

# Lowan Behold!

## Newsletter of

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### Coming VMRG 2010 events

- March 19, Wychitella search
- March 27, Reporting-back meeting, then Ten Year Celebration Dinner at Geelong
- March 28, Serendip Sanctuary Tour
- Winter newsletter
- July VMRG Committee meeting, Boort
- Training w/e October

See [www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au](http://www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au)

or contact our Secretary Ann Stokie



into the unburnt parts. Since the fire there have been quite a lot more active mounds in both grids possibly because the Malleefowl that escaped the fire have made the unburnt area their home.

I have been fortunate to have had the use of a movement-activated 'sensor' camera from Richard Ferrier at Birchip. We set it up at a mound just off the baseline of 03 grid in Wathe FFR in mid November 2009 and it has taken possibly a 1000 photos of the Malleefowl working the mound. There is a sequence of photos showing the Malleefowl digging out the mound for egg laying and filling it back in again. We also have photos caused by wind movement, of just the mound, especially in the last few weeks!

There are some photos of just one bird on the mound and of foxes visiting as well. There's also a photo of a chick sitting up there on the mound while the Malleefowl works on the opposite side. It's not easy to see until it's zoomed up on the computer.

There are some interesting photos of what the birds do at times, things that you would not see unless you sat and watched them over a very long period of time.

There has been discussion about the legalities of having the camera set up at a mound but there are no issues about it as ParksVic do not have a protocol for this type of research at the Reserve, but it is a different matter if you are going to set up one in a National Park.



### Sensor camera at Wathe Reserve

from Ron Wiseman with photos from the camera

In October 2009 Les Solly and Claire Roll finished a section of 03 Wathe South West grid that remained unsearched after a search by the Hopetoun Pre-school parents earlier in the year. They found an active mound about 350 metres into the burnt area.

The fire in this part of the grid was in mid December 2007. Most times Malleefowl will only return to burnt areas in 10 to 15 years when there is sufficient litter for them to fill the mound, but in this case the birds have scratched litter from around the dead trees in a radius of 30 to 40 metres. This mound has been active all the time up to our last visit in mid January. When Peter Stokie monitored the eastern half of 03 he also found an active mound within the burnt area, about 100 metres from the edge of the unburnt part of the grid.



The burnt area has regrown very well with plenty of cover and lots of grasses and herbs for the chicks to take cover and feed on until they make it



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](mailto:giliz@laharum.vic.au)



Locals Jonathon Morrison of Netherby and Joseph Morphett of Yanac monitor at Broken Bucket

## Anatomy of a Site Search at Annuello FFR

*Summary of a report by Dr. Joe Benshemesh prepared by Peter Stokie*

The VMRG, members of the Colignan/Nangiloc Kindergarten community, the Kulkyne Way Landcare Group, and Sunraysia TAFE Environment Studies students combined resources to complete a highly successful search of the Annuello site on Saturday May 2, 2009.

What started out as a planned two day search with maybe 15 people grew like topsy during the last few days before the event, and 36 people met at Messenger's mailbox on a fine, cool Saturday morning for a briefing and safety demonstration before heading into the site for an extensive search for known and unknown Malleefowl mounds.

The Annuello site is a large area 2.6km long and 1.5km deep. The baseline of this site was 400 metres into the bush from a track called Angle Track. The object of the exercise was to thoroughly search the existing site and add the extra 400 metres to the site.

With so many people available, we divided the group into three teams of 12, allocated each group three team leaders and a section of the site and simultaneously line-searched in a N-S direction for all existing and new mounds. Armed with maps of the search areas, GPS and Palm units, hand held radios set on different frequencies for each group and loads of enthusiasm, the whole block was completed between 10:30am and 5:00pm in one day. The group covered approximately 600 hectares in the day.

Peter Stokie provided field supervision and data was collected on Cybertracker 3 and processed on excel and GPS-trackmaker.

### Issues arising from the search:

7 records had no GPS locations, 2 were known mounds and 5 were possibly new. Of 5 possible new mounds, these have been checked thoroughly against the GPS tracks of the day and found to be aborted records or false entries

### Re-found mounds:

40 mounds on current list (including n89 found last year), and of these 30 mounds were re-found (including n89). Also re-found was n09 which has been missing since the year 2000

### Missed mounds:

Ten known mounds were missed, comprising 6 that were outside or on the very edge of the search area and 4 within the search area. The 4 within the search area should have been found. Only one of the 10 missed mounds had been recorded as active in the past

### Search Efficiency:

Search efficiency inside search area = 88%  
General search efficiency, counting mounds missed on edge of the search area = 81%

### New mounds:

11 new mounds, excluding re-finding of 07n89. All new mounds were tagged with a flag so they should be easy to confirm. 7 of the 11 new mounds were in the 'new' section between the track and the original baseline of the site as the site was extended during current search. 4 of the 11 new mounds were in the area last searched (by Greencorps) in 1997, increasing the mound count in this area from 32 to 36 known mounds, an increase of 12% in 12 years. These mounds should be thoroughly measured during 2009 monitoring to see how they compare with other mounds.

