



AROUND THE MOUNDS

Threatened Species
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The 'new' recovery plan

The updated National Malleefowl Recovery Plan has been completed and should be available from the recovery team and on the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage website soon.



Malleefowl chick (Photo: Joe Benshemesh)

The plan covers the next five years (2006-2010) and is intended to provide a detailed overview of the ecology of Malleefowl and the main conservation issues that face the species. It follows the basic structure of the previous recovery plan and is in two parts: a review of the available knowledge and status quo around the nation, and a series of actions that are recommended to protect the species and to learn more about its threats and how to address them.

While the document has been updated to reflect achievements over the last five years, the actions are essentially the same as in the previous plan with the exception of Action 9 which deals with monitoring - where considerable progress has been made in the past few years. There are now over 100 monitoring sites across Australia and some excellent systems have been developed to facilitate the monitoring.

One change in the new plan is that rather than emphasise the need for more sites, our emphasis is now on analysing the data that has been obtained, refining and standardising the systems, making them available to all and developing an 'adaptive management' framework for the future. This would represent a shift from the monitoring programs fulfilling the crucial but somewhat passive role of

simply observing trends, to a potentially very central role in Malleefowl conservation where monitoring, research and management converge to examine the success of different management practices.

Adaptive management involves 'learning by doing' in a scientifically rigorous way, and in the case of the Malleefowl, monitoring would require a high degree of collaboration between stakeholders, particularly between volunteers who often undertake the monitoring and land management authorities who have management responsibilities. The fruits of this partnership could be enormous in terms of developing more effective management. Although the recovery plan has not been finalised, there is already reason to expect that achievements over the next five years will be greater than in the past.

For example, in WA the PhD studies of Jessica van der Waag and Blair Parsons are expected to be of great relevance to a number of actions in the plan. In Victoria, the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group and Mallee Catchment Management Authority were successful in an Natural Heritage Trust application which is tackling the standardisation, review and analysis of the national monitoring data (the new Action 9).



Malleefowl (Photo: Joe Benshemesh)

Meanwhile, there have already been some expressions of interest from a couple of universities in tackling actions that deal with gene flow and recruitment.

Joe Benshemesh on behalf of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team.

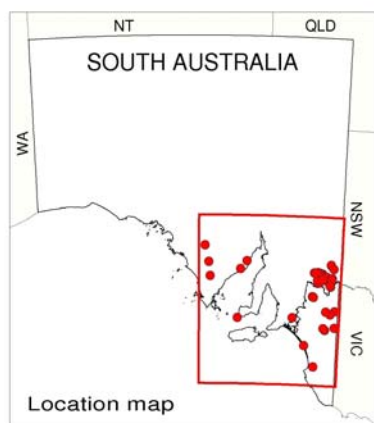
Around the Mounds, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2006



SA Update...

Progress report available for SA region

A progress report has been prepared to summarise the status quo of Malleefowl monitoring in SA. The report includes a brief description of Malleefowl distribution in SA, how the grid system was established, future directions in grid monitoring, grid locations, data transfer and analysis, reporting and sharing information, and an update on each region. Please contact (08) 8222 9459 or email gillam.sharon@saugov.sa.gov.au if you would like a copy of this report. The location of Malleefowl monitoring grids in SA is shown on the following map.



Training Workshop in SA

Two training workshops in SA are planned to take place just before the 2006/07 monitoring season. A workshop is planned for Eyre Peninsula (probably in Lock) and the Riverland region (Berri) from 30th September to 2nd October 2006. Details will be made available closer to the time and invitations are extended to all those interested in Malleefowl mound monitoring.

Monitoring in Innes National Park, Yorke Peninsula

A grid was partly established in 1991 in Innes National Park followed by a history of variable surveying and monitoring effort. Records have been retrieved for the years this grid has been monitored, however there are many discrepancies in the data, with coordinate datum not recorded, details of searches not complete and a number of mounds not staked and/or tagged, etc. This has largely been due to a lack of protocols, training and reporting procedures in SA which we hope to overcome in the future. To resolve some of these problems the Innes Grid was revisited in mid-November 2005 by myself and Graeme Tonkin. Of the twenty-six mounds that we located, six were active.

We now have an accurate record of the mound locations and their status in this grid and all known mounds are now

staked and tagged, with reflectors in trees for easier tracking in the dense vegetation. This sets a solid foundation for future monitoring which should occur on an annual basis.

