stokie discussed the training weekend and we changed some of the arrangements so we could participate in the 100 year celebrations for Wyperfeld National Park on the Sunday. New arrangements will include some monitoring practice facilities on the Saturday morning for anyone who could be there by Friday night.

Some new data loggers will be purchased.

VMRG will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2010.

Discussed site re-searches and possibility of 'participating' in monitoring site establishment at Scotia Sanctuary in NSW.

EnviroFund project finishes in September with some meetings near Malleefowl monitoring sites and development of Malleefowl information CDs.

VMRG Education Kit was a runner-up in the Banksia environmental awards. VMRG monitoring safety procedures have been entered into Safer Communities Award process.

Still in discussion with Iluka regarding funding of Malleefowl projects near mineral-sand mines near Ouyen, waiting for Government decisions.

Major funds and partnerships are being sought to implement the Adaptive Management Framework for Malleefowl, and grants are being sought for monitoring, some more equipment, and computer, website and database improvement.

We have an AGM at Wyperfeld NP on October 10 and you can be nominated for a Committee or Executive position by two weeks beforehand. Secretary Ann Stokie 5229 8648 will be sending out information to all members

Increase in membership dues

by Ralph Patford, Treasurer

At the 2008 AGM members voted to increase fees by \$5 per annum per category. So, from November 1 this year Membership Fees will be:-

- \$30 for Household Membership, and
- \$20 for Individual Membership.

Members are reminded that the fee includes the cost of attendance at the Training Weekend, so payment at that time certainly makes sense.

As a matter of interest, the annual fees for the Malleefowl Preservation Group in WA are \$5 more per category and they are currently considering hefty increases.

Member profiles - Gwyn & Ron Wiseman



Gwyn

Previously - My family were pioneers at Yarto East, north of Hopetoun. Horse 'n cart 7 miles to school through some interesting scrub! Us kids were always excited about the wildlife, but not even our once-a-year nature walk excited a teacher. The ritual digging out of a mallee hen's nest, the pride in showing 'sir' the beautiful delicate egg, was greeted with no more than a raised eyebrow, despite a lot of care to leave the nest how we found it, which should have made an impression. I often wonder what those teachers think now of our rare treats in a country school!

Ron worked long hours, so our children's time was always interrupted. Our solution was 'head for the scrub'. It worked well and developed further by visiting our farmer friends for picnics in the corner paddocks next to the scrub. We met Angus Torpey.

Malleefowl - Later there was a rather abrupt meeting with Paul Burton when I spied his map of Wathe. Eventually a meeting to walk with him took place. Our daughter Meryl-Ann spent her rare visits home at Wathe and opened up valuable information for me with her photographs to prove how beautiful the Mallee is. Then the reliable old Toyota land cruiser came into our lives and opened up whole new places and confidence. Before that it was shank's pony! Still bugging Paul and talking to his answering service, Ron and I started to walk the Wathe grid with paper and trusty compass.

VMRG - About 4 years later Joe and Paul invited us to Wyperfeld. We almost did not go - but the welcome alone was a good start! The biggest surprise was the positive and continued approach. The 20 people or so were keen 'to have a go' searching the grids scattered throughout north west Victoria. It was amazing the enthusiasm of the folk who welcomed the challenge and kept in touch with us. Something worked because it's been 10 years and the group is growing.

Interests - Promoting and learning anything about the Mallee and our malleefowl is at the top of the list because we have the best group of members of any organisation. Also - Hopetoun and District Historical Society, Neighbourhood

House, knitting for the vulnerable children of the world, putting our camping gear to good use, spending more time with the family - that will do for starters! Family tree is more of a disease than an interest, and learning to work this computer!

The future - There's standing and semi standing native scrub for sale and I'd like to see it developed into malleefowl breeding country. Make our Mallee parks weed and vermin free, especially Wathe. Lots of children's puzzles, books, etc about Malleefowl, more grids, and keep keeping on VMRG, we've come a long way!

Ron

Previously - I lived at a little place called She Oaks and that was about 6 miles east of Meredith. I went to Grade 8 in Primary School. Every weekend we would go out into the bush looking for wildflowers and birds and there were plenty of both. This is probably why I am still interested in native flora and fauna today.

Malleefowl - While visiting Wathe Flora and Fauna Reserve, Gwyn and I ran into Joe Benshemesh and that's when my first association started with Malleefowl research and that was back in 1996/7. The next time we saw Joe he asked if we could do some monitoring in Wathe for him and that was 12 years ago.

