

Lowan Behold!

Newsletter of

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.

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February 2013

Coming VMRG 2013 events

- Reporting Back meeting March 23-24, Ouyen
- Winter newsletter
- Training w/e Wyperfeld NP October 12-13
- AGM at Wyperfeld weekend
- Monitoring October – January
- Summer newsletter

See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

or contact our Secretary Ross Macfarlane (see above)

Malleefowl heaven (and hell) by Ron Wiseman

If you want to visit Malleefowl heaven drive very slowly along the Patchewollock-Ouyen Road and it is possible to see Malleefowl such as you may never see again. But please drive carefully as there are also birds of all types feeding beside the road including Ring-neck and Grass Parrots, Bronze-wing and Crested Pigeons.

We have had reports of up to 50 Malleefowl seen in the evening feeding along the road side. Gwyn and I had to go and see for ourselves this great event. We travelled to the area on January 27 to see if the reported numbers were correct. To our surprise we counted 50 while going north towards Ouyen and on the return about 8pm we counted 73 by the time we had come through the scrub. The Malleefowl and other birds are feeding on the spilt canola grain from the trucks carting to Ouyen.



Photo by Sally Williams

We also have two motion cameras set up on a mound out in Wathe Flora and Fauna Reserve and have had some good photos of fox predation. On one occasion a fox had taken a chick and within one hour had also taken an egg. The old belief that they do not dig out mounds is wrong as the

photos show the fox digging out the mound on both occasions. From the photos that we have of this mound the fox visited the mound every day and at times was hanging around for up to four hours on some days.



How big is a BIG Malleefowl? by Ralph Patford

I have been an active proponent of the Malleefowl cause for well over a decade now and in that time I have heard a number of stories about oversized Malleefowl. Apparently, and I have yet to be totally convinced, a much larger version, or versions, of our present day Malleefowl were once to be found in eons past. Indeed, they talk about huge Malleefowl mounds still to be seen, some in the Brisbane Ranges not all that far from where I live in Geelong.

Well, I can now truthfully assert that I have seen a giant Malleefowl. In fact, I have seen two! The tallest was about 6m high and the other a mere 3m. And they are there to be seen by anyone who cares to wander into the sleepy (usually) little Mallee town of Patchewollock. Indeed, as you may have already guessed, they are not made of flesh and bone but of steel beams and corrugated iron.

These two eye-catching sculptures were made by the artist Greg Wallace, who operates from The Drover's Hut Gallery in nearby Lascelles. At that time the Mineapre Hotel at Lascelles and the Patchewollock Hotel were run by the same person, a chap I know only by the name of Wally. Wally appeared to be the driving force behind the project to have these two sculptures made and set up on the reserve opposite the Patche Hotel in Patchewollock.

On the Saturday following the VMRG Training Weekend at Wyperfeld, the folks at Patche held a festival – 'Year of the Farmer Celebrations'. Apart from Wendy and me, the VMRG was 'represented' by the Fuller family, the Wisemans, the Lindners and Elizabeth Gosling. Perhaps there were others there in the crowd that I missed!



BIG Malleefowl and chick

The festival was largely musical and starred Pete Denahy and a host of local and far-flung talent. Other activities included a sheep race, a local walking tour, quite a few information stalls and, of course, the 'unveiling' of the two giant Malleefowl by the Mayor of the Shire of Yarriambiack. My guess is that there were close on 400 people in attendance, all of whom were able to indulge in a free sausage sizzle for lunch and a camp-fire meal for dinner. And all it cost was a gold coin donation to Peter McCallum. Pretty amazing, really!

The life-sized imitation Malleefowl mound looked a little out of scale but, as one local commented to me, they would need to bring quite a few semi-trailer loads of mulch to create a mound in scale with the birds. In all likelihood the VMRG will erect one of its Interpretive Signs adjacent to the sculptures, an ideal spot for those entering the northern section of Wyperfeld.