The establishment of a second grid in the future may be feasible/appropriate. In the past, the Friends of Innes National Park and local National Parks & Wildlife staff have shown an interest in monitoring this grid. Hopefully this enthusiasm can be reignited with a training workshop planned for next season using the new Cybertracker system.

I must mention that during the trip to Innes we were lucky enough to watch two birds working their mounds, which was a treat!

Sharon Gillam
Threatened Fauna Project Officer
SA Department for Environment and Heritage

Murraylands Region - Riverland District CLM Malleefowl Monitoring Report 2005/06

Community Land Management Inc (CLM) is a completely voluntary community environmental organisation. CLM has 15 Malleefowl grids, totaling 140 nests, that it surveys yearly on Calperum and Taylorville Stations, Danggali Conservation Park and Chowilla Regional Reserve. This year, 25 volunteers participated in the malleefowl surveys.



Active mound on the Stony Pinch 1 grid, Feb 2006. (Photo Grant Geyer)

CLM can report we found two active Malleefowl nests on Calperum Station this year (see photo) as opposed to nil in the previous year. CLM Project Managers have started two new grids this year (included in surveys) and completed searching and surveying a grid on Taylorville Station. It was noted by survey teams that nearly all the grids included at least one nest that had been visited by a Malleefowl and some activity had occurred. Due to rain, the survey season started late this year and surveying has only just been completed (late February 2006).

Grant Geyer
Project Manager, Malleefowl Monitoring
Community Land Management Inc.

Murraylands Update – Malleefowl, the Weather and Climate

Monitoring undertaken in association with the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage was recently concluded, with one grid being surveyed as late as mid-February. Ten grids were surveyed in National Parks and Wildlife reserves, one on private land in a Heritage Agreement and seven grids on Gluepot Reserve by a range of volunteers and staff. All grids were surveyed using the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group approach and we are close to having this running as smoothly as possible.

Overall results indicated a slight improvement on last season, but only 17 active mounds were recorded and none of the mounds surveyed on Gluepot were active. Numbers of active mounds have declined considerably since the late 1990s and overall remain at very low levels. Two grids (Ferries McDonald Conservation Park and Bakara Conservation Park) contrast with this result, with six and five active mounds respectively, which accounted for most of the active mounds across the whole region this year. These grids occur in quite different parts of the region, within different landscapes in terms of habitat fragmentation and rainfall, as well as management regimes.

We could speculate that the severe drought in 2002/03 may have caused a high mortality of breeding birds and the subsequent lack of recovery of breeding activity since this event (except at the two grids referred to above). This was observed in an isolated population in central NSW in the mid-90s (Priddel and Wheeler 2003), however, differences between the nature of the sites, the threatening processes at play and threat management, makes direct comparisons between these different areas troublesome.

Another factor needs consideration when interpreting this season's results, and that is the timing of rainfall during 2005. The rain came very late in 2005 and was either below or very much below average across the Murraylands leading up to the season (February to May). When the rain finally came in June, the region recorded above or very much above average rainfall. Research by Priddel and Wheeler (2005) has also shown that the best predictor of clutch size for Malleefowl in central NSW was rainfall between May to December. Overall, during this period of 2005, rainfall across the Murraylands was average or above average, although unfortunately the birds appear to have been unable to capitalise on this. We speculate that the population has, in fact, been reduced by the previous severe drought (as above) or the dry conditions leading up to June may have resulted in the failure of some birds to initiate breeding, continuing the trend of previous years. Much more detailed analysis of data is required to investigate this further. Comparisons with the results of monitoring in other regions will help to tease apart the various possibilities.

It would be nice to get an 'average' or better year in 2006 to see if breeding activity increases. However, this turns my thoughts to climate change as I'm currently reading 'The Weather Makers' by Tim Flannery, and I wonder if we

are already seeing some shift in climate with serious potential impacts on the mallee and its fauna in general. For example, extensive fires in Ngarkat Conservation Park (~250,000ha) over the last 10 years have resulted in more than 80% of the vegetation being less than 20 years of age (post-fire). Whilst Ngarkat is not a major stronghold for Malleefowl, the effects of fire combined with drought has had a dramatic effect on populations of Mallee Emu-wrens and Western Whipbirds, as well as the whole suite of other fauna that occurs in the park. Perhaps this is simply the result of chance? Either way, if you're interested in Malleefowl you can't ignore climate change and if Tim Flannery is right we had better start taking it very seriously!

