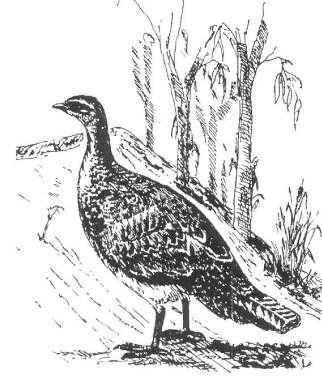




Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – February 2011

Conserving Biodiversity

Malleefowl Monitoring in Wedderburn

Monitoring consists of checking all known mounds against a set of constant national standards and parameters. These parameters consist of size, vegetation, disturbance and evidence of bird presence. This is done on a twelve monthly basis during the breeding season, though some very old mounds are only checked five yearly. Mounds are also photographed at the same time to record visual differences.

Studies of Malleefowl have shown that birds prefer to renovate an old nest site rather than start from scratch (literally!) on a new one. We also know that in an active mound, birds will lay eggs (the number varies with conditions) and most of these hatch. An infra-red camera set on a nest mound at present is demonstrating this, and hopefully will quantify the number of eggs laid and hatched this season.

However a camera will not give us information on the most critical aspect of Malleefowl conservation which is whether the young chicks are surviving to egg laying adulthood. For the CMN conservation efforts to be considered successful we need to see an increase in the active (i.e. egg-laying) population of Malleefowl.

So this is why it is so important to have the monitoring take place. The monitoring effort this year at all known mounds in the Korong Vale, Skinners Flat, Wedderburn and Wychitella Blocks has recorded four pairs of breeding birds, the same as last year. This is a positive sign that Malleefowl are still doing OK in the Nature Conservation Reserve. Whilst one of last year's active mounds in Wychitella block is not active this year it was with great joy that an old mound in Korong Vale block was found to be renovated and active! We do not know what has happened to the pair in Wychitella that bred last year. Maybe one or both birds have deceased by natural causes or predation or possibly they have moved to a new unknown location. It may even be that the birds have decided not to nest this year. This happened to the pair on my block much to my consternation; however they returned the next year and have continued since then. Next year's monitoring may reveal more.

The program also collects bird feathers, which will allow DNA testing to tell us if we have new birds or old birds relocating. Fox scats are also collected for studies into fox diet. The program was designed by scientists and is used Australia wide. After 15 years of national data gathering it is an immense body of observations that can be used for studies into Malleefowl. We now have four or five years of data and photographs specific to Wedderburn entered onto the National Malleefowl Database.

As Wedderburn has a small population of Malleefowl and the most isolated remnant population in Victoria, it is important that more of the area be searched to find any more nest mounds. This, with annual monitoring, will give us an accurate picture of what is happening to Malleefowl in our area.

Article -Doug Pocock

Photograph - malleefowl on an active mound



Monitoring Malleefowl using non-Invasive Cameras

The article above relates information concerning a vital technique employed nationally for the monitoring of malleefowl including the Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve (WNCR) and on private land adjacent to it. The importance of this technique was recognised in a review of WCMN malleefowl policy held last year. One of the results of that review was therefore an application to a funding body for a grant to employ volunteers to carry out line searches for malleefowl mounds in areas of the WNCR which had not been surveyed. The effort to recruit volunteers for line searches will be an ongoing one until this task is completed.

At the review mentioned above it was also recognised that useful information could be obtained by using non - invasive cameras to monitor the behaviour of the birds during the breeding season. A project was set up with the expectations of observing such things as; the laying of eggs, the hatching of chicks, predator activity and general malleefowl behaviour at an active mound. The project is a pilot one and while valuable practical experience in the use of these cameras is being gained we have obtained some exciting results to date. Egg laying and the hatching of chicks have indeed been observed on numerous occasions leading to the formation of a calendar of such events which is of great predictive value. Various animal 'visitors' to the active mound have been caught on film and we have been treated to breeding displays etc by the male bird, as seen in the photographs shown. The observation of these threatened local birds has been the passion of Peter Watts for a number of years now and Peter has spent many hours in the bush organising this project and experimenting with cameras in order to obtain the best results. According to Peter, six hatchings have been recorded and approximately twenty eggs laid to date.

The breeding season is now drawing to a close and it is agreed that it is now time to consider the future of this sort of monitoring program.

Other activities such as monitoring of vegetation around malleefowl mounds which had to stop during the breeding season will re-commence in the coming months, probably around August, as will the above mentioned line searches for undiscovered mounds.



Article - Peter Watts and Michael Moore

Malleefowl (in the Mallee)

The Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve is the home of the most southerly known population of Malleefowl. It is possible to learn a great deal about this threatened species from the information sign at Jacka park rest area in Wedderburn. The Wedderburn Conservation Management Network, in conjunction with the Loddon Shire have recently erected signs on the Wychitella Road, alerting motorists to be aware that Malleefowl have been seen crossing that road, and to take care.

The opportunity to learn more about the Malleefowl and visit different areas was not to be missed by the WCMN "Observers". At Wandown Flora and Fauna reserve (near Boundary Bend) they joined with members of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery group to assist with research field work. This involved collecting Malleefowl feathers from the vicinity of active mounds. The DNA from these feathers will be examined for genetic study of Malleefowl populations. At this time of year Malleefowl chicks are hatching and some were sighted during the fieldwork. Eggshell pieces were also collected for DNA.