Interpretive signs update by Ralph Patford

For those reading about the Interpretive Signs project for the first time, a little bit of background. VMRG was granted \$26,600 from the Malleefowl Management Committee from the Iluka mining offset funds. This allowed for the design, manufacture and erection of 10 Malleefowl interpretive signs in the Victorian Malleefowl habitat area.

By the time this article is published I am confident that the final draft of the text and graphics will have been approved by all that need to do so and that printing of the panels will be well and truly underway. The shape of the panels and the stands has been finalised and their manufacture has been underway for quite some time.

The next task will be to finalise the 10 sites for the placement of the signs. Approval in principle has already

been granted by Parks Victoria and the relevant local government bodies.

After a fair bit of discussion and feedback a preliminary list of sites has been drawn up, but this list is still to be finalised. The VMRG Committee will discuss this at its February meeting and there may be further opportunity for input at the Reporting Back Meeting on Saturday March 23 in Ouyen.

The list of possible sites, in no particular order, includes:- Ouyen (in the rest area adjacent to the Caravan Park), Cowangie (at the Kow Plains Homestead), Rainbow (at the service station on the northern exit from town), Wyperfeld NP, Hattah NP, Manangatang, Shearer's Quarters (Sunset NP), Pink Lakes, somewhere suitable in the vicinity of the north-east access to Sunset NP, Natimuk, Kiata, and Nhill.

Feel free to forward further suggestions to me at 5 Selma St, Corio 3214, or 03 5275 3019

The final phase will be the erection of the signs and I will be calling for volunteers to help with that task.



Special Chair makes a Dream Come True

*Adapted from a media release by ParksVic
Photos supplied by Bernie Fox*

An all terrain Trailrider chair has helped make a dream come true for Ann Stokie, a member of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group and its secretary for ten years.



Ann really wanted to visit an active Malleefowl mound nest, but having become wheelchair dependent, visiting one in a remote bush location had seemed an impossible dream.

The group contacted Katherine Dyson at Parks Victoria's Halls Gap office who arranged the loan of the special wheelchair for the 2012 training weekend at Wyperfeld National Park. With one person front and back, the Trailrider can be steered over any walkable surface, and the chairs are now available in some parks so that less mobile visitors can also enjoy the sights and sounds of bush walking. Although the bush in Wyperfeld National Park was too dense for the Trailrider team, they found it very easy to transport Ann to an active mound at a National Malleefowl monitoring site in nearby Dahwedarre Bushland Reserve. Ann was also awarded Life Membership of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group at its Annual General Meeting on that weekend.

"I never thought I'd ever see a Malleefowl mound again," said Ann, "It was absolutely wonderful to be able to visit an active mound for the first time in two years, and this Trailrider chair made it possible. It was safe and very comfortable and it really made my dream come true."



Group Member Bernie Fox says he found the chair far better than anything he had imagined. "It was far lighter than envisaged with very easy assembly and the adjustments were endless and catered for every possibility. The instructional DVD for the chair was a great help and set a very positive theme. We also found manoeuvring the chair was simple once we realised that wider than usual turns were required of the front person. All in all it gave us pretty good access to the bush."