Jody Gates
SA Department for Environment and Heritage

Malleefowl monitoring on Eyre Peninsula

Malleefowl monitoring on Eyre Peninsula (EP) in 05/06 has been the best monitoring period on record for a number of reasons. Firstly, Kate Thorn, Graeme Tonkin and myself attended the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group meeting in Victoria on the 7th of October 2005. This sparked a huge amount of enthusiasm to be more organised. An important aspect of this has been receiving invaluable help from Sharon Gillam (Department for Environment and Heritage, Adelaide) who has helped organise the existing EP Malleefowl data into a user-friendly format for future use and has collated a statewide report concerning Malleefowl.

We also learnt about using Palm Pilots from the Victorians and we have subsequently purchased two units to be used exclusively on EP for Malleefowl monitoring. Graeme Tonkin was instrumental in organising the Palm Pilots, which have been used to monitor the five Malleefowl grids on EP this year.

Monitoring of the grids this year has been both arduous and enjoyable. By arduous I am referring to weather conditions with two of the trips being hit by thunder and lightning, most notably near Mount Wudinna where Department for Environment and Heritage staff, EP Natural Resource Management staff and a Green Corps team were camping out. However it has also been enjoyable spending time with the many people involved, including a number of volunteers, most notably the very reliable Cowell mob.

This year's monitoring has been very successful: Pinkawillinie Grid was surveyed for new mounds with three previously unknown (inactive) mounds found. The results of mound monitoring are shown below:

<i>Grid Location</i>	<i>No. Active Mounds</i>	
	<i>2005/06</i>	<i>Total Mounds</i>
<i>Munyaroo CP</i>	3	34
<i>Pinkawillinie CP</i>	0	20
<i>Hincks CP</i>	4	34
<i>Cowell HA</i>	5	50
<i>Lock HA</i>	6	54

Some mounds not in grids on EP have also been monitored with the following results:

Waddikee: 14 mounds (4 active)

Yalandra: 1 mound (active)

Pt Neill: 3 mounds (inactive)

Lincoln National Park: 1 mound (inactive)

It is likely that the Pinkawillinie Malleefowl grid has been burnt during a fire in late January 2006. Unfortunately, no active mounds have been found for a number of years and the vegetation has not been burnt for a very long time, so hopefully in 20-30 years this will once again be prime Malleefowl habitat.

Finally, later this year an EP Malleefowl workshop is planned to bring together Malleefowl enthusiasts from around EP. As part of this workshop, representatives from the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group have offered to come across and provide information on what they are up to.

Andrew Freeman
Bush Management Advisor
Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board

Malleefowl monitoring update - South East SA

While there are still plenty of Malleefowl sightings in the South East (SE), we have no detailed information on the status of populations – whether they are stable, increasing or decreasing in distribution and abundance etc. However, concern has been raised in the region recently about the potential impact on mounds from the increasing number of feral deer.

In the latter part of 2005, Vicki Natt accepted a position as the South East's part-time Malleefowl Project Officer. Her main duties are to increase the extent of mound monitoring in the region, coordinate volunteers participating in mound searches and assessments, and to raise the profile of Malleefowl within local communities.

Last October, several representatives from SA attended the training weekend hosted by the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group at Wyperfeld. The method that the Victorians have developed with Joe Benshemesh will be adopted in all future monitoring conducted in the SE to ensure consistency in the quality and quantity of data collected at various sites.

During November, more than ten people participated in a two-day mound survey at Mount Scott Conservation Park. Coordinates delineating transects to be searched were pre-programmed into GPS units and this was found to be an extremely effective and efficient method of conducting mound searches (far better than relying on compass bearings!). A total of 43 mounds were located during the survey, eight of which were considered to be active. Peter Bird and David Peacock (both of the Animal and Pest Plant Control Commission) assisted Vicki's efforts to verify mound locations using a GPS on a grid that was established in the Coorong in 1996. Only one of the 26 mounds that are mapped

was active this season.

