



around — THE MOUNDS —

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM AUTUMN 2014 EDITION FIVE

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM

BY SHARON GILLAM, CHAIRPERSON



Extreme summer temperatures and wildfires in the Mallee country, followed by severe rainfall events, at least in SA, have seen the end of another Malleefowl breeding season. While relatively good rainfall was experienced last winter, it was followed by a dry spring in many areas, apparently leading to several abandoned nesting attempts by Malleefowl.

Read on to find out more about the fires in SA and Victoria, and how the breeding season panned out across the States. Many thanks to all the keen volunteers and staff for their efforts this season in setting up gear, training folks, monitoring sites, uploading and validating data into the national database; and all the other little in-between tasks that go into gathering this valuable information.

To bring you up to date on recovery team membership, we welcome two new members to the team: John DeJose, CEO of the MPG in WA, and Gerard Hogan, replacing Andrew Chalklen from the Department of the

Environment in Canberra. Both of these gentlemen bring a wealth of knowledge from their respective backgrounds into the team. Lisa Farnsworth has resigned from her position at the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Mt Gibson Sanctuary, WA, to pursue other options back in the eastern States, and hence has left the team. Although Lisa was only with us for a short time, she made a very important contribution by providing updates on AWC monitoring and Malleefowl recovery activities; and supporting WA volunteers and the monitoring program. We wish Lisa all the best. Long-serving member Peter Ewin also made a quiet exit, taking on a planning role with his Department, and is now based in Albury, NSW. Many thanks to Peter for his support and involvement with recovery activities over the years and firmly putting NSW on the Malleefowl map. Peter was also Deputy Chair and participated in a number of subcommittees. He has kindly offered to remain involved with the 5th Forum preparations. Best wishes to Peter from the team.

On a sad note, we say farewell to Peter Sandell, who passed away on March 18 after a long battle with melanoma. Peter was a long-time supporter of Malleefowl conservation, promoting the management of this species through his career with Parks Victoria, on the recovery team and with the VMRG. Peter diligently chaired the recovery team for seven years before passing the baton to me. I am thankful for the advice and encouragement Peter gave me, as we caught up over a number of enjoyable lunches in my early months as chair. At the October 2013 VMRG training

weekend, I was in Peter's group as he led us out for refresher training at the mounds. I recall that we had a nice chat out in the scrub – a lovely memory to keep. Peter Stokie and Kathryn Schneider have provided a fitting tribute to this quietly spoken, yet determined campaigner for Malleefowl recovery who will not be forgotten. Our sincere thoughts go to Patsy, family and friends.

Inside are our regular articles including the Mallee Post, more recovery team profiles, updates from Tim, our National Coordinator, plus a range of other news – don't forget to check out our new website! - enjoy the read!

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National Malleefowl Recovery Team
Milton Lewis WA, Sharon Gillam SA

NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

BY TIM BURNARD



INNES NP MONITORS-TIM, PARTNER DONNA & MICHAEL GILLAM IN BACKGROUND

In the past six months (since the last edition of this newsletter) I've had the great pleasure of meeting many more volunteers involved in the important task of Malleefowl monitoring. Being relatively new to the world of Malleefowl I have taken the opportunity to get involved with monitoring training with the MPG at Babakin (WA), VMRG at Wyperfeld (Vic) and at Innes, Karte and Gum Lagoon sites in SA. It's been the best Malleefowl introduction a National Coordinator could ask for.

With the breeding (and monitoring) season winding up and validation of all monitoring nearing completion we will soon be able to get a bigger picture of how the season has turned out for Malleefowl. On the face of it, it's not great. The Bureau of Meteorology reports that 2013 was Australia's warmest year since records began in 1910. Maps produced by the Bureau show that temperatures were well above average for the entire Malleefowl range and perhaps more importantly, rainfall was below average for much of the range. The rising temperature may not impact Malleefowl in more temperate regions but it could be serious for birds that live in the more interior of the range where temperatures are already high. Along with increased temperatures we can expect an increase in fire activity. This season saw significant fires in some traditional Malleefowl sites like Bronzewing (Vic) and Billiat/Ngarkat (SA) that will severely impact on Malleefowl.

Now that monitoring is done for the season, I'd like to remind all volunteers

that the outcomes of their monitoring efforts can be seen on the national monitoring database. You can get to the database via our new website www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au. If you still don't have a password to the database, contact your State Coordinator to get access - Joy McGilvray (WA), Sharon Gillam (SA) or Peter Stokie (Vic). My favourite section is 'Sites and Mounds' which shows the monitoring sites across Australia and gives fantastic historical information (including photos) of mound monitoring over the years. There are other sections that detail the data gathered by monitors but I like this one because it gives an excellent overview of each site and mound. I encourage all of our volunteers to take a look and see where all the data goes.

Malleefowl monitoring is probably the most important activity we collectively undertake each year. Not only does it let us know how the species is going but it forms the basis of all future research. The monitoring is all fed into the database and is quite possibly the best dataset of any bird in Australia. Importantly, the data doesn't just sit there looking good; the Adaptive Management Team is using this information as the foundation of knowing just what are the critical threats to our bird. This is thought to be a first in threatened species research in Australia and something all involved can be proud of....especially our magnificent team of volunteer monitors from across Australia.

Anyone wanting to contact Tim Burnard can use email tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au or phone 03 5581 2205

OUR NEW WEBSITE: www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au

The National Malleefowl Recovery Team is excited to announce the birth of our own website. It's a great place to read the latest Malleefowl news from across Australia as well as back copies of 'Around the Mounds'. Many people will also be interested in the 'Library' which is gathering a range of papers and documents including many of the important research papers that have been generated over the years.

You can also access other interesting websites via the 'Important Websites' page. These include some fascinating footage of Malleefowl on sites like the 'Lachlan CMA YouTube presentation' and 'Malleefowl Conservation Farm'.

The site is also an ideal place to tell any of your own Malleefowl stories...like the story sent in by Roger Pitman from Badja Station WA detailing the successful hatching of chicks from a mound that had just been rebuilt after being mostly washed away in a heavy rain event. If you have any newsy items or papers that you think should be added to the website please forward them to me at Tim.Burnard@birdlife.org.au



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Submissions for Edition Six of Around the Mounds close on **Friday 19/9/14**.

For editing, articles are best sent by email as attached documents with photos also as attachments.

This Newsletter is available in colour at www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au or from the National database at <http://database.malleefowlvictoria.org.au/Start.aspx> (copy/paste this link),

Other important websites for news, information and photos include [www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au](http://malleefowlvictoria.org.au) [www.malleefowl.com.au](http://malleefowl.com.au) [www.malleefowl.net.au](http://malleefowl.net.au)

FIFTH NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL FORUM

DUBBO, 12 – 15 SEPTEMBER 2014

Organisation of the Fifth National Malleefowl Forum is well underway. The date has been set, the venue booked and a call for abstracts has gone out. Several highly regarded speakers have been secured including our own favourite Malleefowl researcher Joe Benshemesh, Australia Museum ornithologist Walter Boles (author of two fascinating papers that delve into the prehistoric Malleefowl past), and Ian Fraser (author of the recently published book *Bird Names* which received a 2013 Whitley Award Commendation for Zoological Resource). More speakers are still in negotiation.

