



Media Release

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Check out the chicks at Yongergnow

Time is running out to see the Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre's cute Malleefowl chicks before they grow up and find new homes.

Out of eight eggs collected, the centre in Ongerup is raising seven surviving Malleefowl chicks under licence from the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Yongergnow volunteer Judy O'Neill, who co-owns a bush block near Ongerup with a healthy Malleefowl population, said viewing the Malleefowl chicks was a rare privilege.

The chicks have an unfortunate survival rate of less than two per cent in the wild.

"In all the years I've walked through the bush, I've never seen a Malleefowl chick in the wild. It was not until spending countless hours in a bird hide watching a mound while assisting with research on the species, that I saw my first chick," she said.

Research has shown that although juvenile Malleefowl team up with their peers in the wild, chicks are quite happy to go solo. They hatch approximately one week apart, dig their way out the mound and head off into the bush alone.

Yongergnow administrator and biologist Vicky Bilney said the centre's rare chicks were generally very calm and unconcerned about people.

"Visits to the chicks are guided to ensure we can respond to their behaviour on the day. If a bird is nervous, we move away. If it's happy to let us watch it, we stand quietly and observe.

"It's wonderful to share the experience of seeing a Malleefowl chick with visitors, and for me, each visit is special. I observe something new every time I'm with the chicks."

The chicks are currently kept in individual cages in order to monitor their health, eating habits, development and behaviour.

The tamest and friendliest Malleefowl chicks will be moved into a 36x36 metre native bush display aviary as soon as possible.

Yongergnow chairman Ken Pech said the Malleefowl chicks were thriving and encouraged adults and children alike to take advantage of the unique opportunity to see them up close at the Yongergnow Centre.

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Photo caption: Yongergnow's firstborn Malleefowl chick "Happy" is just over three months old and thriving.

For more information about this rare and unique bird, please contact:

Vicky Bilney
Biologist and Administrator
Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre
Phone: (08) 9828 2325
Email: visitor@yongergnow.com.au
Web: www.yongergnow.com.au

Ken Pech
Chairman
Mobile: 0427 171 904

Background: Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) are large ground dwelling birds somewhat larger than a domestic hen. Once common, their numbers have seriously declined over the last 100 years.

Malleefowl are classified as fauna "that is rare or likely to become extinct" under the *Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act 1950-91*. Nationally, the Malleefowl is listed as a threatened species.

Malleefowl chicks are independent from hatching. The eggs are laid in the mound (every 5-7 days), and begin incubating immediately. The egg chamber is dug up to one metre deep into a leaf litter core that produces heat early in the season. The chick hatches 60 days later and digs its way out of the mound. Following this exhausting arrival, it has a quick rest near the mound and then heads off to search for food alone.

Chicks are known to fly up to two metres from the first night in order to roost, and are capable of regulating their own temperature. A major cause of mortality is starvation, as well as death from predators like foxes, cats, goannas, raptors and currawongs.

Information sourced from <http://www.malleefowl.com.au/> and PHD researcher Jessica van der Waag.