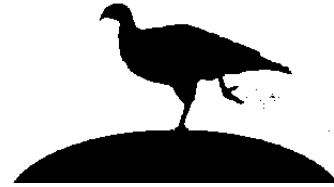


Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc.

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Newsletter August 2007

Coming VMRG 2007 events

September 7-11 -National Forum WA
October 14, 15 -Training weekend, AGM
October onward -Nest monitoring
March 2008 - Reporting back meeting

See www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

National Malleefowl Forum

The Forum will be held from Friday September 7 to 10 at Katanning Leisure Centre Western Australia, with a trip to Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Research Centre and Malleefowl sites at Ongerup on Tuesday September 11.

The Forum will consider progress in the National Recovery Plan and new information about Malleefowl biology and management, with comparisons to other megapodes like Brush Turkey and Scrubfowl. It will discuss how research findings can be applied in each State, how a Nationally consistent monitoring system can provide useful data important for management, and how this collected data can be made available.

Information and bookings through Stephen Davies 08 9572 1074 or

S.Davies@exchange.curtin.edu.au

2007 season?

The early rain and some winter follow up have started Malleefowl working in many areas. But we and they need more rain! Certainly last year was bad in most areas.



Let's hopes this is what we will see again this year!

News from your Committee

- All positions will be declared vacant and nominations voted on at the AGM at Wyperfeld Training weekend, October 14. Nomination forms available from Ann at VMRG address above
- Members will have the opportunity to raise or discuss issues at a short Ordinary meeting following the AGM
- VMRG members attending the National Forum in WA will be subsidised from funds raised, and sponsors will be thanked
- VMRG display at the forum will include a handout, a map of monitoring sites, monitoring photos, poster, banners and Track & Scat Manual
- New VMRG banner has been produced
- Shirts with VMRG logo are available from Ralph at \$35
- We are working on a way of recognising outstanding service
- Ron Wiseman will digitise and archive historical material which should be taken to him at the Training weekend
- Our Newsletter may change its name
- We need a coordinator of re-searching sites
- VMRG will have input into the EES for Iluka sand-mining proposals near Bronzewing
- Envirofund application has been submitted
- Dara Foundation grant application for re-searching was unsuccessful
- PV 2007/8 monitoring grant was successful
- TSN grant application was made
- Training weekend was organized
- Monitors will be asked to nominate for sites
- The National monitoring sequence will be used
- New Manuals will be printed
- Financial statement and accounts were approved
- Updated track & scat manual will be printed
- Input needed this month on District Fire Protection Plans, available on DSE website
- Australia Post has been asked to produce a Malleefowl stamp
- Organisations using VMRG and member's photos and information will be asked to acknowledge these contributions
- 2009 will be VMRG's 10th anniversary
- Positive meetings have been held with horticultural companies near Wandown



Heading out for the search

Paradise found *by Ralph Patford*

This story of a paradise found might lack the intensity and length of John Milton's Paradise Lost but it has a much happier ending. And thankfully, Lucifer, in any of his guises, did not make any unwanted appearances.

On the weekend of May 5 and 6, a whole bunch of us congregated at Hopetoun to establish a monitoring site out at Paradise Flora and Fauna Reserve. There were quite a few of us from VMRG and even more from the Hopetoun and District Pre-School.

The idea was to search a 2 kilometre square of the reserve and to map all Malleefowl mound sites. The reserve is approximately 20 km west of Hopetoun and almost directly south of the Wonga Camp Ground at Wyperfeld. Although there is cleared land between Wyperfeld and Paradise, they are linked by corridors at both the western and eastern ends of the reserve.

Les Solly and Ron Wiseman had made some preliminary skirmishes into the reserve and provided information for Joe Benshemesh to set up the boundaries and search lines with GPS points. Peter had done his usual thorough preparation of equipment and procedures, so all was set up for a good weekend of bush bashing. And the weather turned out to be great!

There were enough of us on the Saturday to be able to establish two lines, each of about 10 walkers. It took 3 to 4 hours for each line to walk the 2 kilometres through to the back of the grid, reposition itself on the next corridor and return to the base line. Consequently, by lunchtime on the Saturday we had about 40% of the search completed. After a delightful and restful bbq lunch, the process was repeated in the afternoon.

Numbers were down on the Sunday, but with only 20% of the grid to be searched the job was wrapped up by lunchtime. Most of us, yours truly included, were very pleased that we did not have to do a second pass after lunch.

Doing a line search is quite demanding as each walker not only needs to be on the lookout for Malleefowl mounds but also needs to watch the spacing to their neighbours on either side and, at the same time, be continually dodging through

unhelpful mallee scrub. Then there are the numerous line stops when mound sightings have to be checked out and recorded, and when the lines themselves have to be tidied up or moved sideways. The volunteers from Hopetoun and District Pre-school were fantastic at doing what was required of them and all the time maintaining a cheery and friendly manner.

The first sighting of a mound by each of the walkers was greeted with loud cheers and everyone eventually had that experience. A lucky few also managed to catch sight of some Malleefowl, an even more noteworthy event.

I am pleased to say that the search probably took longer than was anticipated. Why am I pleased? Why did it take longer? To para-phrase a noted ex-premier of Queensland, well you may ask... We thought an outcome of 10 to 15 mound sightings would be both reasonable and would justify setting up the grid. The final count was 92 mounds, an exceptional number, and puts Paradise up among the highest of the grids we monitor. Les Solly, who had volunteered to go in and stake and tag all the mounds that were found, is probably regretting that now!