Across Australia there are many people and organisations undertaking a wide variety of activities to save Malleefowl. These activities are undertaken by volunteers, professionals and academics but there is little opportunity for us all to share knowledge and thus learn of improved ways of doing things. The Forum will benefit Malleefowl across Australia by providing an opportunity to share experiences and collectively

improve management for Malleefowl.

Past Forums have been held in Adelaide (1995), Mildura (2004), Katanning WA (2007) and Renmark (2011). This time it is NSW's turn and the forum will be held at the award-winning convention centre at Western Plains Zoo, Dubbo.

Registration is not yet open but if you would like to ensure that you are on the mailing list to be included in all notifications regarding the Forum, please email Tim.Burnard@birdlife.org.au or phone 03 5581 2205. Registration fees have been substantially subsidised through an Iluka Malleefowl Management Fund Grant. At just \$65 for volunteers (\$130 for organisation staff) covering the two



day attendance this represents excellent value for all participants.

The Forum will cover subjects including latest technology, interaction with industry (including mining companies), managing populations and updates on the Monitoring Database and the Adaptive Management Project. Following the formal two days of the Forum (Sat & Sun) we will have a selection of field trips available for participants to take part in.

The National Forum is only held once every three years and it's our big chance for everyone interested in Malleefowl to come together; so make sure you put the date aside!

WHAT HAS MILTON BEEN UP TO IN NSW?

BY TIM BURNARD

An important part of my Malleefowl trip to NSW was to catch up with Milton Lewis at Mount Hope (Central NSW) to see firsthand the work going on to help save Malleefowl. And I have to say, it's pretty inspiring.

Just for starters there's some very impressive fencing work to keep goats out of some good-looking Mallee country. Three privately owned properties are in the process of removing all goats using some lovely fencing (I love a well constructed straight fence that disappears into the horizon). The fence has one-way gates dotted along the perimeter that allow goats to move out of the enclosure but not back in. One property has 50,000ha fenced and all goats removed (well, all but one billy with horns too large to get through the one-way gates), the next property of 40,000ha is in the process of removing all goats and the third property is soon to start the fencing work. In all, about 115,000ha! This is a remarkable achievement in itself but Milton has also managed to obtain PVP orders on all three properties that place permanent protection on the properties by placing a caveat on the property title. Clearly, the land owners involved have made a huge commitment to Malleefowl protection and must be commended for their efforts. Perhaps just as impressive as this major

fencing work is the lengths Milton has gone to record what the impacts of the work will be. Inside the fenced areas there are numerous additional fenced areas (50m by 10m) that will be used to measure other impacts. These smaller sections are fenced to exclude rabbits and Milton has set some vegetation baselines, to measure how all this work will influence vegetation growth. As we know, good vegetation is critical to Malleefowl in supplying the materials needed for mounds to compost and provide heat for eggs to hatch. Milton has gone to the extent of measuring individual plant responses to protection even counting the number of seeds produced on some grass plants. On top of this, there are strong fox control programs in place and soon there will be some fire trials working with local Aboriginal people to produce cool mosaic burns that replicate traditional fire regimes for the region, aimed at increasing acacia and grass growth critical to Malleefowl.

All of this work is supported by local landholders who, with the Invasive Species CRC are running an extensive fox control program. Milton has taken a lead in development of a land-owner group who really care about Malleefowl.

In order to measure all the work within the fenced areas, there are well established control sites nearby where no

work has been undertaken. Malleefowl mound monitoring will be used as the gauge of success. My hope (and expectation) is that over time, all of this work can be included in the National AM project and thus assist our understanding of Malleefowl threats across Australia.

Milton has been employed by the Lachlan CMA on this work for the past 7 years. Just recently CMAs were dismantled in NSW and replaced by Local Land Service Boards. Milton has been working in what is now the Western LLS region. With the change of management from CMA to LLS there has been a change to management boundaries and Milton is now employed in a LLS some distance from his study area. Our immediate challenge is to ensure the work continues and the outcomes build on the Malleefowl literature.*

It was extremely rewarding to meet Lynda Waters, the new Land Services Officer from Cobar and the Erlina Compton, Manager of Strategic Land Services from the Western LLS. Both are Malleefowl lovers and very enthusiastic about keeping the work continuing with guidance from Milton. Milton is adamant that the work will continue!

*Did you know that we have started building a library on the new National website that will one day hold all of the Malleefowl literature?

VALE! PETER SANDELL - MALLEEFOWL CONSERVATIONIST

BY KATHRYN SCHNEIDER (PARKSVIC) AND PETER STOKIE (VRMG)



It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the sudden passing of Peter Sandell on March 18, 2014.

Peter was an outstanding conservationist at multiple levels during his distinguished career and a dedicated champion of Malleefowl research and recovery initiatives and programs.

Peter was well-known through his role as Chairman of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team and his involvement with the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group. He joined the VMRG Committee four years ago and held the position of Vice President for two years.

Peter worked with Parks Victoria and the former Department of Sustainability and Environment for 24 years. During this time Peter was instrumental in the management of the expanded Mallee parks of North

West Victoria, especially following the acquisition of the Murray Sunset National Park which significantly expanded the habitat of Malleefowl. Peter continued to carry out significant research into the effectiveness of the management program for this park, and as a result of the VMRG monitoring of multiple sites that were established in the park, it was evident that Malleefowl breeding numbers increased significantly over time since the early 1990's. Peter carried out detailed research on the impact of foxes upon Malleefowl, especially after the release of Calici virus, and published a number of scientific papers in conjunction with Dr Joe Benshemesh based on his research.

Peter was a great supporter and advocate for the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group in his PV role. He was the Ranger contact person for the group, contributed great advice to the group's safety policies, and provided great support to the volunteer monitors when they were in the field. Peter nominated VMRG for a prestigious PV Kookaburra Award in 2007.

It was a pleasure to have Peter as a volunteer member of the VMRG during his working career, and since his retirement he and Patsy have continued to monitor the Bambil site in the Murray Sunset NP, as they have done for many years.

Peter was a widely respected authority on the Mallee landscape because his views and ideas were always supported by the diligent application of science. He was extremely influential in the restoration of the Mallee parks through improved management practices and he significantly progressed our understanding of landscape-scale fire management in the north-west. He was a strategic thinker and an innovator when it came to environmental management. This coupled with his passion for the natural environment and his focus on a scientific basis for management meant he was a true leader in environmental management in Victoria. His work resulted in substantial accolades including the prestigious Australian Fire Service Medal in the 2010 Queens Birthday honours and ParksVictoria's Outstanding Achievement Award in 2008 for his environmental works in the Mallee.