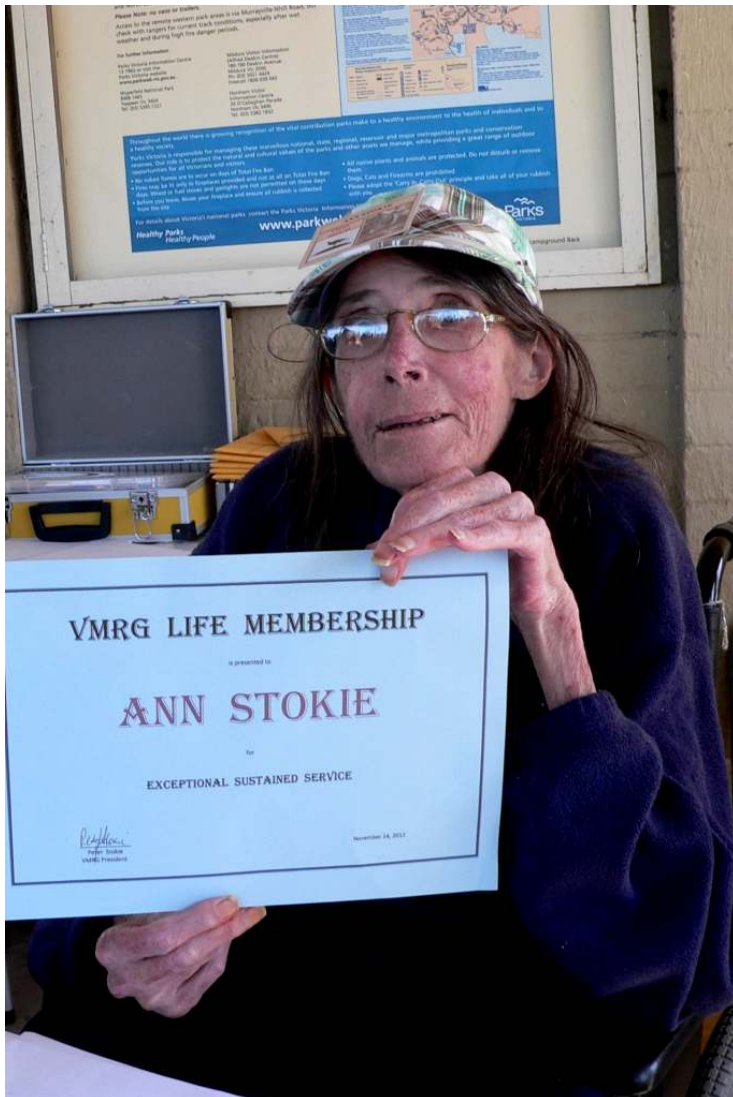
Trailrider chairs are now available for the Grampians, Wilsons Promontory, Cape Conran and Lysterfield Parks.

Ann Stokie, VMRG Life Member by Gil Hopkins

At the AGM at Wyperfeld in October 2012, Ann Stokie was accepted as the first Life Member of VMRG on the nominations of Bernie Fox and Ross Macfarlane for 'Exceptional Sustained Service' to VMRG.

Bernie spoke well of Ann's continuous involvement in VMRG, including a few humorous stories. Peter Stokie had already reported in the President's Report that Ann "has been secretary since the AGM of 2003; has been a wonderful advocate for Malleefowl conservation; a fearless representative and spokesperson for the VMRG on numerous committees; has prepared and presented detailed and successful submissions to two EES panel hearings, namely the Nowingi Toxic Waste Dump and the Iluka Resources Sand Mining project; and chaired a major two year National Heritage Project investigating Malleefowl monitoring and population assessment resulting in the National Malleefowl Monitoring System now in place right across Australia".

Congratulations, and thanks for a job done well!



Malleefowl Management Committee Report – Iluka Malleefowl Offset Fund by Peter Stokie, VMRG representative on the Committee

The Iluka Malleefowl Offset Fund, required by the Commonwealth and State Governments as a condition for the mineral sands mining approval near Ouyen in NW Victoria, and stipulated at \$100,000 per year for seven years, has been operating for nearly three years, and funds of close to \$300,000 have been allocated to programs to date. Programs completed include three separate grants to the National Malleefowl Management Database, funding for the fourth National Malleefowl Forum, funding for Fox scat analysis for 2007-2011, and the VMRG Website Development.

Current programs are: (\$ figures do not include GST)

- Adaptive Management of arid and semi-arid ecosystems – year 2 of funding (total funding over 3 years approx \$90,000)
- National Newsletter – Around the Mounds – year 2 of funding for 5 years (total funding approx \$21,000)
- VMRG Interpretive Signage – (total funding \$26,000)

Seven new programs were approved at the November meeting of the MMC held in Mildura on 15/11/2012