In all probability there are almost certainly more mounds to be located. The biggest problem we had in walking the line was keeping on a heading with minimal divergence. This became less of a problem as we converged on the end point but at times we were 30 and 40 metres off the bearing line. What this means, of course, is that there were tracts of ground which were not searched as they should have been. As a case in point, on the Sunday, Les Solly, while on a mission to find a camera that had been dropped the previous day, found a mound that had been missed. Les did, indeed, find the missing camera, a combination of good recall, excellent bushman skills from Les and a huge dose of luck.

All in all, a great weekend. The weather was great, the organisation was great, the volunteers were great, the outcome was great, the VMRG ended up with another site established and the Hopetoun and District Pre-school ended up with a boost to their fundraising!



Searchers in Paradise

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

Nil at Nhill? - no way!



Getting ready in the cold near Broughton's waterhole

We started off on a very cold foggy morning at 8am on July 14 at Nhill SES for a briefing, then drove a long way out into the Little Desert to Broughton's Waterhole, south-east of Kaniva. Nhill SES, ParksVic and VMRG supplied the troops and SES supplied the BBQ tea.

It was an interesting exercise learning to set the GPS on bearings 20 m apart and help others to learn how to read and use the GPS and walk with it to maintain direction. The message seems to be – use it like a compass to find an object to walk toward and keep looking at the sun to check your direction. When we looked back at the tracks we walked as shown on the GPS they were rather curved. There is an art to everything! We found that we couldn't easily walk through thick prickly bush and maintain straight direction. It all helps us get experience and learn from mistakes.

We didn't find many nests (5 in total in 120 hectares) and none had any signs of activity. Bushwalkers say there are two types of bush in Australia – bugger bush and bugger bugger bush. We certainly found the worst thickest deadest bush we have come across so far.

But we all learnt a lot and we made new friends and a definite mark in Nhill. Next day we went on to search at Broken Bucket.



Coming out of the pricklies



Is this Father Christmas hanging up the stocking?

Searching Broken Bucket

On July 15 and 16 VMRG members searched the area around Broken Bucket Reserve in order to set up a monitoring grid in the southern end of the Big Desert. We found a broken (historic) bee hive box and a few old Malleefowl nests, but one of the group did see a malleefowl and we had a good time working together for important data.

The biggest holes were strange sinkholes in the clay sections of the site, but it seemed that the apparently reasonably frequent burning, together with the drought, had produced dry thin vegetation with not so much leaf litter. The Mallee areas were more suitable and there were a few nests to find.

Overall we again learnt a lot about efficient searching and had produced a really good system of maintaining contact while keeping the separation. It was useful to stop every 200 m to check if we needed to catch up or change position for better distribution. Whistles were helpful to tell everyone when to walk and when to stop. Some other people may have found the system tedious but it really worked well. It depends on the thickness of the bush and the experience of the searchers.

Visiting the collection of carcasses of the Big Desert wild dogs on the way back was interesting. Here is another distinct species that little is known about.

We didn't stay at BB Reserve because there were 1000 trail bikes there! Besides, the Bucket has a major hole in it!



Preparing to head off 20m apart along the search line



Really interested searchers found this nest well and truly being prepared for this season with a great litter trail

Nurcong/Nurcoung FFR search

What's in a name? Nurcong has at least two versions of its name! Who cares – it has lots of active Malleefowl nests!

Natimuk Urban Landcare Group (NULCG) together with VMRG and Bird Observers organised searches of Nurcong Fauna and Flora Reserve south of the Little Desert and north of Mount Arapiles on July 26 & 29, and August 9. July 29 was called off due to heavy drizzle that set in all day, and who wants to walk through thick broombush when it's drizzling?

We were searching in the exact area where the three Duff children Isaac 9, Jane 7 and Frank, nearly 4, were "Lost in the Bush" in August 1864, for 9 days without food or water. You may have read about it in your old 'School Reader', together with the hobbyars and Little Dog Dingo! But this was a true story. Incredible to think of, when we baulk at a few hours of walking.

Nurcong is incredibly thick broombush, with many prickly hedge wattles and barbwire bushes. Perhaps that's why we found most mounds with recent activity near the perimeter firebreak or near a track.

We had a very pleasant Thursday, with good food supplied by the Friends of Natimuk Nursing Home (neighbouring farmers), and the rock climbers from NULCG learnt a lot about the Malleefowl in their area. Peter Stokie helped us set up all the transects and after his experience with the previous searches we were pretty well prepared.

The follow-up search on August 9 completed our area. We didn't find many old nests, but in the area searched there were 3 very actively worked nests and we saw and heard a pair of Malleefowl and one on its own.

Searches also have other consequences. At Nurcong two of the searchers were from local DSE, and some were from neighbouring farms and towns. We also met neighbouring landholders on the road and through providing

lunch. It is really important to VMRG and the future of our Malleefowl to involve neighbouring landholders in our program, and help them become part of Malleefowl Recovery.

Nurcong FFR is a really important Malleefowl refuge, separate from but connected to the Little Desert, and is one of the most southern occurrences of our birds. It is really important to be involved with DSE and ParksVic in the management of the Reserves, especially with regard to fire and pest animals, but also in the long-term, for the future learning and appreciation of local landholders and school students.

This is the third major search at Nurcong and has covered the least known area. We know that there are more nests in the Reserve and are hoping for a good breeding season this year.

Natimuk Urban Landcare Group helped with the search in order to raise funds for the Friends of Natimuk Nursing Home.



*Hand to hand to hand
VMRG to Natimuk ULC Group to Friends of NN Home*

Present VMRG Committee Roles

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 Government Organisations, Liaison with Non-Government Organisations, Future Planning, Excursions & Events, National Recovery Team Representative, Web Page Co-ordinator, Technical Advisors, Public Officer

Anything for the Newsletter?

Anything you would like to see included?

Contact Gil on giliz@netconnect.com.au