

Malleefowl

Leipoa ocellata



Features and adaptations

- 1 Grey head, white chest and speckled wings for camouflage
- 2 Strong, powerful legs to rake sandy soil and leaves into a mound
- 3 Control egg incubation temperatures by scraping soil on or off the mound
- 4 Stay still or sneak away quietly into the bush when disturbed
- 5 Only fly to escape predators and to reach their roosting place in trees
- 6 Babies take care of themselves immediately after hatching
- 7 Look like chicken but are more closely related to brush-turkeys

Habitat



Malleefowl are shy birds that love the mallee woodlands of north-west Victoria. The word mallee describes eucalyptus trees that are short and have many trunks sprouting from the ground. These birds camouflage well in the low plants of this scrubland and spend a lot of time on the ground. At nighttime, they roost in the trees. They lay their eggs in a mound that they build out of sand and leaf litter.

Diet



Malleefowl are omnivores, meaning they eat plants and animals. They reveal tasty treats by using their strong legs to scrape through the leaf litter. They use their beak to peck at sweets like seeds, flowers, blossoms, fruits and buds. Malleefowl love protein rich insects like ants and cockroaches. They help their habitat by snacking on lerps, which are the sugary armour of sap-sucking bugs.

Life stages



These birds partner for life. Each year, they build a nesting mound of sandy soil. They lay up to 24 eggs and bury them in the mound's leaf litter. The leaves break down and create heat to incubate the eggs. Males scrape material on and off the mound to control the temperature. Chicks hatch after 60 days and have to care for themselves immediately. Malleefowl live for about 15 years.

Threats

ENDANGERED

Malleefowl are endangered in Victoria. Much of this bird's habitat has been cleared for housing, roads and grazing, with only small patches remaining. Climate change is making droughts more common. When water is scarce, Malleefowl won't lay eggs. These birds are also sensitive to fire. It takes a long time between fires to build up the leaf litter that is so important for mound-building.

Conservation



Rangers and volunteers care for Malleefowl habitat. They plant new trees to connect smaller patches of habitat and remove pests like foxes and cats. They monitor populations of Malleefowl and their nesting sites. Protecting Malleefowl habitat from fires that burn too often is very important. This allows leaf litter to build up so that the birds can find food and incubate their eggs.