It has been a significant blow to lose such a colleague, but his memory and wisdom will live on, not least through a number of environmental programs he was instrumental in establishing. He will be greatly missed.

Our thoughts are with his wife Patsy, his family and his many friends and colleagues.

MY LATEST MALLEEFOWL TRIP...NSW

BY TIM BURNARD

I have just returned from another field trip. This one had several objectives; meet the NSW Malleefowl family, help link all monitoring to the National Database, explore opportunities for the upcoming AM project experiments and finally to look at facilities for this years National Forum.

As always, the Malleefowl family have proved to be an inspiration. It doesn't matter where I go in Malleefowl territory, there seems to be a strong fellowship of people dedicated to saving Malleefowl.

In Central NSW I caught up with Recovery Team member Milton Lewis and Threatened Species Officer Marc Irvin as well as a group of landholders involved in a large scale fox control program. At a 7.30am breakfast meeting run by the Invasive Species CRC, a group of about 15 landholders turned up to pick up fox baits and discuss their on-ground works. Landholders in this region manage vast areas compared to what I'm used to down south, often around 100,000ha. So 15 landholders represent a large tract of land being controlled for Malleefowl. Some

would say they are just involved to protect their sheep investments but it was clear that this group is dedicated to the preservation of Malleefowl. They will soon be erecting interpretive signage all about Malleefowl and there's interest in constructing a large Malleefowl to help attract others into the cause. I talk more about the Mount Hope work in an article about Milton on page 3.

In Dubbo I was ably guided by Mel Bannerman. We started with a quick trip to Goonoo State Conservation Area to visit a mound in Ironbark forest...with Glossy Black-Cockatoos calling in the background. Then it was down to business visiting what seemed like a hundred potential venues for the upcoming National Forum. In the end there was little doubt that the Western Plains Zoo was the ideal venue for both the Forum and Dinner. The surrounds are great with a range of local and exotic species (including monkeys) frolicking on islands in the lake just outside the venue doors.

While in Dubbo I also caught up with Tim Hosking, President of the local Field Naturalist group which is exploring the possibilities of getting involved with Malleefowl monitoring and contributing to the National database. This would be a great outcome. With a membership of about 100 and an active on-ground group of maybe 20 people, we are hopeful that the Dubbo Field Nats may become an important member of our national Malleefowl family. I also met with management at the Western LLS to see if we can get all of the past NSW monitoring onto the database and thus fill a large information gap for this important Malleefowl region.

Finally, on the way back south I dropped in to Griffith to meet Parks staff (Laura and Robin) and discuss how monitoring plus volunteers can equal additional information to our database. All in all, I'm very happy with the trip. I met some great people dedicated to helping our Malleefowl who are more than willing to gather information and add this to the database.

NCMPG NEWS, WA

BY GORDON MCNEILL

Grant received

The North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group (NCMPG) has received a grant of \$19,400 from the Gundawa Association which is a new regional conservation association in Western Australia engaging with community organisations to stimulate practical biodiversity and conservation work. The association intends to develop strategic research and landscape conservation within an area which includes parts of the Dalwallinu, Perenjori, Morawa, Mullewa, Yalgoo, Koorda & Mount Marshall Shires. It is funded through the lease agreements and interests of Extension Hill and Mt Gibson Mining. The NCMPG has operated as a local voluntary organisation for 21 years working in the community to locate, monitor and protect Malleefowl activity in the Dalwallinu, Perenjori & lower part of the Yalgoo Shires.

The grant application was developed following the visit of Tim Burnard in September and makes a contribution to the costs of his role as national co-ordinator. Some of the money has also been used for the benefit of the national database in a naming and extraction project completed by Cybertracker in the US and supervised by Joe Benshemesh. Joe reports that the newly developed facility "saves an enormous amount of time for volunteers processing photos, reduces transcription errors and enables the time the photo was taken to be written in the file name."



THE PHOTOS ARE THE SAME MOUND AT 7AM AND 8.30AM ON THE SAME DAY.

The group has also been able to pay Joe for his time in processing data for the NCMPG from before 2006 and up to 2010. This work has involved examining, confirming, registering and validating mounds from the group's records. In 2014 NCMPG will use the grant to purchase hand held mapping devices to support its monitoring program and to conduct a volunteers training weekend in best practice monitoring in August. The NCMPG would like to express its gratitude to the Gundawa Association for the provision of this grant which has enabled it to renew its activity in the region.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the NCMPG and/or volunteering to be trained to undertake monitoring work (requires walking through dense bushland), please contact Gordon McNeill on 0427611645 or gmcneill@bigpond.com for more information.



Mound Monitoring Results 2013-14

NCMPG monitors four sites in the Dalwallinu & Perenjori Shires comprising 143 mounds and works in with Jessica Sackmann of Mt Gibson Iron at their iron ore lease in the south of the Yalgoo Shire where over a hundred mounds are also monitored.

At the four NCMPG sites this season there were nine active mounds which is the average number of active mounds per year over the last six years. During this time we have seen a high of 13 active mounds one year to a low of 3 active mounds another year.

However the activity is not evenly spread over the four sites with one having no active mounds for the last two seasons even though there is significant evidence of Malleefowl being present. Another site has had just one active mound each of the last two years. The other two sites had five & three active mounds respectively this season. At Mt Gibson there were eight active mounds.

YONGERGNOW CENTRE CHICKS HATCHING AGAIN!!

BY JANE CAMPBELL, WA

The Yongergnow Malleefowl Centre in Ongerup is proud to announce our new arrivals for 2014 with three healthy Malleefowl chicks hatched in January.

The centre is already home to one pair of Malleefowl and one lonely female whose companion sadly passed away last year. We hope one of the new chicks will be a male mate for JC.

Just before Christmas the centre received a licence from Department of Parks and Wildlife to collect 6 eggs to incubate. Volunteers Jane Campbell and Sandy Vaux collected the eggs on December 27 from Foster Road north of Ongerup, and Corackerup Nature Reserve to the south east of the town.

Three eggs have successfully hatched, one was not viable and two more show promising signs. The sex of the chicks will be unknown until DNA testing is carried out at 6 weeks. The first two chicks were named Benedict and Maggie after the latest two babies to be born in the district and the third has been named Crackle as he came from Corackerup.

The remaining Malleefowl will be banded and released back into the area they came from with the aim of increasing the numbers of this vulnerable species. The population of Malleefowl in the bush continues to be threatened by loss of habitat and the effects of introduced predators.