1. **Malleefowl Mound Searches – Conservation Volunteers** – funded amount \$25,340. Funding will pay for training and employment of CV leaders, and offset costs for local, national and international volunteers to do the searching, and pay the expenses of VMRG instructors to train the CV search leaders
2. **Camera Trap Monitoring – Joe Benshemesh** – funded amount \$16,100. Funding will enable Joe to purchase 30 remote sensing cameras to be placed into a selected site, strategically placed across the site away from mounds to capture Malleefowl, fox and other animal movement in an experimental scientifically-managed project. Outcomes of the camera trapping may provide information on off-mound behaviour of Malleefowl and opportunity to track Malleefowl of all ages and potentially provide data on recruitment.
3. **National Malleefowl Recovery Coordinator – National Malleefowl Recovery Team** – funded for 4 years, \$30,475 in year 1; \$15,000 years 2 & 3 and \$10,000 year 4. The grant will partially fund the employment of a National Coordinator to assist in the implementation of actions that support the objectives of the National Recovery Team.
4. **Fox Scat Analysis 2011- 2013 - Parks Victoria (Kathryn Schneider)** – funded amount \$20,000. Follow-on from previous years' analysis conducted by Peter Sandell.
5. **National Malleefowl Monitoring Database – Joe Benshemesh** – funded amount \$8,600. Funding will enable further minor adjustments to the database and enable database ecologists from WA, SA, Vic and NSW to hold a one day conference in Adelaide in late February/early March.
6. **VMRG Information Brochures – Peter Stokie** - funded amount \$3,750. Funding will enable the existing brochure to be redeveloped and redesigned by graphic artist, Robyn Adderly, and 5,000 brochures to be printed.
7. **VMRG Interactive Website Development – Ralph Patford** – funded amount \$2,000. Funding will enable an interactive facility for membership and communication improvements to the existing VMRG website.

Do you have any pictures of unusual Malleefowl mounds? Stories about Malleefowl? Or stories about 'Malleefowl people'? Send them to Gil at giliz@activ8.net.au

'Around the Mounds' the Newsletter of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team is available from the VMRG website along with the National database.

President's Report 2012 *Peter Stokie's AGM report condensed from 4 pages by Gil Hopkins*

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group has continued to successfully meet its main objective of monitoring Malleefowl sites in Victoria. The second most important objective of searching of existing and new sites has not been possible this year as funding applications were not successful. There were several highlights during the year, and special mention needs to be made of the Big Desert Track Search and the launch of our revamped website.

Membership continues to be steady at around 99 financial members including 8 junior members and 8 new members who participated in monitoring and track search activities during the year.

More than 70 members monitored 34 sites in the Mallee, Wimmera and North Central regions of Victoria, locating 158 active mounds.

New sites were established this year at Tooan State Park (v38), and Oldfields (v39) north of the Little Desert. Little Desert Lodge Sanctuary (v25) is now included. Three sites where there has been little sign of Malleefowl activity, v10 One Tree Burnt; v17 One Tree Plain and V22 Denning were placed on the five year cycle. VMRG visited 1,151 mounds (99.4%). Search time totalled 942 hours, with an extra 450 hours of travel. Special efforts were required to finish two sites and all monitoring was completed by mid January, the earliest finish on record.

There were few site searches this year. Twelve VMRG members funded by Iluka Resources searched Mallee vegetation in the mine footprint near Bronzewing FFR. Seven mounds were located, and a pair of Malleefowl observed by remote sensor camera working one mound. VMRG aim to collect annual data to assess impact of mining on a small population of Malleefowl.

A detailed submission to attract funds (\$9,000) from the DSE Community for Nature Grant to search several sites was unsuccessful and deemed to be outside the guidelines. So there are few highlights to report. The major highlight was the Big Desert Track Search by the VMRG and Victorian Mobile Landcare Group. 600 kilometres of tracks in the Big Desert and Wyperfeld National Park were searched and highly significant data collected, collated and will be published in draft form.

The 2011/12 meeting was held in Natimuk, partially sponsored by Greening Australia through projects Jess Gardner was leading. Many local residents and farmers attended, and we had a guided tour of Tooan State Park with Doc Sutherland.

