

for the Little Desert The most well known (and often the most elusive) is the Mallee fowl or Lowan. This is the only mound-building bird to inhabit an arid landscape of great temperature fluctuation and low humidity. The male bird spends up to 11 months of the year building a suitable temperature-controlled 'nest' for the female to lay her eggs. The eggs are kept warm by the decomposition of vegetation incorporated in the mound. The male bird keeps the incubation temperature constant by manipulation of the mound materials.

Other species include emus, owls, raptors, a number of honeyeaters and parrots and the rainbow bee-eater. Some birds are resident for the whole year, others are seasonal visitors, many following the flowering of native plants.

Among the animals to be found in the Park are possums, kangaroos and several species of bats. Of the reptiles, the Gould's Goanna, which can grow to a length of about 1.5 metres, is an impressive sight stretched along the length of a tree branch. The slow-moving Shinglebark Lizard is another common sight. Smaller again is the delicately shaded Painted Dragon

This is a subtle, changing, landscape, best seen on foot. There are short guided walks near the camping areas and the Kiata Sanctuary has a nature trail through an area rich in wild flowers and close to a working Malleefowl mound. As well, there is the Desert Discovery Walk of 84km, a loop beginning and ending at the Wimmera River and with overnight camping sites at Yellow Gum Camp on the southern leg and Mallee Camp on the northern leg.

Prior to white settlement, the Little Desert lay within the country of the Wotjabaluk people, centred along the Wimmera River. The first part of the National Park to be proclaimed was the Kiata Lowan Sanctuary, an area with several resident Malleefowl, which was extended to 1000 ha in 1968. In the following year

the State Government proposed that much of the remaining Crown Land in the Little Desert be subdivided for farming. After an intense campaign against the proposal it was abandoned and the Park increased in size to 35,000 ha. In 1988 it was increased to its present size by including the Central and Western Blocks.



Membership

FOLD does not have a membership subscription as such, but we work on a joining fee of \$10 followed by irregular payments of \$10 as and when required.

**Friends of the Little Desert
Membership Application**

Name

Address

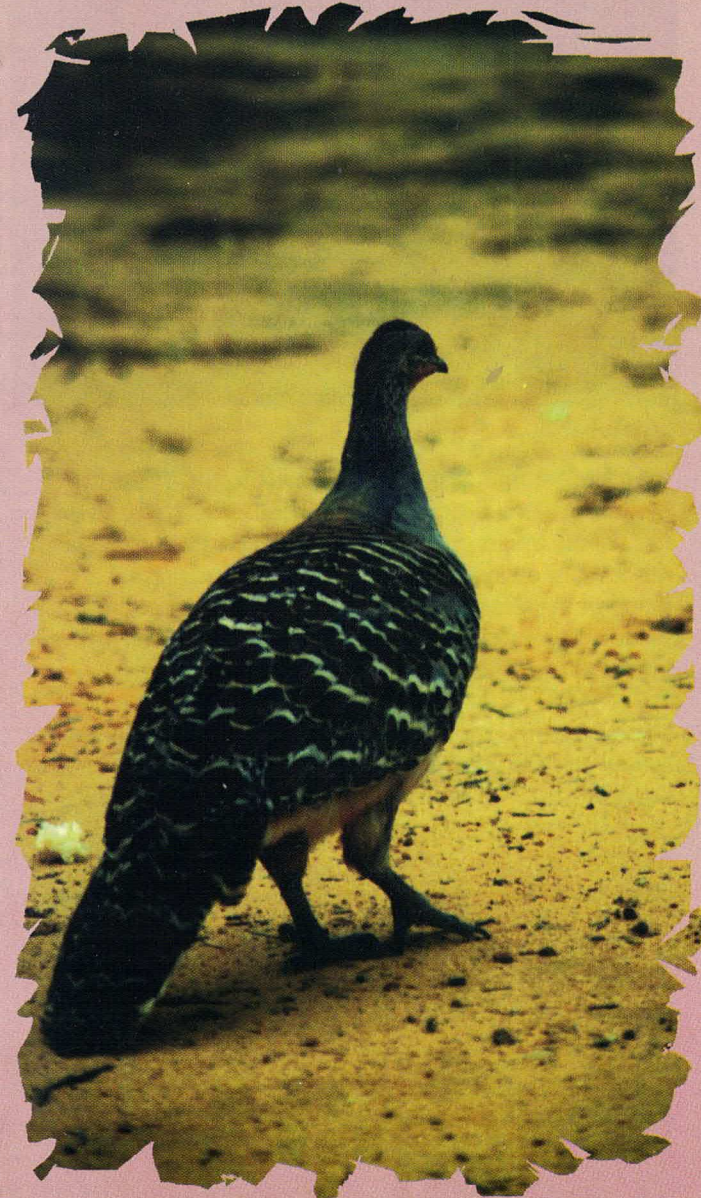
.....