VMRG - My membership has been a journey of learning and trying to understand all the data that we gather each year. I joined VMRG because we were involved with people who had a similar interest to us.

Mf activities - My activities have been monitoring, searching new grids, re-researches and the highlight has been being President of the group and the involvement with Iluka sand mining project.

Interests - My special interests are of course Malleefowl and the local Historical Society. Mainly in the restoration of old machinery and the digitising of the Hopetoun Courier of the past 110 years so 60,000 scans and around 1,800 hours later we have them all on disc. My other interests are music from time to time and of course our wonderful grandchildren.

The future - Travel to Tasmania for about 6 weeks, and for Malleefowl I would like to get a remote sensing camera to set up at a malleefowl mound to track their work and visits to the mound by predators. Also maybe seeing other areas where Malleefowl live.

Member profiles are a new section for the newsletters. Thanks to Gwyn & Ron for being the guinea pigs!

If you would like to suggest someone, please contact Gil on 5383 8207 or giliz@laharum.vic.au

VMRG Reporting Back meeting

by Ron Wiseman

VMRG held a very successful reporting back meeting on April 4 at the DPI building in Mildura. It was reported that this breeding season was one of the most successful for many years. But there were a couple of reasons for this including more monitoring sites, better winter rains, and also some of the grids have had fires close to or through them. Two thirds of Wathe FF Reserve burnt in 2007 and Malleefowl from the burnt area seem to have moved into the unburnt section, so there are more active nests in our sites.

The afternoon speaker was Taneal Cope who is doing a three year study at Melbourne University on Malleefowl genetics. This involves the collection of feathers for lab testing to find out if in-breeding is a problem, if all eggs in a mound are from the same parents, and other relationships. It was an interesting presentation!

Dr Joe Benshemesh reported on Malleefowl monitoring results and also the Adaptive Management process that the Arthur Rylah Institute are doing for the Group.

Some of our members visited the Australian Inland Botanical Gardens near Buronga NSW for a very enjoyable walk through the Mallee section with plants indigenous to the Mallee area.



At the Gardens in front of the Malleefowl mound

If anybody would like to join our Group, we hold a training weekend at Wyperfeld on the 2nd weekend in October for training new members in the monitoring procedures as well as having a great social weekend. Please contact Ron Wiseman on 5083 3240 or the secretary Ann Stokie on 5229 8648.

The Group now has a membership of 90 and is steadily growing.

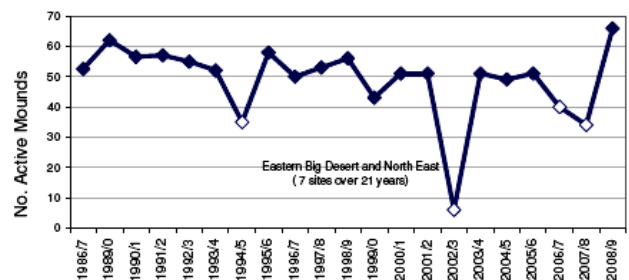
Monitoring Reports are available from the VMRG webpage at www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au, but they are a bit hard to locate. Highlight one newsletter on the **What's New and Features** on the opening page then you will find reports on the left column of the next page headed **Monitoring Reports**



Joe giving the report at the Irymple meeting

Extracts from 2008/9 monitoring

report extracted by Gil from Joe and Peter's report



Active nests in seven sites over 21 years

Another excellent year of monitoring with great success and very high standards, and the most active mounds ever recorded, 151 out of 1169!

It was the first year of monitoring all known mounds in the Wedderburn area, where line searching is now needed to find all mounds in all reserves.

We moved to a new version of Cybertracker which will allow us to upgrade our failing Palm computers with newer equipment.

We set up an on-line database to hold all Australian monitoring data safely and accurately, and yet accessible to those using it. There are 4 roles – contributors (monitors), coordinators (State representatives), ecologists (who vet data and prepare reports), and administrator (who organises the computer management).

Lerp were recorded at 7% of mounds.

We are moving toward further development of a national program of adaptive management plans for recovery of Malleefowl populations and are making partnerships and seeking funding.

Monitors have access to data for their monitoring sites. They can review their data for every mound, view any comments, and soon be able to see the photos taken. They can also see 'Mound Inspection Reports' for **every** site on the database. The database is found at www.database.malleefowlvictoria.org.au but you need to be registered by our coordinator, Peter Stokie 5229 8648 or pstokie@iprimus.com.au