NUMBER TWO CHICK MAGGIE IN HER NEW HOME

HABITAT RESTORATION IN THE NORTHERN MURRAY MALLEE, SA

BY CRAIG GILLESPIE, SA MDB DEWNR

Halfway between Swan Reach and Loxton in the South Australian Murray Mallee is a very special place for Malleefowl. Surrounding and adjoining the Bakara Conservation Park is an extensive mosaic of remnant Mallee vegetation, much of which has long been committed to Native Vegetation Heritage Agreements. This land is well managed by its private owners who comprise the Mantung-Maggea Land Management Group. The group is committed to sustainable farming and good custodianship of natural ecosystems and manage their land with a landscape-scale approach. Assisted by Heritage Agreement grants, many landholders bait foxes in autumn as well as spring realising the dual benefit of increased lambing rates and protection of their resident Malleefowl.

The presence and activity of these Malleefowl in fact seems to be as much a bragging right within the group as any aspect of farm productivity. The landholders know exactly how many nest mounds are on their property, which ones are active and where the birds are breeding each year. Many of these mounds are also monitored using digital surveillance cameras.

The local landscape also benefits from extensive and sustained rabbit control by the Land Management Group in concert with the Murray Mallee Local Action Planning Association and Natural Resources SAMDB. This integrated cross-tenure land management makes for an important asset for biodiversity conservation.

The findings of a Landscape Assessment Framework underscore this importance having identified the deep sand environments common in this area as the landscape scale priority for habitat restoration. This was indicated by the declining trajectory of another group of birds that rely on the patchily dense shrubby understoreys of the *Eucalyptus incrassata* and *E. leptophylla* Mallee habitats that form on these sandy soils. This bird response group includes the Southern Scrub-robin, Shy Heathwren, Purple-gaped Honeyeater and Inland Thornbill and has its local stronghold in the area.

Since 2006 this priority has been addressed via the Woorinen Recovery Project, a landscape restoration

project delivered by the Murray Mallee LAP with funding from the Commonwealth Government and the Native Vegetation Council and scientific guidance from NR SAMDB. Over this time the project has initiated restoration on over 840 hectares of deep sand environments so far. The Mantung-Maggea group has also been heavily involved contributing to site preparation, revegetation, pest animal management and the commitment of key restoration sites on their own land.

A focus for the restoration project has been a crown land parcel locally known as 'Hamilton's Scrub', which is soon expected to be proclaimed as the 'Mantung Conservation Park' and has been the site of much of the on-ground works including innovative approaches to revegetation, dune reconstruction and an experimental field trial designed to determine successful restoration pathways, using optimal combinations of fire, herbivore control and other management interventions.

All stakeholders, not least the local private landholders, recognise the pending Mantung CP as a key component of the recovering landscape being surrounded by Malleefowl populations and contributing greatly to habitat extent and connectivity.

The Woorinen Recovery Project enjoys plenty of on-ground support. There is much work still to be done in the landscape and the field trial, now two years underway is beginning to reveal valuable insight. Funding for future works is as yet unconfirmed but the proclamation of a new Park will acknowledge the great work of the community and reinforce their efforts into the future.

**RESTORATION TRIAL
IN FOREGROUND,
CONTROL BEHIND**



SA MURRAY-DARLING BASIN UPDATE

BY DAVE SETCHELL

The 2013/2014 breeding season marked the tenth year of an ongoing project to implement best practice monitoring of DEWNR-managed Malleefowl grids in the SA Murray-Darling Basin.

A total of 13 grids were monitored this season (411 mounds), with a further 7 grids (86 mounds) monitored by BirdLife Australia volunteers at Gluepot Station, with support provided by DEWNR.

A total of 31 active mounds were recorded, which was well down on the 54 active mounds recorded last season. Only 5 active mounds were recorded north of the Murray River, but this was consistent with last season's tally. A total of 659 hours of volunteer time was contributed to the monitoring effort and DEWNR thank all individuals and groups involved.

The Murraylands Malleefowl monitoring volunteer network also received a welcome injection of new blood this season, with Peter Graff, Michael Dolan and Sporting Shooters SA involved for the first time.

Early winter rains gave us some optimism for a productive breeding season but the remainder of the critical May to September period was extremely dry with above average temperatures. The warm and dry conditions were more pronounced in the northern areas, while the southern areas experienced better conditions and this was reflected in the breeding activity. It was also a bumper season for ambiguous mounds, with a lot of evidence of mounds being worked early in the season then later abandoned without being used to incubate eggs.

We are always looking for volunteers to help with monitoring, particularly with some of the more remote grids in the Murray Mallee area. If you would like to become involved with the Murraylands monitoring program, please contact: Dave Setchell, Monitoring Program Coordinator, Mallee Eco Services Phone: 0428 873 090 Email: dhsetchell@gmail.com