Postcode..... Tel no.....

I enclose a payment of \$10 as joining fee.

Send to Les Smith
47 Purches Street
Heatherdale 3132
Telephone 03 9874 2641

Friends of the Little Desert



The Friends of the Little Desert was formed in 1988. As a volunteer group, we work at a variety of activities under the guidance of Parks Victoria staff within the Little Desert National Park. Our



Wax-lip Orchid

members come from the local area and from Melbourne and other regional areas of Victoria. Over the years, these activities have included the removal of fences remaining from the days when grazing took place in the area, and searching for and monitoring mallee fowl mounds in the grid which has been set up in the Kiata Lowan Sanctuary.

More recently, the Friends obtained a grant from Parks Victoria as part of the celebration of the centenary of National Parks in Victoria. This was used to upgrade the Kiata Camping Ground with a planting of indigenous trees and shrubs, and to provide new signage on walks in the vicinity of the camping ground.

A new Parks Victoria grant has been obtained in conjunction with Gerang Landcare to construct early in 2001 a viewing platform and interpretive signs at the Trig Point, situated between the Kiata Camping Ground and Salt Lake. This will involve several groups from the local community as well as the Friends Group.

The Little Desert is a large National Parks of 132,000 hectares, stretching west from the Wimmera River south of Dimboola to the South Australian border. Two major roads cross the Park

south from Nhill and Kaniva, dividing it into three Blocks. Other minor roads lead into the Park from the Western Highway and the Wimmera Highway.

Despite being called the Little Desert it is desert in name only. Although it has proved unsuitable for western style farming due to poor soils and low rainfall, it is nevertheless rich in biodiversity.

The three Blocks of the Park vary in annual rainfall between 400mm and 600mm and in soil type. These variations result in a diverse flora, with significant differences between the Blocks.

In the Eastern Block, which includes to Wimmera River camping areas and the Kiata Camp Ground, there are extensive heathlands, with banksia, tea-tree and she-oke. Desert Stringybark and Desert Banksia can be seen on the white sandy soils. Scattered throughout these sandy areas are laterite ridges of iron-rich sandstone where broombush can be found. In spring there are spectacular flower displays, including a variety of sun and spider orchids.

In the Central block there are extensive heathlands, interspersed with mallee scrub, large vegetated



Green-comb Spider Orchid



Gould's Goanna

sandhills and clay pans with Yellow Gum, Bottlebrush, Wilson's Melaleuca and Gold Dust Wattle. In one claypan the trees are Red Gums. In the centre of the block is Broughton's Waterhole, originally a small natural waterhole which was extended by Mr Broughton in the late 19th century to water his stock as he drove them across the Desert.

A feature of the Western Block is clay flats of Buloke and Melaleuca with woodlands of Yellow Gum and slender Mallees. Near Mt Moffat is Moree Reserve, a waterhole surrounded with ancient Red Gums where aboriginal artefacts have been discovered.

More than 670 native plant species occur in the Park, about a fifth of Victoria's native species. Of these, at least twenty species are considered to be rare or significant.

There are also more than 200 bird species recorded