The Malleefowl mounds at Wandown are quite different from those seen locally being very sandy, and shaped with great care, displaying the active attention of the birds currently working the mounds. This was an excellent opportunity to gain an increased understanding of this most interesting bird that we are fortunate to still have in small numbers in the local environment.

Article - Wedderburn Conservation Management Network "Observers"

Photo Caption: Malleefowl sign on Wychitella Road



Box Gum Grassy Woodland Project

The three year Box Gum Grassy Woodland project is progressing well, although the wet weather hasn't helped in getting on ground works completed. Many of the outputs have already been met including the creation of a WCMN library, the erection of two malleefowl signs on Wychitella Rd, (with Loddon Shire assistance), Land for Wildlife and Weeds of the Wedderburn Area speaker nights and providing information to the community via websites, newsletters etc.

In terms of on ground works, over 100ha of weed control has occurred, 100ha of linkages created and 100 ha of rabbit control. There is more work that needs to be done and land holders who have shown interest will be contacted shortly to begin works on their properties. Being a three year project, if you are interested in having works done, but can't participate this year, feel free to contact the group to register your interest for future years. Contact information is given at the end of the newsletter.

Article - Wendy Murphy

Group Self Assessment

The Wedderburn CMN is currently undertaking a Group Self Assessment to provide an overview of where each member sees the group in terms of stability, motivation and drive and to provide a comparison to where the group sat two years ago. Each paid up member was sent a form which asked them to rank their opinion of the overall health of the group ranging from 'Trail Blazers' down to 'Just Hanging On'. There was also a group health element which asked respondents to rank different aspects of group health both now and two years ago, to determine where things have improved and where things have fallen away, or need working on. The group sat down at the February meeting to discuss the results which was a very positive exercise providing some great, honest feedback both from members who have been with the group for many years and those who have only recently joined. Results varied greatly among the members, but an overall feeling was that the group was "Rolling Along Smoothly" and had gone ahead from two years ago. Most aspects of the group health element were positive, especially in terms of communication, network development, financial and information resources, but a lot of work needs to happen in terms of attracting

members to take on more administrative roles within the group. From all the results gathered a report will be generated and actions taken to try and work on the lowly ranking elements.

Article – Wendy Murphy

Guest Speaker Program - Land for Wildlife

At our January meeting we were given a talk by Terri Williams of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). Terri is, among other things, associated with the Land for Wildlife program which is organised through DSE in cooperation with the Bird Observers Club of Australia. We were informed that this valuable program which began in 1981 can now claim that there are some 9,000 properties in Victoria taking advantage of the completely free and voluntary scheme. The scheme encourages private landholders to provide habitats for wildlife on their properties. One of the valuable aspects of this resides in the fact that there is a large percentage of native flora and fauna located on private land outwith the reserve system and therefore dependent upon private landholders for their survival. We were informed that if people are interested then upon application the property in question is visited by an expert such as Terri who inspects the property and gives advice as to how it can be, if necessary, brought up to the required standard for registration as a member property. Registration as a member does not in any way alter the legal status of the property. Advice is also available on how the wildlife habitat can be managed and integrated with other uses of the property. Apart from playing a vital role in the survival of species as mentioned above the habitat can play a major role in sustainable agriculture and provide landscape connectivity. Other advantages to the scheme include; newsletters, other publications, field days and contact with like minded individuals. Membership is open to all sorts of properties from small to large. Terri can be contacted through DSE Bendigo.

Note - you get a sign like the one above to hang on the gate.

Article – Michael Moore



The WCMN would appreciate your feedback on the type of topics you would like guest speakers to come and talk about. In the recent past we have had talks from knowledgeable people. If you have a particular interest and would like to suggest a guest speaker please contact Wendy on 0438384053 or

wendy.murphy@dse.vic.gov.au

Wheel Cactus and Raven Research

A research group within DPI is seeking information to assist in the formation of a model in which weeds are spread by birds, particularly ravens. It would be appreciated if you have any information concerning interaction of these birds (or other bird species) with wheel cactus e.g. observations or awareness of such behaviour, that you pass this on to Rodney Jones at:

rodney.jones@dpi.vic.gov.au

What is the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network?

The WCMN is a network including interested individuals, both public and private land managers who come together to promote a shared aim. That shared aim is to work with the community in general to promote profitable, productive and sustainable human enterprises while conserving and indeed enhancing the biodiversity of their area of interest.

For further information concerning any items in this newsletter or other aspects of the WCMN contact

WCMN ranger, Wendy Murphy - 0438384053

WCMN Chairman, Michael Moore – 54943542

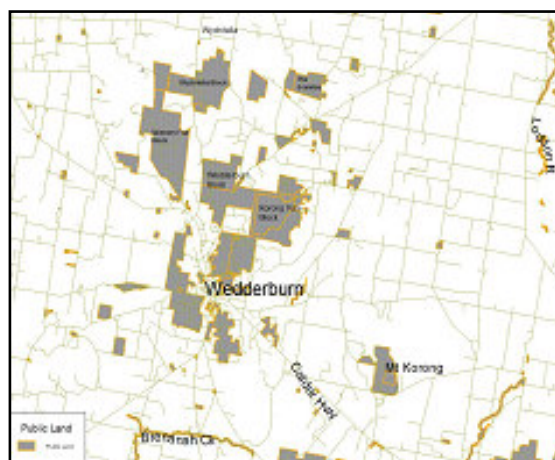
Website addresses

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/january/web/index.html>

<http://wedderburncmnnews.blogspot.com/>

<http://lplnnews.blogspot.com/>

LPLN- Loddon Plains Landcare Network



The WCMN Area of Interest