Gum Lagoon Conservation Park and Duck Island (part of a joint management partnership between Department for Environment and Heritage and private landowner James Darling) are a stronghold for malleefowl in the SE. James has long-term monitoring records for about eight mounds, many of which have been fenced to protect them from deer. In October, two days were spent searching for additional mounds in one section of the park, during which one active mound was located. During the coming six months, mound surveys will be completed at Gum Lagoon Conservation Park and Mount Scott Conservation Park, the Coorong grid will be re-surveyed for the presence of new mounds and it is envisaged that two or three grids will be established at other localities.

Vicki Natt, Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator
Dan Harley, Threatened Fauna Recovery Officer
SA Department for Environment and Heritage

Vic Update...

Victorian monitoring season completed!

The 2005/6 Victorian monitoring season has been completed and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group volunteers did another splendid job visiting more than 1,000 nests at the 28 monitoring sites. They are still checking the data, but at this stage it seems that at least 99% of nests were satisfactorily visited and recorded, despite some difficult conditions that included people being 'rained out' on more than one occasion and sites needing to be completed later. People got drenched and so did a Palm Pilot, but fortunately those concerned remembered to backup the data routinely so no data was lost (eventually the Palm dried out and was revived!)

There is also good news regarding the trends in Malleefowl breeding numbers. While there were the usual ups and downs at different monitoring sites, the overall trend was positive in the three main regions where we have most sites (North-east, North-west, and Eastern Big Desert) and suggests a continuing recovery following the devastating 2002 drought. This was especially the case in the north-west in the Sunset Country where breeding densities had plummeted over the past decade. Numbers in the Sunset country are still lower than they were in the mid 1990s, but the 2005/06 season was the best since 1996. Let's hope these trends continue!

While the overall trends were positive, there were exceptions and at some sites there was no sign of recovery or numbers actually went down. We suspect the positive trends we recorded are related to better rainfall during the winter of 2005 than in the past few years, but it is harder to explain the drop in breeding numbers in some areas. We are hoping that the analysis of all the monitoring data, which is planned as part of the Multi-regional Malleefowl Project, will shed some light on both positive and negative trends in relation to environmental factors, or at least

inform us of other data that we might be able to collect (such as data on trends in predators, food availability, etc) to better understand trends in the future.

Joe Benshemesh
on behalf of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group

Galloping birds, broken feathers and David Attenborough... can you help explain this?

An amazing event was witnessed by four Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group members whilst monitoring a site (Wathe) near Hopetoun in north west Victoria. On each of the four nights, a hour or so before dusk, a small Malleefowl casually wandered through a small section of the clearing right in front of the tents, often no more than 20 metres in front of the group, feeding and grazing. As darkness approached, the bird moved slowly back into the bush to roost.

For three evenings, about 200 or so metres from the campsite, a much larger bird was observed at the far end of the clearing, grazing under cover at the edge of the trees. This bird was more wary and moved away quickly when approached.

On the fourth night, as dusk was quickly approaching, we noticed the larger bird, (which we now know to be male), at the far end of the clearing moving at a veritable gallop through the open clearing. It soon became obvious that he was heading directly towards the other bird (which we now know to be female). Was this an attack, or a threat, or was he trying to get quickly to the bush on the other side of the clearing?

As the male got closer to the female she was unperturbed and walked slightly towards the approaching male. At the last moment when a crash appeared likely, she turned, crouched down and spread her wings much like a platform. He mounted her in a flash, dismounted to her side equally as rapidly with the entire act of copulation taking barely a few seconds. After a triumphal display and a deep boom, the male moved away as quickly as he had approached and within 20 seconds or so had disappeared into the scrub without even a glance over his shoulder. The female merely shook herself, readjusted her feathers and went on browsing as if nothing had happened and later wandered off to her usual roost. The only sign of the event was a broken feather on her back that stood out from the rest of her feathers.

What was happening here? We had not seen these birds together. In fact, there was no prior indication that either knew the other was there. We know there was an active mound nearby. We had also noted a broken feather on the female's back a few days before which had disappeared by the night in question. Were these birds regular partners or was this an opportunistic mating? The female did not seem disturbed or threatened by the incident, so how rare is an event such as this? And why didn't we have a camera or a video to capture this remarkable occurrence? And where was David Attenborough when we needed him?

We invite your feedback, similar observations or knowledge of any research that might shed light on this event to astokie@iprimus.com.au or r_patford@hotmail.com.