Monitors collected feathers to support Taneal Cope in her PhD research, and VMRG granted \$3,520 for final DNA analysis by the State Museum of South Australia. Taneal presented an outstanding report at VMRG Reporting meeting in Natimuk. She is completing her thesis, having returned to New Zealand for the birth of her first child.

There were three editions of the VMRG newsletter, Lowan Behold, a high standard and quality production.

Habitat 141 is an ambitious project to work with communities to conserve, restore and connect habitats for plants and wildlife on a landscape scale from outback to the ocean along the Victorian/South Australian border to Broken Hill. The area covers most of the Malleefowl habitat in Victoria. VMRG are actively supporting the establishment of a Nurcough Corridor project.

The VMRG Fire Sub-Committee led by Ross Macfarlane addressed issues from regional Fire Operations Plans. Detailed submissions were sent to DSE regarding the Mildura, Wimmera and North Central Fire Operations Plans urging caution and reconsideration of many extensive

burns, and requesting detailed pre and post monitoring with results available to VMRG. Mallee and Wimmera Districts met VMRG in person and responded to our submissions. During the year, VMRG was represented at the Royal Society of Victoria Symposium on Fire and Biodiversity, and had letters published in *The Age* and *the WeeklyTimes*. We stressed our concerns that the Government insistence of the annual 5% target planned burns on all public land is inappropriate in the Mallee and Wimmera districts and potentially may lead to the local extinction of Malleefowl.

The database now holds all Australian Malleefowl monitoring data and is fully operational. Data collected by monitors, and entered by the State Coordinator, is now a seamless operation. All VMRG monitors have access to the database through their password, also giving access to maps, reports, etc. We hope monitors will soon be able to print all the documents for monitoring instead of us mailing them.

The VMRG committee obtained a Malleefowl Offset grant to carry out a professional overhaul of the VMRG webpage, managed by Ralph Patford. The revised webpage has a new drop down menu, reorganised categories of information, and a more user-friendly format.

The Iluka Offset funds Committee of Management includes representatives from VMRG, the National Malleefowl Recovery Team, Commonwealth Government, Parks Victoria, DSE and Iluka and meets quarterly to discuss funding proposals, which are reported separately in this newsletter. Adaptive Management of arid and semi-arid landscapes (University of Melbourne ARC linkages grant) was approved in November 2011. The project operates through the University of Melbourne with Iluka Resources and Parks Victoria as financial partners and the VMRG as a non financial partner. A Linkage agreement between all partners was signed on March 8, 2012, and a series of meetings have been held to develop initial plans.

VMRG received only two grants this year, the first to conduct a series of workshops for Indigenous youth on threatened species monitoring. \$8,800 was provided by the Wimmera CMA to work with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council in the Horsham District. VMRG, the Community Projects officer of the Wimmera CMA and the Cultural Heritage Project officer from the Barengi Gadjin Land Council worked together on this project. Three workshops were planned and developed, but the first workshop planned for late May 2012 had to be cancelled at the last moment when most participants were unable to attend. The VMRG is keen to promote the project again if the Barengi Gadjin Land Council wishes to pursue threatened species monitoring as a priority.

The other grant came from Mallee CMA and the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network to reprint the Malleefowl Education Kit. We are still awaiting the guidelines and call for submissions for the Healthy Parks Healthy People Community Grant to support the monitoring program for 2012/13. Generally this grant is announced in June/July each year, and funds our monitoring program. We commenced the monitoring this year without these funds.

Finally, I would like to thank all committee members for their incredible commitment in ensuring all the necessary tasks that arose during the year were carried out to the best of our abilities, and especially to those that take on extra responsibility for projects. It is pleasing to report that the VMRG is, and will remain, a strong organisation as we endeavour to protect Malleefowl and act as advocates for sound and appropriate management strategies to enhance the survival of Malleefowl in Victoria. The committee does not have this task alone, of course, as all members contribute to the success of the VMRG, so I acknowledge and thank all members of the VMRG for all of your efforts during 2011/12.