MALLEE FIRES IN MURRAY-DARLING BASIN, SA

BY CHRIS HEDGER, SA MDB DEWNR

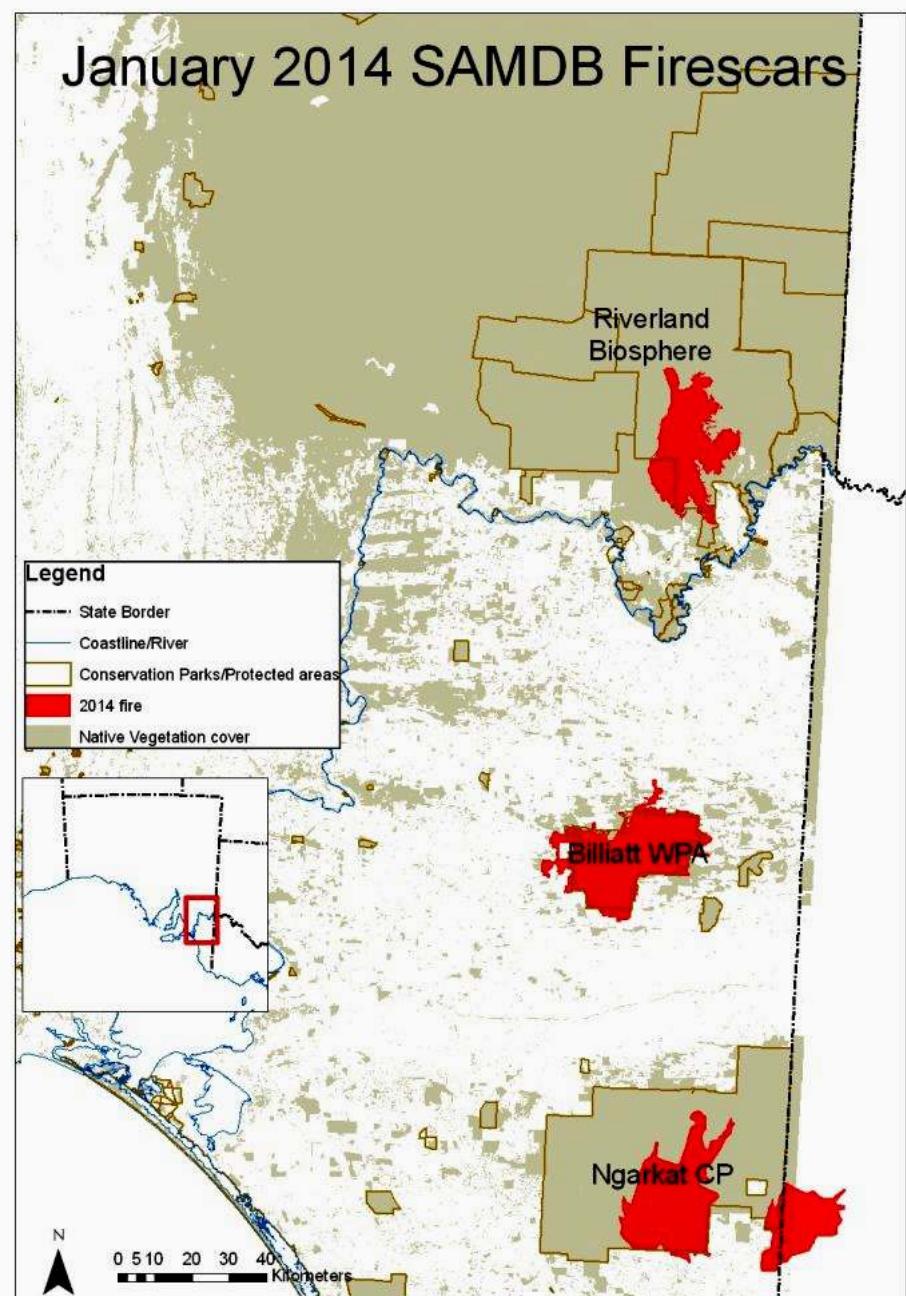


Large landscape scale fires proved to be a theme for much of the semi arid regions of South Australia and Victoria during the 2013-2014 fire season. In the South-Australian Murray-Darling Basin, three concurrent fires in the Riverland Biosphere, Billiatt Wilderness Protection Area and Ngarkat Conservation Park pushed fire authorities to the limit, and collectively burnt over 222,000 hectares of Mallee or heath habitat (see map).

Despite truly honourable efforts by many to halt these fires and reduce loss of priority ecological values, significant environmental losses were felt across the region. The last known populations of Mallee-Emu wren in South Australia were unfortunately burnt, whilst core habitat for the Mallee sub-species of Western Whistler was also lost. Such unfortunate circumstances have left the persistence of these species questionable within the region.

For Malleefowl, the extensive loss of habitat in Billiatt and the Riverland Biosphere will no doubt affect local populations. Fortunately for Billiatt and surrounds, grid surveys indicate unburnt islands and neighbouring habitats around this burn contain some of the most productive and healthiest populations in the State, thus implying that recovery of the species should occur naturally once the mallee has regrown. For the Riverland Biosphere however, where grid surveys indicate much poorer levels of productivity, increased recovery efforts may be needed to support local recovery of Malleefowl.

Despite all these losses, it is important to remember that fire is a natural component of these landscapes, and is needed occasionally to maintain a healthy system. Adding further to this silver lining were the promising above average rainfalls experienced across the fire scars in late summer and early autumn, which will hopefully help facilitate the return of a healthy and



diverse habitat. In places like Billiatt where drought conditions followed the last major fire in 1988, we may see the return of habitat healthier than what we saw before the fire.

ONE FIRE IN NGARKAT CP IS KNOWN AS THE RED BLUFF FFR FIRE IN VICTORIA! SEE MAP ON PAGE 9



SOUTH EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2013 MONITORING SEASON

BY VICKI NATT



Monitoring of the five grids of the South East Region of South Australia for season 2013 included Mount Boothby to the north, two grids in Gum Lagoon Conservation Park, (Coola Coola and Naen Naen), one in Mount Scott Conservation Park and the Coorong grid located in the Mallee of the Southern Coorong. The weather was kind and the bush was in good condition showing good spring growth. In total, 120 mounds were monitored with 20 mounds found to be active, 2 less than last year, but a reasonably productive season.

Fourteen different volunteers and fourteen different DEWNR staff participated in the monitoring on one or more days this season. Eight volunteers and nine staff took part at Mount Boothby over two days. The Gum Lagoon grids took two days with 3 volunteers and 11 staff. Rain hampered progress on the first day and led to some interesting 'dress

codes' on the second day. Mount Scott took a day with 7 volunteers and the Coorong grid took 2 volunteers a day to complete.

The Haywood family joined in the monitoring for the first time at Mount Boothby camping out, participating in the mound monitoring and exploring a number of butterfly species active at the time. Everyone enjoyed showing the kids the natural treasures as we moved from mound to mound.

Then came learning how to use the new technology. Apart from the reliable old back up 'hard copy' data, this year the teams had to learn how to use Cybertracker on a MobileMapper and 4 mobile phones. Graeme Tonkin spent many hours

setting up, testing and presenting them beautifully set up in a plastic case, with shock proof packing and all the accessories set out in separate compartments. The younger team members from the Coorong had little trouble mastering the phones.

I am grateful to the Coorong Tatiara Local Action Plan who approved the grant for Malleefowl monitoring as a biodiversity project, covering four grids for the next five years, allowing me to continue as Project Officer.

Finally, thanks to everyone who helped make this year's monitoring a success. A special thanks to Janet Copping who assisted with all the monitoring and to Graeme Tonkin for his time and patience!



VICTORIAN MONITORING REPORT – 2013/14 SEASON

BY PETER STOKIE, VMRG

During the 2013/14 Malleefowl breeding season, trained volunteer monitors from the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group have visited 40 sites and more than 1,200 mounds and collected data from these sites and mounds according to the National Malleefowl Monitoring procedures.

A few statistics help us understand the incredible achievements of the Victorian members of the large national Malleefowl community

- There were 76 individual monitors involved this year coming from all parts of Victoria, many being community members close to the monitoring sites, but more than half come from city centres of Melbourne, Geelong and other country towns.
- Some people monitor in more than one site, so 76 volunteers is the actual person count – one VMRG volunteer monitored at six sites, several monitored at three sites, and quite a few more monitored at two sites. When all monitors are counted at all sites, the tally is 126 volunteers.

- The total time spent monitoring in the field by all monitors was 988 hours this year
 - The total travel time, including return trips from home and driving around sites was 454 hours
- One of the time-consuming tasks that the VMRG aim to undertake each year is site re-searching (re-surveying). There were no new sites established this year as the VMRG priority was to carry out expansions in sites that had not been fully surveyed from previous years.

We have worked in three sites this year, namely Tooran State Park near Natimuk in the Wimmera, Oldfields (a Trust for Nature property) near Nhill and Broken Bucket Bush Reserve on the south western edge of the Big Desert.