**Thank You** to Fiona Murdoch for promoting the activity and getting so many people to assist, and for organising and providing lunch

to Ann Stokie for assisting with lunch preparations and looking after the children during the afternoon search

to Greg Currie, Alec Hawtin, Mark Johnston, Phil Murdoch, Neil Macfarlane, Peter Stokie, Barry Waite, & Keith Willis for taking on the role of team leaders.

to WWF Threatened Species Network for providing the funds to cover all the expenses for the search

And a very **big** thank you to all of the searchers



Some of the searchers at Annuello



**Monitoring at Nurcoung** *by Gil Hopkins*

I know that a lot of members who have been monitoring for years have had some of the same experiences, but last year Liz and I watched a large Malleefowl working the buckshot gravel nest for about an hour after we had completed the recording. We had set up for lunch near the nest and Liz noticed him walking off. We had lunch and he returned, then kept nearby while we monitored. The buckshot gravel was so hot it was painful to take the measurements. Because he was so intent on the nest we thought he would return, so we moved off about 15m into the shade and sat quietly, taking photos extremely often.

He returned and continued working, even when we talked to him, sometimes even coming near us on our side of the nest mound. What a magnificent bird!

We started monitoring at 8.30am, but didn't finish till dark about 9.30pm, then drove home. But what a fantastic day! One Malleefowl observed for so long, another on the nest, and 7 active nests out of 22. Anyone do better? But you can have the thick dead drought-stricken broombush!



**Training Weekend 2009** *by Gil*

This year was a bit different with the celebration of 100 years of Wyperfeld National Park on Sunday, so we had to get through our monitoring training a bit more quickly. Members had some experience in the field using Palms and GPS, and also had training in reporting and safety, mostly with exercises.

We also had our major members meeting for the year after the AGM, including reports from Ph D

and Masters students, and from SA monitoring and Monarto Zoo captive breeding. An extremely informative event.



*Help!*



*Show me yours first!*



*VMRG meeting in action!*



*Our new committee at work*



*Taneal & mf genetics*



*Jessica & foxes, with help!*



*Barry Clugston, Hugh Barrett & Mark Mellington (PV) opening the James Barrett Nature Drive at the Centenary celebrations*



*Joe Benshemesh monitoring in 1983 & 1995*

## VMRG Committee *by Ann Stokie*

### The following plans are under consideration:

The purchase (subject to available funding) of a trailer to store equipment for training weekends and site searches

An overhaul and update of the VMRG website.

The scanning and storing of all nest photos from 1996 to 2009

The possibility of assisting the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to establish monitoring sites on their property at Scotia Sanctuary in NSW (subject to suitable funding)

Involvement with the development of Habitat 141 in North West, West and South West Victoria

### The committee has set aside funding for following site searches for autumn, winter and early spring 2009:

The Powerline site west of the Hattah Township

Pheeneys site in Sunset National Park

Broken Bucket site in the southern Big Desert

Nurcounq site south of the Little Desert

Little Desert Track Search (to complete the project started in 2009)

Wychitella near Wedderburn

These searches will involve various local community groups and VMRG members (including Colignan, Wedderburn, Yanac North and Natimuk) the 4WD Mobile Landcare Group and students from the University of Melbourne.

**Search dates will be advertised in the next newsletter and through emails to members.**

## The great Malleefowl-mound

### photo quest *by Ross Macfarlane*

2010 marks VMRG's tenth year as an incorporated body, and my contribution is to make a concerted attempt to track down all the group's monitoring photos that are still out there on film. Gather round kids, for therein lies a tale!

Once upon a time, back in the dim dark past (1999-2002), volunteers in the field took mound photos on little throwaway cameras, which our *Very Good Friends* at Parks Victoria donated to us. In those days before GPS we followed compass lines through the middle of mallee trees to find nests, and we *Faithfully Recorded* our monitoring data on sheets of A5 paper. The data was entered for *Posterity* on the Malleefowl database, but as the photos were only intended as a cross-check on the monitoring data, and as *Money was Tight*, most of the films were never developed.

