

# Lowan Behold!

## Newsletter of

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.  
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August 2010

### Coming VMRG 2010 events

- July VMRG Committee meeting, Boort
- Scotia Sanctuary search August 15-19
- Training w/e, Wyperfeld NP October 9, 10
- AGM at Wyperfeld, October 9
- Monitoring October – December
- Summer newsletter

See [www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au](http://www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au)  
or contact our Secretary Ann Stokie



*Boronia, pinkish*



*Boronia, white with age!*



*Azure Daisy Bush (Olearia rudis)*

### The Mallee blooms

*Story and photos by Ron Wiseman*

The recent rains have brought the Wathe Flora and Fauna Reserve to life, with its beautiful wildflowers coming out and giving a great show. Gwyn and I are still staking Grid 037 in the burnt area. We have seen some of the best displays of nature's beauty that you would see anywhere in Australia.

The plants and regrowth amongst the burnt Mallee is something to see. The many little plants growing include Golden Phebalium, Desert Grevilleas, Azure Daisy, Blue Boronia (*B. caerulescens*) in all colours from pink through blue to white, Native Pines... and many other varieties are all growing since the fire went through in 2007. The orchids are also showing growth with new leaves, with the odd one showing new buds peeping out.

In other areas the Malleefowl are putting litter into their mounds at present and seem to be working very hard at it. In some cases the litter is fairly thin on the ground so it is being shifted over a long distance, but a couple of mounds that we visited were well over half-full of litter.

### Reporting Back meeting, March 2010, Geelong by Gil Hopkins



*Some of the audience, intently considering information*

The full 2009/10 monitoring report from Dr Joe Benshemesh is on our website but important points are

- Another very successful year of monitoring
- Generally more breeding mounds, but varied with different sites, more eggs in some mounds
- Malleefowl numbers satisfactory given last twelve seasons, but climate change will increase risk
- National database being re-analysed for reporting
- New 'Mobile Mappers' need more work, but everything is improving in data management
- More and heavier fox scats collected at mounds
- Monitors should photograph any signs of predation
- Monitors should check the information on the database against what they personally recorded and comment where necessary
- Little Desert Tracks search data is being analysed



*More members musing*

Peter Sandell reported for the Malleefowl Recovery Team that a National Forum is expected in SA in mid 2011, that the Team has been important in coordinating monitoring and research, has sent management information to 15 NRM bodies, and is seeking funding.

## Malleefowl Conservation Genetics

by Taneal Cope  
report by Gil Hopkins from  
Taneal's presentation

- Taneal's Ph D project looks at
- Genetic variation in Australia
  - Historic variation
  - Mating systems, and
  - Population models

For the first two aims she has collected Malleefowl material (mostly feathers) from across Australia and from museums, and is analysing the DNA present to find how closely related the birds may be.



Taneal and active mound



Checking egg laying

She spent summer months at Wandown and Menzies sites, recording, collecting and incubating eggs and releasing chicks in order to analyse their DNA (and their parents' DNA) and establish whether all the chicks from a mound come from the same mother and the same father, or whether different mothers can lay in one mound, whether females have more than one partner, and whether females may lay in more than one mound. In order to do this work she had to obtain permits and go through a rather strict Ethics Approval with Melbourne University for correct care of all birds, eggs, feathers, specimens and mounds.



Sample eggs were collected after candling to check their readiness for hatching, then incubated (in VMRG stubby-holders) following information from Zoo handbooks and other recent research, checking

every 4 hours. The chicks were released 24 hours after hatching within 200m of their 'home' mound. Embryo cord samples were kept as back-up DNA samples.

50 eggs and 77 naturally-hatched membranes were collected from 17 nests, and adult feathers from all 34 active mounds. Most eggs were not collected. Active mounds in Wandown had between 4 and 17 eggs, while those in Menzies had 18 - 21 eggs.



Just hatched



Ready for release, 24hrs old

Even though there was a lot of work done collecting all the DNA data, now she is analysing and interpreting it all, a very time-consuming and involved process. We are all waiting for the information that her research will uncover, and the population models that she develops, probably by October this year.

Taneal acknowledged all the help that was given by VMRG and other volunteers, in digging out and filling in mounds for egg observation and collection, in

incubating, in releasing new chicks, and in attempts to collect samples from adults.



Volunteers in action

**VMRG Membership** - Information about renewals and new memberships by *Ralph Patford, Treasurer*. The VMRG Membership Year runs from November 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Annual Training Weekend (2<sup>nd</sup> weekend October at Wyperfeld) provides an opportunity for new members to join and existing members to renew. At other times members wishing to renew or new members should download a membership form from the VMRG website, complete this and forward it with payment to: Treasurer, VMRG, 5 Selma St, Corio. 3214.