Monitoring and 2013 plans by Ross Macfarlane

During the spring–summer months, members of VMRG have collected data on numbers of breeding Malleefowl at 40 sites across its range in Victoria — about 1,200 mounds— and recorded data electronically for analysis by Dr Joe Benshemesh. The detailed results are transferred to the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database and will be discussed at the VMRG annual Reporting Back Weekend in Ouyen on March 23-24.

Preliminary data shows the 2012 Malleefowl breeding season has been outstanding, continuing an improving trend since the long-term drought broke in 2010. Some sites in north-western Victoria have reported a 25-30% increase in the numbers of active mounds, despite a very dry winter. Two One Tree Plain sites in Murray Sunset National Park are showing signs of Malleefowl presence for the first time in over a decade, and two active mounds were found in the Denning Channel Reserve. However, significant declines in breeding success were recorded during the 10+ years of drought, so with a warming planet, and signs that the continent may be moving back into a hot, dry period, there is no room for complacency.

VMRG is excited to be holding its annual Reporting Back Weekend in Ouyen on March 23-24. The announcement comes in the wake of extraordinary numbers of Malleefowl sightings in the area, with up to 80 birds being reported feeding along roadsides, which has provoked unprecedented local interest. Attendees will hear about the past season's monitoring results and the Group's plans for winter and summer, including site searches, and the annual Training Weekend at Wyperfeld National Park on October 12-13.

The Reporting Back Meeting will see the release of the Annual Report on Malleefowl Monitoring in Victoria 2012-13. Thereafter, it will be available on the VMRG website with the previous five seasons' reports.

In recent years VMRG members have established monitoring sites in the southern Mallee and the Wimmera, in Broken Bucket Flora and Fauna Reserve (south of the Big Desert,) Mali Dunes (Yanac North,) Little Desert National Park, Tooan State Park and Nurcoung Flora and Fauna Reserve. This region is home to Victoria's oldest Malleefowl reserve, Kiata Sanctuary, where one mound was active for the second successive year, after a 12-year hiatus.

In 2013 VMRG is also linking up with Conservation Volunteers, the Barengi-Gadjin Land Council and Iluka Resources to extend its capability to search new and existing monitoring sites. The research project, Adaptive Management is continuing at the University of Melbourne. Other projects include the erection of Malleefowl informative signage in 10 sites across the Wimmera-Mallee, and the installation of up to 20 motion capture cameras in the Wandown Important Bird Area – part of a research project to monitor Malleefowl, foxes and other wildlife.

Out of control? Burns in Mallee National Parks

by Alec Hawtin, long-term

Malleefowl monitor

Shown with Sharon receiving VMRG Special Recognition Certificates in 2010

Frequent burns threaten the iconic and special species – Malleefowl. They are put under pressure by the amount of escaped burns and out of control extensive wild fire in the Mallee National Parks. The huge areas of extra unscheduled burns (2,300ha in one incident alone) are not included or recognised as part



of the prescribed burning ordered by the chief seat-polishers in the city who do not understand the pressure put on the remaining wildlife. Malleefowl are forced into smaller areas and have to compete with birds already established in their territory, causing conflict and possible deaths among the remaining population.

I'll give you an example of what happens! Sharon and I monitor Malleefowl nesting activity in a 400ha grid in a remote area of Murray-Sunset NP. Part of this grid was burnt in the 1980s and has only just become suitable for some remaining birds to use old nest mounds. It takes years for recovery of the unique Mallee habitat, especially with 12 years of drought. We check 27 nests and the best ever result was 6 active nests in the very wet 2010 season. One particular mound was active in 2011 after waiting unused for 18 years. Previously there was not enough leaf-litter to provide mulch for the birds to use for composting to heat the mound to enable the attending birds to hatch out their chicks.

There are plans to burn near this grid, which contains a lot of old-growth Mallee with lots of hollows for native fauna. This old-growth Mallee is also important for the survival of several recently-established colonies of Black-eared Miners. In this stretch of Mallee we know of 10 Malleefowl mounds and there are sure to be others as well. Why put more pressure on this prime Malleefowl habitat?

In the past, fires have been allowed to burn themselves out without any consideration or attempt to suppress the burning of old-growth Mallee which is so important for the survival of many species.