We have now systematically searched about 200 hectares of Tooran using volunteers from the Horsham unemployed group and interested locals from around Natimuk. We had the support of Jody Taberner (CVA and Wimmera CMA), Jess Gardner (Greening Australia) and

Peter Stokie (VMRG) as group leaders. We spent about 5 days undertaking these searches and it is our plan to complete this site during 2014/15. In total there may have been 12 people involved in these searches, many of them on multiple days.

Oldfields was led by CVA using volunteers from overseas and Victoria, (about 15 in total) over two days and up to 8 new mounds were found. There is still about one third of this site to be searched

Broken Bucket is a big site (approx. 600 hectares) and is now fully searched. The search was led by CVA over 4 or 5 days using overseas and Victorian volunteers, and maybe 10 or 12 extra mounds were added to the site.

The Oldfields and Broken Bucket searches were funded by a grant from the Malleefowl Offset funds from Iluka Resources. Part of these funds was used to provide training for CVA leaders which the VMRG conducted at the Little Desert Nature Lodge in May and June in 2013. CVA leaders then led groups at the sites.

MALLEEFOWL AND 2014 VICTORIAN MALLEE BUSHFIRES

BY KATHRYN SCHNEIDER, PARKSVICTORIA/DEPI



January 2014 was a period of extreme bushfires in the Victorian Mallee. Lightning ignited 18 bushfires in the Mallee Parks on the evening of Tuesday January 14, with another two bushfires ignited by more lightning on Wednesday.

These conditions resulted in six significant bushfires in the Mallee Parks:

- Murray-Sunset National Park, Rocket Lake 1,214 ha
- Murray-Sunset National Park, Danyo Reference Area 4,668ha
- Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserve (FFR) 14,102 hectares
- Big Desert Wilderness Park/Red Bluff FFR 29,896 ha
- Paradise FFR 4,430 ha
- Wyperfeld NP, Lake Albacutya Wirrengren Plains 56,543 ha

There have been larger fires in the Mallee before but these fires were the most complex and difficult for fire agencies to manage due to number of ignitions and the fact some were in remote locations and difficult to get to, while others were close to communities. Each had its own challenges and threats with DEPI, CFA and PV fire fighters working around the clock to contain them.

Aircraft and ground crews were immediately dispatched to bushfires on the Tuesday evening. High fire intensity caused dramatic fire-driven weather, with fire running in directions other than the prevailing wind. Fire behaviour was extreme with flame heights of 7-10 metres and rates of spread in excess of one kilometre an hour. Fires were spotting 200 metres ahead. For safety reasons, aircraft were grounded at dusk when visibility diminished, however overnight ground crews were tasked with building containment lines from the fires' points of origin around the fire perimeters.

The fire at Bronzewing on the Wednesday afternoon was immediately treated as a priority considering the upcoming weather conditions and the fact that it is a medium-sized reserve surrounded by farmland. The risk of bushfire impacting private property was a prime consideration as were the ecological values within the Reserve. Six aircraft were immediately dispatched to the Bronzewing bushfire to water-bomb the head of the fire. However, sunset and extreme fire behaviour meant aerial attack could not halt the spread.

Ground and aerial attack continued throughout Wednesday and Thursday ahead of a forecast weather change coming through on Friday that would bring a strong and gusty wind change with it. Ultimately weather conditions before and during the weather change resulted in 95% of Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserve being burnt, mostly at high intensity.

The final all-clear message for all the bushfires was issued on February 12. During the almost month-long campaign, more than 700 people worked on the Mallee fires using a variety of fire fighting vehicles plus aircraft, bulldozers and graders. Fire fighters and support staff came from across the State to assist local agencies.

As the bushfires were brought under control in late January, the management focus turned towards recovery of the communities, infrastructure and the environmental assets affected by the fires. To assist with this, a multi-agency Bushfire Rapid Risk Assessment team (BRRAT) visited the Mallee.

The BRRAT is a multi-disciplinary team that rapidly (in 7 days) identifies, assesses, prioritises and evaluates risks on public land to minimise further threat to life, property, critical infrastructure and the environment following a bushfire. It produces a report that identifies priority risks, provides practical treatment solutions and estimated costs of risk mitigation.

In the case of the Mallee bushfires the BRRAT focused their attention on significant fire impacts in a number of ecologically important areas including: Lake Albacutya and Pine Plains in Wyperfeld National Park as well as the Bronzewing and Red Bluff Flora and Fauna Reserves.

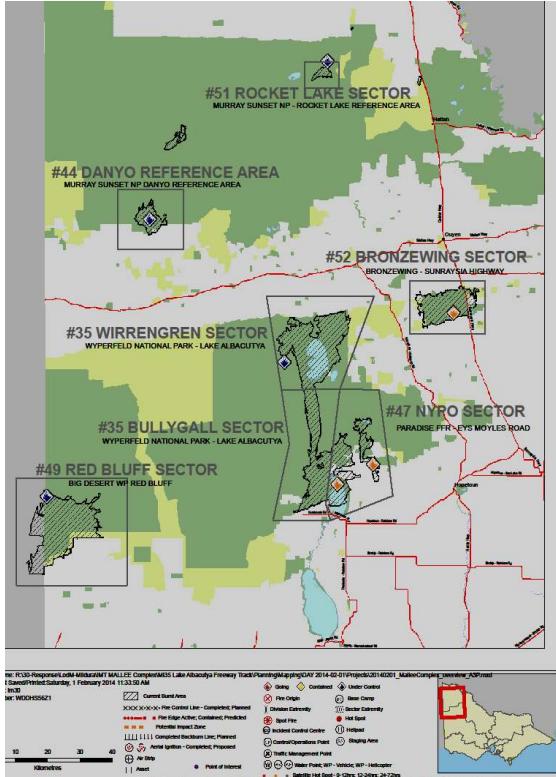
In relation to Bronzewing, the BRRAT team noted it as one of the highest density populations of Malleefowl in Australia and that the Malleefowl monitoring grid within Bronzewing was entirely burnt. They were able to ascertain that 40% of the most suitable Malleefowl habitat (ie Triodia Mallee older

than 30 years post-fire) in that area of Wyperfeld was impacted by high intensity fire. There were also significant impacts to the translocated Black-eared Miner populations and other threatened Mallee bird species within the Reserve.

The report identified the Bronzewing Threatened Bird Community as a key asset at risk and included a number of recommendations that were developed in consultation with representatives from VMRG (including the late Peter Sandell, Keith Willis, Neil Macfarlane, and Myf Macfarlane).

Current recovery activity in Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserve is focused on re-establishing private property fence lines and rehabilitation of mineral earth control lines constructed during fire suppression.