The Annual Fee is currently set at:-

- \$20 for INDIVIDUAL membership
- \$30 for HOUSEHOLD membership

The preferred method for distribution of 'Lowan Behold', the VMRG Newsletter, is by email. In all likelihood, a fee of approx. \$10-\$15 will be charged for those wishing to receive a hardcopy in the mail – commencing after this year's AGM.

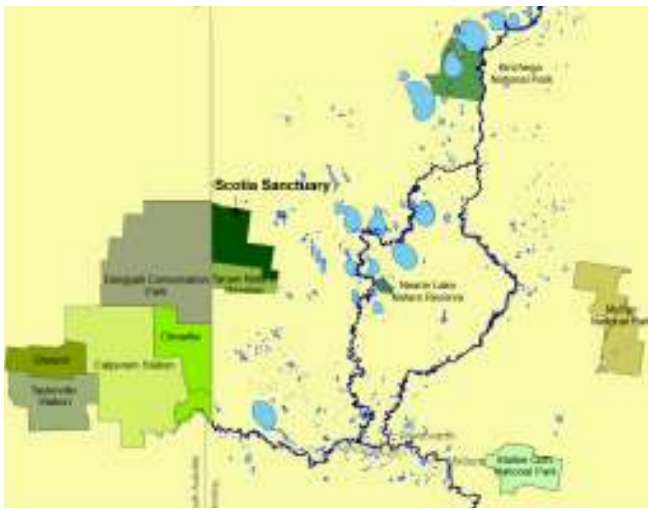
If you are unable to download a copy of the membership form from the website, forward payment and basic details to the above address and I will forward a receipt, together with a membership form for completion and return. New members will also receive a Membership Kit.

Please note that members who have not renewed by January 1 will receive one reminder notice only.

The VMRG website [www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au](http://www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au) is full of information on the work of the VMRG. The Constitution, which includes our Aims, can also be accessed.



Richard and Margaret Alcorn, designers of our database, at our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in March at Geelong



**A Word or Two from Interstate** – a summary of recent Malleefowl activity in SA and NSW, by Peter Stokie, VMRG representative on the NMRT with information supplied by Peter Ewin, DECCW, NSW and Sharon Gillam, DENR, SA.

The National Malleefowl Recovery Team meets every four months or so, and along with major agenda items, receives reports from all of the representative states.

In NSW, there has been an increased interest in carrying out surveys, and several sightings of Malleefowl have been reported. You may need to get out your maps to find some of the small reserves and private property in NSW mentioned in this summary.

- The Lachlan CMA have conducted two aerial surveys in April and December 2009 over unsurveyed areas where conservation management is planned, and undertaken aerial mound to mound surveys at previously established sites at Yathong and Nombinnee Nature Reserves.
- The Western CMA has funded conservation works of 3,000ha on two properties, and the potential for Malleefowl monitoring using the National System, aerial surveying and remote camera surveying is under consideration.
- In the Lower Darling CMA area, Malleefowl monitoring is linked to fox baiting at Mallee Cliffs NP and Tarawi NR by DECCW, and the CMA has several locations on leasehold properties where searches could be conducted with the help of volunteers.
- Malleefowl monitoring using the National System has commenced in Goonoo NP, and a joint camera monitoring program involving Sydney University and DECCW and Central West Livestock Health and Pest Authority is planned.
- There have been targeted surveys at Tollingo NR and Woggoon NR, where several pairs of Malleefowl were sighted.
- Bird watchers have reported sightings of Malleefowl in the Round Hill NR, on the Kidman Highway near Nombinnie NR, and video footage was taken of a Malleefowl on the western boundary of Yathong NR. In South Australia, systematic complexes of monitoring sites are monitored annually, and all of the sites are now entered onto the National Database. The 41 sites are clustered into four main areas in most large remnant vegetation patches managed by DENR, and on some privately operated properties.
- Murraylands (DENR) has 20 sites in 13 Reserves and private properties.

- Murraylands (*managed by Community Land Management*) has 10 sites
- Eyre Peninsula: 5 sites
- Yorke Peninsula: 1 site
- South East: 5 sites

The map opposite (Scotia protected areas) shows the location of Tarawi and Murray Cliffs mentioned. It also shows Scotia where VMRG are going to search in August. This also shows the SA parks and reserves in the area, and there are monitoring sites in all of the SA areas shown. I know that in Danggali and Chowilla, which are included in Murraylands DENR section one or two active mounds were recorded in 2009 from three sites. There have also been a few sightings of Malleefowl in the north section of Mungo NP in the last year or so.