Ann, Ralph, Peter & Wendy
Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group volunteer monitors



Malleefowl (Photo: Joe Benshemesh)

Third time lucky (almost)...

(It's hard to encapsulate the search for Malleefowl over three seasons in 200 words, but here goes...)

Minus one (we missed you, Jane) our intrepid band set forth with light hearts and full of anticipation. South Bore grid in Murray-Sunset National Park is (I think) the closest Victorian grid to the South Australian border. Ironically, one member of our trio now lives in Albury! But the remaining two thirds of the South Australian contingent (my husband Jason and I) remain to wave the South Australian banner, and the drive from Lobethal to Loxton is only a few short hours.

Our first year in Murray-Sunset met with all our expectations – mallee and black oaks, mulla-mulla, twin-leaf, and the heat! Following the lead of generations of desert dwellers before us, we “worked” in the cool of the morning and evening, trusting in the GPS to navigate us from one mound to the next through mallee and *Triodia* (darnit, forgot the gaiters *again*...). Oh, and what did we do during the hottest part of the day? Drove to the Loxton pub for a beer and the cricket, of course!

The second season we were either immune to the heat or it wasn't quite as determined to whack us over the head for being foolhardy enough to venture forth. The pub still featured, particularly as we realised this Malleefowl surveying gig wasn't complicated in South Bore (“no change...no change...cross-sticks displaced...no change...”). Perhaps this was our year? But, alas, “no change”.

And so last year, filled with possibilities, we set off amid reports that a Green Corps team surveying South Bore had found several new mounds and real signs of activity. This was it! The weather had been great and warnings that the *Stipa* was “bad” this year provided the impetus to purchase those gaiters we had forgotten in previous seasons. Packing our wagon literally full to the boot, we set off.

What a change! It was lush. Acres of Stipa, green heads waving in the breeze, Vittadinias dotted in between, a host of yellow twin-leaf flowers and a myriad of other plants unknown to me. We set up our tent, gathered our GPS and trusty Palm Pilot and trekked off to do a few mounds before tea. Excitingly, we found poo! Malleefowl poo! And footprints! And no cross-sticks! In fact, some of the mounds had been disturbed so much the cross-sticks were probably over the border in SA! Malleefowl had finally made an appearance (okay, so we hadn't actually seen one yet...) in South Bore. This was it, this was **OUR** year...

Keeping a careful eye on ever-darkening skies, we decided to call it a day when the odd sprinkle stayed with us for a while. After all, we didn't want to get "rained in" on our first day! A concerned phone call to our friend back in SA confirmed our worst fears. Rain, rain and more rain – with some clear patches. Given the night's efforts, we weren't sure that the Bureau of Meteorology deserved our blind faith.

And so with heavy hearts and searing disappointment, we agreed that while being "rained in" in this beautiful country was no hardship, being stranded was. There was no alternative – we had to pack up, and abandon our surveys. To be frank, I was bitterly disappointed. I had fallen deeply in love with this place. No doubt, the other years I had truly enjoyed - the mallee never disappoints. But this year was different. There was such a change in the place, something magical that had reached in and captured a piece of me.

We had experienced the stark searing heat of January, the tolerable warmth of December and now the gentle coolness of November rain. I couldn't bear to leave and not only because I knew that we *would* see Malleefowl this year. It was the effect of the whole place - from the droplets on the Stipa, to the squabbling of the Babblers, to the gentle breeze across my skin.

I was relieved beyond belief to hear from Peter Sandell that he, together with Peter Teasdale, had completed South Bore – and with great news! But I'll let Peter tell you about that. Suffice to say we will be back, with a 4WD just in case, to let it capture us with its magic all over again...

Karina Mercer - Volunteer
(with Jason Vanlaarhoven and Jane Bradley in absentia)

Postscript to Karina's tale from Peter Sandell: In early February, after subtle prompting from Peter Stokie, Peter Teasdale and I headed out to South Bore to complete the work bravely started by Karina and Jason. We made an early start in order to complete the grid in a day. The weather was fine and mild.

Beginning in the north we worked our way through the grid encountering evidence of activity in the form of excavation and tracks but, alas, no active nests. However, late in the afternoon, with only a few nests to go, we came to a nest which was decidedly active. The first active nest

at South Bore since 1997, it was a sight for sore eyes (and legs!). What the birds were doing in the intervening 10 years we can only guess. We only hope they do it again in 06/07 when Karina, Jason and Jane return.