The ecological impacts of the Bronzewing fire are significant and long term outcomes unknown. However, DEPI and Parks Victoria crews have reported seeing some Malleefowl tracks near Bonzewing so we're hopeful that surviving birds have fled to the State Forest or Wyperfeld. Local residents have reported seeing at least one Malleefowl at Bronzewing since the fires.



VICTORIAN MALLEE FIRES 2014



THE MALLEE POST ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES

BY GRAEME TONKIN

Thomas Paine Bellchambers, 1858-1929

"There is the evil that comes from the destruction of valuable links in nature's chain, on which man's very existence largely hangs."

Thomas Paine Bellchambers, 1858-1929

Tom Bellchambers was well known as a naturalist and conservationist and was most notable for his study of and life-long passion for Malleefowl. In 1914 he became the first person to breed Malleefowl in captivity.

Tom was born in England in 1858 and immigrated to Australia in 1874. He had an intense interest in the environment, nurtured by his mother, and in 1905, at the age of 47, he bought some land in the Mount Lofty Ranges and started the Humbug Scrub Wildlife Sanctuary. Tom and his wife Eliza lived on the Sanctuary with their 10 children. Tom died and was buried in the Sanctuary in 1929.

Tom wrote many articles for local papers on the topic of conservation and the native flora and fauna. He also wrote two books, 'Nature: Our Mother' and 'A Nature-Lovers Notebook', both of which are available in PDF format from the National Library of Australia at the following addresses:

'Nature: Our Mother' <http://nla.gov.au/nla.aus-vn2451768>

'A Nature-Lovers Notebook' <http://nla.gov.au/nla.aus-vn4772760>

The following extract is from 'A Nature-Lovers Notebook', published in 1931:

*In the story of Hoohow & Hoola I am making a special plea for the preservation of the wildlife of the Australian bushlands, which generally speaking, is so little valued, and all too swiftly passing. The story is founded on facts gathered over a great number of years, and after the study of many birds, with the idea of presenting a life history of one of the most wonderful forms of the feathered tribe—one of the small group of mound-building birds known as the malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*). This bird is remarkably intelligent—a born philosopher, an engineer in its knowledge of construction, and a chemist in its adaption of the laws that govern fermentation. As a physicist, too, one would almost imagine that the bird understands the principles of heat, radiation, capillarity, evaporation and meteorology, for it appears to be able to regulate the temperature and gauge the thermal conditions of its gigantic mound, which acts the part of an incubator.*

Malleefowl bred at the Humbug Scrub Sanctuary were supplied to aviculturists across the country, including the Le Souef brothers in Melbourne and Sydney. (The Le Souef brothers, William Henry (1856-1923), Ernest Albert (1869-1937) and Albert Sherbourne (1877-1951) were directors of the Melbourne, Sydney and Perth Zoos around that time and were also trained scientists). In 1924, a pair of Malleefowl bred at the Humbug Scrub Sanctuary were presented to His Majesty King George V.

Nature always provides a surplus for legitimate use, far in excess of needs, to ensure continuance of species...unrestrained, man uses up the capital instead of the surplus and this must, by natural law, end in disaster.

In his ideas and beliefs Tom Bellchambers was truly ahead of his time. Thomas Paine Bellchambers was a remarkable man with a remarkable vision.

The Humbug Scrub Wildlife Sanctuary has been kept going by the Bellchambers family, with the assistance of Volunteers. Information from the Humbug Scrub Sanctuary web site at <http://www.humbugscrubsanctuary.org.au>



TOM PAINE BELLCHAMBERS

(1858-1929)

Founder of the Wild Life Sanctuary at Humbug Scrub, South Australia



MALLEE FOWL BRED AT THE HUMBUG SCRUB SANCTUARY AND PRESENTED TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING IN 1924
[Illustrated London News]

ATM HISTORICAL ARTICLES (CONTINUED)

The following article was printed in *The Register*,

Tuesday 17th February 1914

MALLEE FOWL IN CAPTIVITY.

Mr. J. P. Bellchambers, "Nature Lover and Zoological Collector, Humbug Scrub" writes:—"It should prove of interest to bird lovers to learn that the mallee fowl, although so shy and retiring of disposition, has at last been induced to carry to a successful issue the art of mound-building and hatching, while in a state of captivity. I have several pairs of these birds all reared in captivity from eggs of wild parents. I have for some years endeavoured by thought-suggestion to get the birds to take up family duties. At two years old they would hardly entertain the thought; at three years they made a start, but in a very half-hearted way that proved abortive. At four years old they accepted the suggestion; so I gave them all the material required, which they skilfully manipulated, and eventually formed into the orthodox natural incubator—a large loose mound inclosing a hot bed composed of decaying vegetable matter. They were seriously handicapped up till Christmas by excessive moisture, which destroyed many eggs; but during the last two weeks living chicks are issuing from the mound. This is, I believe, the first instance on record of these birds breeding in captivity. The birds are confined in an aviary about 35 feet long by 10 to 15 feet wide."

The West Australian,
Saturday 20 September 1924

DENIZENS OF THE BUSH.

(By "Mo'Poke.")

"Nature: Our Mother."

This is the title of a booklet of nature studies by T. P. Bellchambers, price 1s. I can safely recommend it to those interested in the life of the bush, and I have enjoyed reading the copy the author has sent to me. Wandering up and down the "fringe of settlement," Mr. Bellchambers has learned to love the bush and the folk it shelters. In his introductory chapter he says: "My

chief reason for entering the literary world has been that I might possibly help in some way to a better understanding of man's relation to the 'all mother Dame Nature.' " And whoever reads will assuredly have his understanding in that respect deepened. There are accounts of ramblings here and there, and stories of kangaroos, snakes, birds, and many other bush denizens, with many illustrations. A long article on the life and habits of the mallee fowl has illustrations showing the birds making their nesting-mound, the female laying, the male placing the egg and covering it, the eggs uncovered to show their positions in the egg chamber, a twelve-day chick and an egg, and a last one showing the male replacing material heated by the sun. Finally there is a diagram of a section of a mound, showing construction.

In South Australia.

