



## Recovering habitat - Woorinen in the Northern Murray Mallee

Taking the leap from traditional revegetation and conservation activities towards the goals of full ecological restoration can seem daunting. However in the Northern Mallee the process has begun.

In the past, private land conservation has been predominately thought of as remnant protection through fencing, revegetation and pest control. This has led us to some excellent results in extension and protection of our vegetation systems, however now the move towards ecological restoration is attempting to ensure that habitats, including all the various components within them, are conserved to provide refuge for our native species.



Mallee Bush

### What is Ecological Restoration?

Ecological restoration involves identifying all of the parts within a landscape or patch of scrub that create a habitat. Species diversity, vegetation structure and composition, the functionality of systems, the adequacy of patches and connectivity all have roles within ecological restoration.

Where previously a patch of remnant scrub that was considered habitat for Malleefowl may have been fenced and had weed control undertaken, we are now considering the aspects important to this species for survival in their habitat such as; replanting of food sources, increasing or protecting the litter for creation of their nesting mounds and reduction of predation on their chicks.

Ecological restoration attempts to consider the components of biological diversity at many scales, such as landscapes, species and individual patches of scrub.

### Woorinen Sands – Restoration Ecological in action

An exciting new practical on-ground example of habitat restoration has just begun in the northern Mallee surrounding Bakara Conservation Park. The Woorinen Recovery Team, consisting of a partnership between the SA MDB NRM Board, Murray Mallee Local Action Planning Association (MMLAP), the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH), Greening Australia and Barron Environmental has begun the implementation phase of a three year project to restore habitat over deep sand dunes that is home to many Mallee bird species such as the Purple-gaped honey eater, the Southern Scrub-robin and the White-fronted honey eater.



Purple-gaped honey eater  
 Photo: Nigel Willoughby



Southern Scrub-robin  
 Photo: Nigel Willoughby



White-Fronted honey eater  
 Photo: Nigel Willoughby

Through restoration ecology components that are no longer performing as well as they could and aim to improve their function. In the northern Murray Mallee it was found that the shrubby understorey on dunetops was important habitat for a group of Mallee birds, all of which appeared to be disappearing from the district.

By identifying the shrubby understorey component of the landscape as important, and that it is currently not performing as well as it could, has allowed the recovery team to target that component for ecological restoration. The recovery team will be improving the shrubby understorey component through actions such as revegetation of species like Spinifex (*Triodia scariosa*), Nealie Wattle (*Acacia rigens*), Egg and Bacon Bush (*Eutaxia microphylla*) and Dune Grevillea (*Grevillea pterosperma*).

They will also be undertaking grazing pressure reduction, both by introduced and native grazers, weed control and competition reduction through possible ripping and rolling actions.

### What this project will achieve?

Working together with landholders, this project will aim to restore a total of 350 hectares of dunetop habitat, as well as to build confidence in the techniques behind ecological restoration.

Murray Mallee LAP and other conservation field officers have been working closely with landholders in the Bakara area for number of years and have been the driving force behind the commitment of private land to this project.

The recovery team has already identified 122 hectares of land on which they have planned a combination of remnant protection with understorey improvement actions along with areas for possible habitat reconstruction.

Throughout the implementation of the project monitoring of the sites will be undertaken both to ensure that the investment in on-ground action is achieving the immediate desired results and so that the long term goal of providing habitat for Mallee birds can be evaluated.

As the first large scale ecological restoration project of its kind, this work by the recovery team will also provide learning's that will assist with developing projects in other areas and greatly increase awareness surrounding looking at all parts of a habitat rather than simply treating conservation in a traditional manner.

Ecological restoration projects across the SA MDB will continue to increase into the future, work is currently being undertaken to improve the skills and knowledge of all field officers involved in conservation and to build ecological principles into various on-ground works schemes being undertaken by community groups, individuals and organisations.

With the increase in ecological restoration it is hoped that not only will the vegetated landscapes of the SA MDB be conserved and extended, but also that their condition and function be improved so that they can continue to provide suitable and resilient habitat for our native species.

### More Information

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