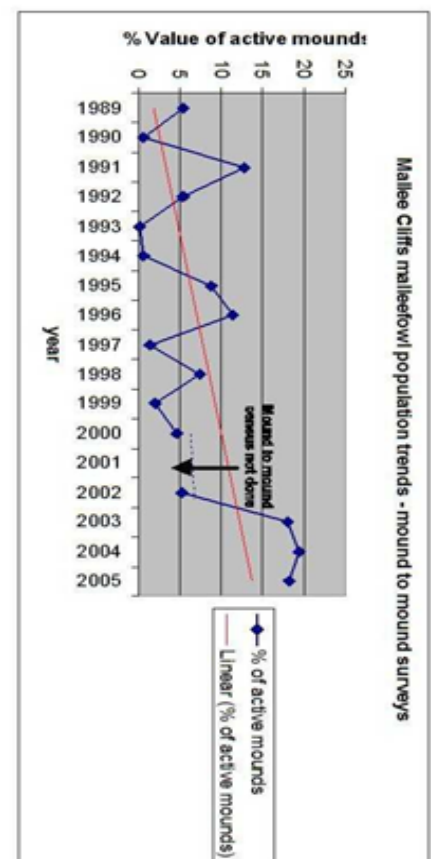
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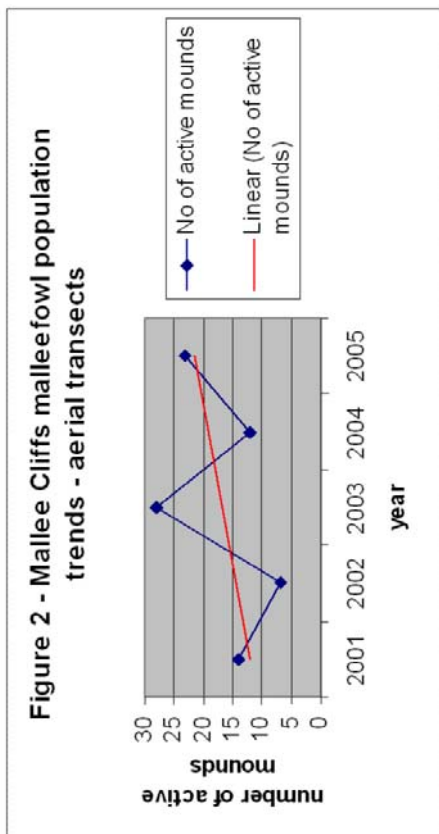
South West NSW Monitoring Update

The 2005 monitoring season has come to an end and although numbers of active mounds were not quite as high as 2004, (a record breeding season for the Lower Darling Area), the figures tend to indicate positive news. The percentage of active nests remains relatively high although recruitment of chicks into the population is unclear. Mallee Cliffs National Park continues to have the highest density of birds within the NSW reserve system.

NSW Fox Threat Abatement Plan (Fox TAP)

As part of the Fox TAP, extensive aerial mound monitoring has been undertaken since 2001. This has involved flying aerial transects covering a total of 10,000ha (100x10km transects) in a number of selected areas. The transects cover both baited and unbaited areas and it is hoped that in the future enough data will be obtained to provide a measure of the effectiveness of fox control in relation to malleefowl breeding success. Aerial flights are also used to check the status of known mounds within Mallee Cliffs National Park and Tarawi Nature Reserve. The use of two different methodologies will, in time, allow for a comparison of the most suitable and cost effective technique to be implemented in the long term.





The two graphs above outline the number of active mounds for two different survey techniques (mound to mound surveys and aerial transect surveys). The graphs show that although different numbers of active mounds have been recorded, the mound activity trend line is relatively consistent between the two methodologies.

Ray Dayman
NSW Department of Environment and Conservation

WA Update...

Community sightings driving Malleefowl science: research in the WA wheatbelt

The Malleefowl is a species that evokes strong feeling amongst the farming communities that share the countryside with it. It is an attractive and iconic species with a way of life that provides great fascination for those who have the privilege to watch the birds in their natural habitat.

In WA, Malleefowl occur through much of the wheatbelt and when present are easy to spot as they often venture out from remnant bushland to feed in paddocks and cross rural roads. Landholders who have Malleefowl on their properties are proud of their presence and regard it as a sign of good environmental health.

