Did you know?

Malleefowl can lay around 25 eggs in one season and it is estimated that only two percent of the hatchlings will survive.

Background

The Malleefowl is one of three Australian species of mound builders (megapode) – they have large and powerful feet, which they use to build enormous nests (mounds) to incubate their eggs. Fully grown they are about the size of a domestic chicken and they spend most of their time on the ground and roost in the tree tops. They have a greyish head and neck, under the beak is chestnut and the throat and chest are white with a central black stripe. They have a crest that extends from the front of the crown to the nape, and is raised when the bird is alarmed. The upper body is boldly barred and is fringed and streaked grey, white, black and rufous. The lower breast and belly are cream. Although strikingly marked, Malleefowl are particularly well camouflaged in the dappled light of their Mallee habitat. Most easily seen at their nest mound, this species usually quietly walks away from observers and rarely flies. The most frequently heard call is a loud booming made by the male.

Habitat

The Malleefowl is found in semi-arid to arid shrublands and low woodlands, especially those dominated by Mallee and/or acacias. A sandy substrate and abundance of leaf litter are required for breeding. Much of the best habitat for Malleefowl has already been cleared or has been modified for grazing by sheep, cattle, and goats. The species has been shown to be highly sensitive to grazing by sheep, and is probably similarly sensitive to grazing by other introduced herbivores. The effect of fire on Malleefowl is severe, and breeding in burnt areas is usually reduced for at least 30 years. However, the deleterious effect of fire appears to be mitigated if fires burn patchily. The degree of fragmentation of the remaining Malleefowl habitat is of particular concern and presents a major limiting factor to halting and reversing the decline of the species.

Feral animal predation

Predation by the introduced Red Fox is also thought to be limiting the abundance of Malleefowl and in many areas and may be a major cause of decline. Also caught on camera traps set up in the Riverina are large feral pig numbers in and around Malleefowl Habitat. Feral pigs have been caught totally destroying Malleefowl mounds and eggs can be destroyed and also consumed by the feral pigs.

Reviving Riverina’s Malleefowl

The Riverina was once home to the largest known Malleefowl population in NSW. Riverina Local Land Services is working with local landholders and managers to help protect/restore Malleefowl habitat and investigating ways to increase Malleefowl numbers, through the Reviving Riverina’s Malleefowl project.
What work is being done?

The first step was to get a better understanding of how many Malleefowl we have in the Riverina, so that we could begin our monitoring program. To do this Riverina Local Land Services have conducted a LiDAR survey that locates mounds from specialised equipment fitted to an aircraft. This form of aerial survey has been proven to be the most cost effective and accurate way of locating Malleefowl mounds, saving thousands of man hours walking around the bush. The next step is to ground truth all mounds detected by LiDAR - this we have to do by foot and if the terrain gets too hard to walk we can fly a drone over the location to get a better look.

Once we know how many mounds are in each site, and how many are active mounds, we can get accurate numbers of Malleefowl in each site and then through monitoring we can record if Malleefowl numbers are increasing/decreasing or remain stable.

Riverina Local Land Services are working with landholders with the following projects:

- Full feral proof enclosures erected for native animal sanctuaries.
- Fencing/protecting prime Malleefowl habitat from the added grazing pressure from sheep and cattle.
- Wildlife corridors will be planted when conditions improve to assist Malleefowl to move between fragmented pockets of vegetation.
- Pest animals will be targeted such as foxes & cats, feral pigs and goats. Aerial culling and baiting programs covering well over 100,000 hectares to help landholders reduce feral animal numbers in the region.
- Education and promotional material developed for community awareness.
- Working with the National Malleefowl Recovery Team to monitor Malleefowl abundance and to upload results to the National Database.

How can you help?

Incentive funding is available to landholders who wish to take part in this project.

Eligibility to apply

- Existing Agreements - all previous works funded by Riverina Local Land Services or Catchment Management Authority must be completed
- Contractual Arrangement - You must be willing to enter into an agreement with Riverina Local Land Services for 10 years
- Local Land Services rates - You must have no outstanding debts to Local Land Services
- Locality - Your property needs to reside in the Riverina Local Land Services region and within the project area (see map below)
- Insurance - You must have public liability insurance for a minimum of $10 million to be considered for funding

Project Area

The project area (see below) is located south of the city of Wagga Wagga and centred around Livingstone National Park and Nest Hill Nature Reserve.

Want to know more?

Contact David Kellett (Land Services Officer - Riverina Local Land Services, based in Griffith NSW)
6960 1355 or 0428 693 990
david.kellett@lls.nsw.gov.au

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