

CONSERVE THE MALLEE



The Little Desert

The Little Desert region is in western Victoria, 375 km west of Melbourne. It encompasses a National Park and the Little Desert Nature Lodge, a private bushland retreat.

Mallee: a sensitive and diverse habitat

The main vegetation in the Little Desert is Mallee. Mallee is the name given to the plant community in which Mallee eucalypts grow, which could be woodlands or heathlands. Mallee eucalypts are small, multi-stemmed trees with lignotubers (Mallee roots) just below the soil surface. These store carbohydrates and water, and allow the tree to reshoot from the base if stems are destroyed by fire. Mallee habitats are generally harsh, sandy sites in the arid zone of Australia, from Victoria through South Australia to Western Australia.

In Mallee you will find:

- Low, unreliable rainfall, hot summers and poorly fertile sandy soils
- Surprisingly diverse flora and fauna including many species of reptiles
- Small nocturnal ground-dwelling mammals – some that burrow
- Distinctive birdlife including Malleefowl and many parrots

Mallee Woodlands and Shrublands in Victoria and parts of South Australia and Western Australia have been extensively cleared, with only isolated remnants in some areas. It is a complex and sensitive environment with a great diversity of plants and animals, but many are under threat of extinction. According to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, "since European settlement, one third of all mammal species have disappeared from the Mallee of south-eastern Australia more than a dozen plant species are now considered threatened or rare as a result of clearing and grazing".



Mallee birdlife

The Mallee is alive with birds. A special bird adapted to live in the Mallee is the Malleefowl or Lowan (*Leipoa ocellata*), a large native hen. Malleefowl don't fly much, preferring to walk or run away from danger. It has a loud, booming call, and is the only mound-building bird to live in the arid zone.

The male builds a giant nest mound during the wetter months or winter. He digs a hole in the ground then fills it with leaf litter. After rain the wet leaf litter starts to decompose, heating up like a large compost heap - perfect for keeping the eggs warm. The Malleefowl digs an egg chamber into the nest up to 60 cm deep. The female fills the chamber with up to 30 large eggs depending on the season, laid at a rate of one per day. Now the male buries the eggs in a metre-high mound, keeping them at a perfect temperature in the cold desert nights.

About Conservation Volunteers

Conservation Volunteers was founded in Australia in 1982, and expanded operations to New Zealand in 2006. Involving over 10,000 volunteers every year, Conservation Volunteers is a leader in delivery of practical conservation programs, community involvement and a range of training programs. Conservation Volunteers has offices in 30 locations around Australia and New Zealand, and offers volunteer opportunities every week of the year. Conservation Volunteers has been recognised with many significant awards, including the United Nations' Environment Program Global 500, 6 Banksia Environmental Foundation Awards, and Ecotourism Australia's Ecotourism Award 2009.

Conservation Volunteers Australia is a Registered Training Organisation. For more information, visit: www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

Other birds you can find in the Mallee include:

- Southern Scrub Robin
- Shy Heathwren
- Gilbert's Whistler
- Purple-Gaped Honeyeater



A male Malleefowl on the nest

Photo by butupa, used under CC

Wildflowers

In spring and summer the Little and Big Desert National Parks are coloured with brilliant wildflowers including many beautiful orchids. Over 670 species of plants from native daisies and flowering tea tree to rare orchids are a photographers and artists delight. Highlights include:

- Flame Heath
- Brush Heath
- Cranberry Heath
- Pink Heath
- Waxlip Orchid
- Banded Greenhood
- Heart-lipped Spider-orchid
- Green-comb Spider-orchid
- Daddy Long Legs
- Hooded Caladenia
- Pink Finger Orchid
- Blue Fairy Orchid
- Leopard Orchid
- Scented Sun-orchid



Leopard Orchid

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Conserve the Mallee

Conservation activities to conserve Mallee include:

- Nature conservation covenants to protect remaining remnants
- Bush regeneration and revegetation to restore the condition, extent and connectivity of Mallee woodlands and shrublands.
- Predator control programs to protect Mallee wildlife.
- Rewilding to reintroduce natural ecological services provided by native animals.



Mallee Scrub

This fact sheet has been assisted with funds from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to promote biodiversity education.