Now, more than 10 years down the track from when the earliest volunteer photos were taken, we want to track the films down and get them developed, scanned and onto the National Database archives – and the sooner, the better. Undeveloped film won't last forever, and the longer we wait the more they will deteriorate and produce poor quality photos. We now have the technology to turn them into a permanent digital

record along with the more recent photos. This also opens up the possibility of new uses, such as tracking vegetation changes at sites over time, or simply creating a longitudinal visual record of the mounds' changes over time.

A major start was made on the project when I received over 2,000 photos of individual Malleefowl mounds taken by Joe and Paul. The oldest date from the 1995-96 season is Joe's beloved Moonah grid, but there are nearly complete records from the next three seasons. Some came as prints, but most were in the form of developed negatives, so with the purchase of a small film-negative scanner and several weekends of semi-concentrated effort, they've all been digitised.

However there are only a few photos from the 1999 and 2002 monitoring seasons, and none at all from 2000 and 2001. So now *the Hunt is On* to track down the missing cameras from the early years of the VMRG volunteers. If you know of any, or if you have any films or photos in your possession (ideally with the tell-tale photo boards on display), please contact me on 03 9557 5016 or email [rm@rmtheriskmanager.com.au](mailto:rm@rmtheriskmanager.com.au).

*Photos from Nest 1 in Grid 14 (Menzies)*



1998



2003



2008

## New Monitors for season 2009

photos and story from Peter Stokie

VMRG is most fortunate to have a significant number of new monitors this year. In total, 21 new monitors visited 11 sites with current VMRG mentors. Many of the new monitors attended the training weekend, and some of the others have joined the group after the monitoring experience. I use the word "experience" deliberately, as the introduction to monitoring for some could be described as extreme.

*Here are a few stories:* John and Noela Olsen experienced 38 degree heat at Bambill and monitored 25 mounds without seeing an active mound. They are not put off by this experience and they are determined to



monitor again in 2010.

Robyn Rattray-Wood and John Fraser, along with Neil, Ross and Lachlan Macfarlane monitored Bronzewing over three days, with temperatures above 35 degrees each day. By sensibly monitoring in early morning and late afternoon, they survived to report that the discovery of 8 active mounds made it all worth while.



Another group to experience hot conditions was Neal and Anthony Chamings, who monitored Wathe in 34 degree heat, but 5:30am starts and 12:30pm finishes on

two days meant they survived without too much stress. Five active mounds and a most cooperative bird working a mound within 15 metres of them made it all worthwhile. In fact Neal and Anthony returned to the Wathe Reserve two months later to monitor Torpeys with Anthony's uncle.

In another extreme of a totally different nature, a group led by Peter Stokie, with Doug Pocock, David Bould and Brook Shaune Bould from Wychitella, monitored the Korong Vale Block in Wychitella NCR in persistent soaking rain in thick broom bush for more than three hours. The reward was one active mound and



hearing the persistent boom of a Malleefowl as they approached the active mound. An added bonus was that they did not need a shower for a few days after their walk through wet broom-bush!

Ken Harris had more reasonable weather when he monitored with Neil Macfarlane and Barry Wait at Annuello. His experience was the difficulty in getting into the monitoring site.



Annuello is now semi surrounded by almond plantations and the company has taken over some of the public tracks and has padlocked some gates. He was challenged as to why he was on the track leading to the site, and somehow talked his way through to find a relieved Neil and Barry waiting for him. Again the reward was several active mounds.

There are other great stories but they don't involve the extreme events described above. They are best described by the action pictures below, depicting the enthusiasm of our monitors even after 5 or 6 hours tracking through the bush going from one mound to the next!



Doug Pocock, Lynton Schriever and Annette Robertson from Wedderburn, at a mound in the Wedderburn Block at Wychitella NCR.

Graeme Hannig from Walpeup, (a great support to Stan Douglas and Peter Stokie), proudly standing beside a new mound he discovered driving out of the Denning site (and it had Malleefowl prints, the only sign for the day that birds are still in the Denning Bush Reserve)



Bernie Fox invited his neighbour to help him monitor at Broken Bucket. His neighbour's son Joseph Morphett from Yanac and his friend Jonathon Morrison from Netherby took over the monitoring with superb skills and enthusiasm.

Others to monitor for the first time were Martin Whatley who formed a great team with Les Solly in Paradise, and a group of friends of Richard Hughes who monitored South Bore and found active mounds. Suzie Deason (ex PV) and Jade Logie (PV Inglewood) monitored 17 mounds at Skinners Flat (Wychitella NCR) without seeing Malleefowl sign, but Jade was with Rod & Leota Cole when they monitored an active mound in the Wychitella Block.

Congratulations to all 'new' folk who helped with the monitoring effort for 2009. We value your contribution and look forward to your involvement for many years to come.