Giving as his address, "Wild Life Sanctuary. Humbug' Scrub, South Australia," Mr. Bellchambers writes:—"With us this bird (the mallee hen) inhabits the dry mallee lands, with rainfall from 7 to 10 inches. The dingo and the aboriginal were its natural checks in primitive times. It is—or was—one of the most fecund life forms of our bushlands, not, as some scientists have stated in the past, a member of a dying type. Undoubtedly, though this wonderful bird is doomed unless adequate steps are taken for its preservation . . . To show what was possible I took the mallee fowl (*Leipoa ocellata*), one of the shyest of bush denizens, a difficult subject, but a valuable and wonderful type. I secured a pair of birds for experimental work: they are still living and busy with a mound. The female is 15 years old, the male 14. In spite of adverse conditions—the rainfall here is 30in., some time reaching 40—they have built their mound incubator every year since their fourth season. Two seasons proved disastrous to them, owing to heavy sum-

mer rains and low temperatures. My greatest success has been during drought times. I have had as many as 12 chicks from the pair. Many of their descendants have gone to various zoos, private sanctuaries, parks, etc." Mr. Bellchambers says that the hatching temperature required to produce good results is from 86 deg. to 96 deg. and that the earlier eggs laid in August, never hatch. "The highest number of eggs laid" he states has been 29. The birds are strictly monogamic. He says he could stock and keep stocked a large area, providing a surplus of birds—"but our governments have not realised the importance of such a work." Mr. Bellchambers does not make his point quite clear: but if he means to advocate that Government should finance and assist someone to run a mallee-fowl farm, then I am afraid Government never will realise the importance of such a course. Which I hasten to say, is as much a matter for regret to me as it is to him. That Mr. Bellchambers knows something about mallee fowls is particularly borne out by his statement that he has bred these birds for the purpose of supply the requirements of other States, "some of which were, I remember," he remarks "to the orders of the Le Souef brothers, Melbourne and Sydney." The following note should appeal to readers interested in the gnawa:—"In the life history of these birds one thing awaits solution: that is, how the egg becomes reversed in the catch hole of the egg chamber, seeing that the egg is extruded large end first, yet the narrow end downward straight from the act of laying, which I have often watched." In conclusion, the writer says his ambition is to see a Nature Lovers League formed with branches in every State. Many will be opposed to such an organisation: but the time is not far distant when each State will have its own circle of naturalists and these, no doubt, will work hand in hand."

INTERESTING MOUNDS

BY TIM BURNARD

One thing that strikes me as I travel about visiting Malleefowl people is the variety of habitat we find our birds in. Take for example the two mounds I photographed on my recent trip to NSW. On the left is a mound near Mount Hope and the right one is in Goonoo State Forest near Dubbo. As can be seen, very different surrounds. The Mount Hope mound is in sparsely vegetated Mallee, the other in quite dense Ironbark forest.

If you have any interesting mound photos I'd love to see them. Send to tim.burnard@birdlife.org.au



NATIONAL MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY TEAM MEMBERS



MILTON LEWIS, NSW

I started my obsession of studying birds at an early age when I was allowed to accompany my father and friends to the Bush Ranger Creek bird-banding site in the

Brindabella Ranges in the ACT. Although never wanting to admit to having been a twitcher I do have quite a passion for keeping lists and was proud to display my 600 badge as a teenager. Thankfully that side of my birding behaviour declined as I focused on my undergraduate studies at the Australian National University and surprisingly an honours year in insect taxonomy. I then went on to work as a Research Officer for several years, banding the entire population of Superb Fairy-wrens in the National Botanic Gardens.

Never happy with just helping to answer someone else's questions, I was encouraged to accept a PhD scholarship and Associate Lecturer's position at James Cook University. During this period I focused on behavioural and evolutionary ecology and investigated the role of tail length in the mating system of the Golden-

headed Cisticola. I then moved on to work with the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission to research the role of fire in the decline of the Gouldian Finch as well as the ecology of several other northern savannah species. Returning to the south saw me take a position with the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority to work with a declining population of Bush Stone-curlew as well as Glossy Black-cockatoos and for the past five years my beloved Malleefowl.

I have been very lucky in my career over the past 30 years but have had strong support from my family during the many weeks that I have been away from home. I do have a little spare time during which I endeavour to build a family home, breed and show Dalmatians and Border Canaries. I treasure my vegetable garden and even manage to pursue a love of photography.



SHARON GILLAM, SA

I was born and raised in the suburbs of Adelaide. My love of animals and appreciation of the Australian bush grew from a young age, as my folks kept chickens and canaries and I had a range of pets, and from regular outings into the conservation parks around the Adelaide region. I showed an interest in drawing very early on, which eventually translated into three years at Art School, a stint in an artists' cooperative and as a practicing artist. I explored my love of the landscape through various media and developed a passion for travelling, camping and photography whilst gathering inspiration for my artwork. During this time I ventured into office work, working my way through to becoming office manager for a small health organisation, where I worked for eight years.

In 1998 my husband Michael and I had the opportunity to travel and work around Australia, which we did for two years - an

amazing experience. Upon our return to Adelaide, I embarked on a career change through further study. I completed my undergraduate degree in Natural Resource Management at Adelaide Uni, Roseworthy, then BSc Honours at the Adelaide campus under David Paton, on the 'Regeneration of heathland vegetation after fire in Ngarkat Conservation Park, SA'.

I took on a short-term assignment collecting soil and plant samples from Eyre Peninsula, investigating plant responses to fire and fire frequency in remnant Mallee ecosystems, before winning the position of Threatened Fauna Officer with the now Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources, in Adelaide. In October 2005, after three days on the job, I attended the VMRG Malleefowl Monitoring Training Weekend in Wyperfeld NP. There I met Peter and Ann, Joe, Graeme, and a whole range of wonderful and inspiring folks whom I still have the pleasure of working with today.

My position involved, among other activities, implementing key recovery actions for priority threatened fauna species, including Hooded Plovers and Brush-tailed Bettongs, with the primary focus on Malleefowl. I was fortunate enough to come in at a very exciting time when the *Multi Regional National Malleefowl Monitoring, Population Assessment & Conservation Project* was launched, which provided funding to pursue and implement a myriad of recovery initiatives for Malleefowl, across the whole of the bird's range. This project produced the National Monitoring System for Malleefowl and kick-started the National Malleefowl Monitoring

Database – two hugely significant objectives for Malleefowl recovery. At a state-level, recovery initiatives picked up pace with the setup and monitoring of 43 operational Malleefowl grids using the national monitoring system (30 of which are now regularly monitored); State-wide meetings and workshops with a range of stakeholders on Malleefowl conservation; a comprehensive report on the status of Malleefowl monitoring in SA, plus a range of on-ground activities in the regions.

My position with threatened fauna ended at the time of the 3rd National Malleefowl Forum in Katanning in 2007, when I then moved into the role of Biodiversity Status Assessment Officer. A pilot project was established to assess the conservation status and population trend of all of SA's native flora and fauna at a regional scale, to assist in the conservation of threatened species at the regional level. Over a period of (almost) seven years, the assessment process is now successfully completed and I am currently writing up reports for the final two regions. It is hoped that this will then lead to the review of the State listings for threatened species. During this time I continued my involvement with Malleefowl recovery at both the State and National levels. I remained on the National Recovery Team, kept up my part in the State monitoring system, and then volunteered for the role of facilitator of the 4th National Forum. This took place in Remark in July 2011, at which time I then took on the role as Chair of the recovery team. My aim is to continue to drive and support Malleefowl recovery actions to the best of my ability whilst I hold this position, with the collaboration of the recovery team.