Repeated burns of the same areas only creates what is referred to as whipstick Mallee because it is never allowed to mature into old-growth Mallee along with its natural understorey so important for wildlife, if they survive the burns.

Why pick the easy option of burning the extensive and remote areas of our Mallee Parks when the idea is to protect towns and public property, people and livestock living in fire-prone parts of developed Victoria, a long way away from the burning areas?

It is also most important that burning should not occur in spring. This critical time is when nature is procreating. Spring burning also kills off any new seeds before they mature, thereby preventing regeneration of the natural bushland, and removing a food supply of surviving wildlife.

Scouts help with monitoring

by Maaïke Johnston

In October 4 scouts from 5th Mildura Scouts, including two VMRG members, joined Mark and Maaïke Johnston on a morning of Malleefowl monitoring. It



was a beautiful, nearly cold, morning and we monitored in the west side of the Colignan grid.

After going through all the safety briefings and procedures we headed to the closest mound to the road, which to our surprise was active! This was a good treat to show the scouts. They helped go through all the data we had to collect and then programmed in the next mound to walk to. Walking through the bush with the GPS was new to them and they loved it.

To our surprise 3 of the 6 mounds visited were active. During the walk we talked about the Malleefowl and its 'lifestyle'. It was great to have a 'new generation' show interest in the work we VMRG volunteers do!

Wyperfeld weekend 2012 by Judy Irvin

Adapted from MMFNInc newsletter, with photos by Gil Hopkins

I attended the 2012 VMRG Training Weekend at Wyperfeld National Park as the new chum of the eight-strong contingent from MMFNInc. Training and official business ran from midday Saturday to midday Sunday. Camping with full catering, 9 main course choices, and only your own plate as dishes is my idea of camping luxury!



Margaret Alcorn explaining organisation of the National database

I was the novice doing the formal training for the first time, whereas the seven others attended to review their techniques, judgement and recording accuracy and generally keep up-to-date, and to catch up with colleagues from around the State. I was impressed with the distances people travelled and their dedication to supporting the monitoring project and Malleefowl protection overall.

When it was highlighted that it is the rigour of exact data collection techniques which enables the data (and therefore the future findings and recommendations) to be respected by the scientific community and government agencies, I could see why the training and continual updating of training is required for everyone. It seems the program is unusual being run by volunteers. It is only when volunteer data collection meets the same standards as qualified/expert researchers that the data can be respected. This puts a good deal of pressure on us to be aware of what we are doing. I was also made aware of the risks involved and the consequence to the whole program if volunteers were seen to be 'unsafe' by poor compliance with risk management.



Introductory session at Wyperfeld

We went out and monitored four nests, one fully monitored and three for quick comment. The one active mound was mounded up very high within a stand of pine with hardly room to squeeze past. My fellow trainees were impressed by the incredible spectacle of the mound, never having seen one before. The Melbourne Uni researchers who will be conducting the Adaptive Management study were all doing the training in our group. It was amazing to hear that most are mathematicians with research experience of marine birds.



Cindy Hauser explaining the Adaptive Management project

I was glad of my introduction last year on a monitoring weekend. I had seen the observations done, walked with a GPS, and knew about definitions of 'crust' and 'lots' and why it is important. I understand now that there are several redundancies built into the observations, that there are indicators of inactivity which help confirm accuracy of reporting and improve the validity of reporting an 'active' mound (which is actually incubating eggs). This is important in a study where there are multiple data collectors, multiple sites, and these are all remote from those entering, processing and reviewing the data.



Monitoring with MobileMappers in Wyperfeld

It was an interesting weekend. It inspired me to look up more information on Malleefowl and what is happening in research. I hope to return to the Training weekend in 2013. It's the food of course!



President Peter Stokie



Secretary Ross Macfarlane



Vice-President Peter Sandell



Treasurer Ralph Patford



VMRG Committee hard at work after the AGM, including Geraldine, Bernie, Ann, and Neil and the executive. Bonnie absent.