Do you have any pictures of unusual Malleefowl mounds? Or stories about Malleefowl? Or stories about 'Malleefowl people'? Send them to Gil at [giliz@laharum.vic.au](mailto:giliz@laharum.vic.au)



**Effectiveness of Malleefowl management actions** by Jessica Walsh

After spending last year researching the ecology and economics of Malleefowl conservation for my Honours project at the University of Queensland, I have returned to the Malleefowl scene, with

wings flapping ready to take on another six months of research.

I will be looking at how to cost-effectively allocate resources between different management actions for Malleefowl conservation across Australia. This question builds on work from my thesis, which was reported in the last Lowan Behold. My work will be divided into two separate analyses.

The first part will involve quantifying how investment in management actions such as fox baiting and prescribed burning, reduces the threats caused by foxes and fire, and how the Malleefowl population growth rate responds to increasing intensities of these management actions. This is one of the first studies that constructs these 'response curves' using real empirical data, rather than basing them on broad assumptions. This analysis is only possible due to the tremendous amount of data collected by the Malleefowl monitoring volunteers. I will use a modelling approach that allows for the large spatial and temporal variability observed within and between Malleefowl monitoring sites across Australia, increasing the accuracy and practical relevance of the response curves for each management action.

The second part of my research will use a decision support tool, called the conservation resource allocation framework, to prioritise how, where and when management actions should be implemented to maximise Malleefowl conservation. This framework uses the principle of 'return on investment' to determine which management actions achieve the greatest conservation outcome for every dollar spent.

This year, I was able to spread the word about the Malleefowl at a presentation about my research for the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland's (WPSQ) Brisbane Branch meeting in April. I explained the importance of using real data to ensure that management actions are actually having the desired impact on the species of concern. I used the Malleefowl and fox baiting case study to explain that we need to empirically quantify the relationships between the dollars invested in management, the intensity of fox baiting (input), the fox abundance (output) and the Malleefowl population growth rate (outcome) to fully understand the effectiveness of a management action.

My research has also reached the pages of the WPSQ Megapodium Newsletter Winter 2010, the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Annual Report 2009 for receiving a University Student Grant and the UQ BioLinks Newsletter September 2009, hopefully raising the profile of the Malleefowl in areas outside its native distribution. I was lucky to attend the training weekend in Wyperfeld last year, which allowed me to get a valuable perspective on the practical uses of my research, and to finally witness the bird that had been ruling my life for the past year, while meeting amazing people who have dedicated their lives to this special megapode; overall a fantastic experience. I also plan to travel to Scotia Reserve to help conduct the mound searches in August, and I look forward to seeing some of you there.

**Jessica Walsh** is currently a research assistant at the University of Queensland, under the supervision of Kerrie Wilson and Hugh Possingham, and working in collaboration with Joe Benshemesh. This research is funded by the Applied Environmental Design Analysis, a hub of the Commonwealth Environmental Research Facility, the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia and the Ecological Society of Australia. For more information, contact [jessica.walsh@uqconnect.edu.au](mailto:jessica.walsh@uqconnect.edu.au).



Keith & Cynthia Willis



Sharon & Alec Hawtin



Neil Macfarlane



Peter & Ann Stokie present to Joe Benshemesh



Michael Crutchfield & Siobhan Rogan



VMRG 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary memories



Gwyn & Ron Wiseman

## VMRG 10 year Celebrations

by Gil Hopkins

Coinciding with the Reporting Back Meeting we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> year of forming Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (although we recognise there were other interest groups earlier). This allowed VMRG to present some of our stalwart contributors with Recognition

Certificates for their time and dedication.

Michael Crutchfield (Parliamentary Secretary for Environment) and Siobhan Rogan (Parks Victoria) spoke in recognition of the volunteer effort by VMRG and gave some hope for State Government encouragement for our future recovery efforts with Malleefowl. But I guess we need to keep negotiating!



## Serendip Sanctuary visit by Gil Hopkins

VMRG were invited to visit Serendip as part of the Reporting Back weekend in March. It was interesting for the 'bushies' to see wildlife and natural vegetation from the tourist's point of view. It was good to see some different birds up close, but all I could think of was how lucky we are to live in or visit our very own 'sanctuaries' like in Ron's first story in this edition. Join VMRG and get out in the real bush!



Look, there's some kangaroos!

Which one is Skippy?

There's a bird in there, and a potoroo as well! →

And a wetland in the drought! ←

