



Media Release

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New arrivals thrive at Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre

Yongergnow Australian Malleefowl Centre staff, volunteers and the Ongerup community are celebrating the birth of their first four Malleefowl chicks as part of the Centre's captive raising program.

The rare chicks are thought to be the only captive Malleefowl found in Western Australia. Being incredibly well camouflaged and having a survival rate of less than 2% in the wild, it is highly unusual to see Malleefowl chicks in their natural habitat.

This significant achievement was only made possible through the support of Department of Environment and Conservation officers who expedited the necessary permits to collect eggs locally just before Christmas.

A total of eight eggs were collected, of which four have hatched and the remainder are potentially viable.

Yongergnow Inc. Chairman Ken Pech said that because it was late in the season when the search took place, eggs in a number of mounds had already hatched and there was a risk that the other eggs found were infertile.

Collecting the eggs was quite a challenge given the dense nests are an average of 1.5 metres high and 3m wide and are made of sand and organic materials.

"To get four eggs to hatch already and to have the hatchlings survive is a major achievement. We're now looking forward with confidence as we have compatible birds which are suitable for breeding in the future," he said.

Unique among birds, Malleefowl chicks are independent from hatching and must dig their way through the mound before finding their own food and avoiding predators such as foxes, cats, goannas, raptors and currawongs.

Mr Pech said a surveillance camera will now be installed in one of the chick pens to enable visitors to the centre to watch "our babies" (as staff and volunteers like to call them) remotely.

Access to the chicks is discouraged, especially as some of them will be released once they have reached an age at which survival in the wild is likely. Based on current research, chicks can be released into the wild as early as three weeks of age but this is subject to assessment.

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For more information about this unique bird, please contact:

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Photo caption:

Yongergnow's firstborn Malleefowl chick is called "Happy". Chicks can fly approximately two days after hatching.

Background:

Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) are large ground dwelling birds that are 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* and nationally, the Malleefowl is listed as a threatened species.

Malleefowl chicks are independent from hatching. The eggs are laid in a 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 with no siblings or parents to care for it.

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.