The Malleefowl is listed as a threatened species in WA, with the national recovery plan suggesting the species now occupies only 45% of its former range. However, the patterns of decline in time and space of this species are not well understood.

Community groups are leading the way in documenting the current distribution of Malleefowl by collecting records of sightings of Malleefowl across the West Australian wheatbelt, including the locations of individual birds and active and inactive mounds.

These sightings, collected over fifteen years by community organisations such as the Malleefowl Preservation Group, have been combined with existing data from the West Australian Museum, Birds Australia, and the West Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management and now form the basis of a project aimed at understanding the extent and pattern of the decline of Malleefowl and the underlying reasons for this decline.

Blair Parsons, with the support of the Malleefowl Preservation Group, Wildlife Research and Management, and CSIRO, is using records of sightings of Malleefowl to investigate the ecology of the species.

Blair will utilise a mix of new technology (such as geographic information systems and remotely sensed satellite data) and more traditional approaches (landholder surveys and field measurements) to gain further insight into:

- the climatic attributes of the range of Malleefowl in Australia
- patterns in the decline of Malleefowl over time in the West Australian wheatbelt
- the habitat requirements of Malleefowl in the West Australian wheatbelt, and
- the importance of various threats including fire, grazing, and introduced predators.

This project aims to provide landholders and land management agencies with the knowledge and tools needed to make decisions regarding the management of land for nature conservation. By providing them with insights into the ecology of Malleefowl and the impact their actions have on them, they will have the opportunity to modify their practices in an effort to benefit this species.

It is the intent of this project to provide communities with better skills and knowledge to design effective conservation projects at a variety of scales (farm, catchment and region) using a variety of different management options (e.g. habitat reconstruction or protection and fire and predator management).

Funding for this three year project (to be completed by early 2008) has been provided by the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust and CSIRO.

Blair Parsons is a PhD student working with the Malleefowl Preservation Group and Wildlife Research and Management, and is based at CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Floreat.

For more information about this project, contact him on (08) 9333 6451 or email: blair.parsons@csiro.au.



An inactive Malleefowl mound in recently burnt mallee habitat. (Photo: Blair Parsons)

WA Malleefowl Network

The WA Malleefowl Network was re-established in 2003 and is open to any individual or organisation with an interest in malleefowl conservation. The Network currently has representation from Natural Resource Management groups, community groups, research organisations, state agencies and conservation organisations.

A main role of the Network is to coordinate malleefowl conservation activities in line with the WA Malleefowl Strategic Action Plan. A key objective of the Action Plan is to monitor WA's malleefowl populations and develop a standardised, coordinated monitoring program consistent with the national approach.

On the 18th and 19th of January 2006, the WA Malleefowl Network hosted a Malleefowl Monitoring Workshop in Northam, for training in Palm/GPS units, database management and Cybertracker software. The workshop was facilitated by Peter and Anne Stokie of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group. There were 18 participants from various areas of the WA wheatbelt, all with differing levels of Palm Pilot knowledge and experience.

The workshop commenced with updates from WA and Victoria and it was very useful to learn about the various malleefowl activities occurring in each state. Of particular interest for WA, was that the VMRG searches every new grid twice in the first year and once every year after that, and each mound within a grid is always checked during a survey. WA will endeavor to meet this standard, however as community capacity dictates the frequency of grid searches, annual surveys may not be possible for our smaller groups.

The Palm, GPS and Cybertracker training involved a theoretical explanation of equipment, followed by a presentation and practical demonstration. The site visitation at Wongan Hills on the second day allowed participants to practise data collection at nest mounds. It also provided an opportunity for WA and Victoria to compare and discuss various monitoring techniques.

The final session on database management clarified how and where national data is stored, data confidentiality and the importance of forwarding data for analysis. During the discussion, it was suggested the National Recovery Team consider archiving national data with an independent national organisation, such as Birds Australia.

It was a very successful two days and there were some significant outcomes. Not only did the workshop act as leverage towards a coordinated, community-based monitoring program to emulate Victoria, but it also provided an opportunity to discuss the future of our monitoring programs, share information with people from other regions/states and develop a more national approach to malleefowl conservation.

Alice Rawlinson
WWF - Australia

In the interests of the environment, please consider providing your email details to the TSN (SA) so an e-copy of this newsletter can be sent to you in future.

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