



A biodiversity snapshot of north west Victoria

North West Victoria encompasses the vast undulating sandy plains of the Victorian Mallee. Although the low rainfall and poor fertility of the sandy soils lead to some parts of the Mallee being called 'deserts', the flora and fauna are surprisingly diverse.

Multi-stemmed mallee eucalypts are characteristic of the Lowan Mallee and Murray Mallee bioregions, and they dominate several communities. These are interspersed with small to large stands of Slender Cypress-pine, Buloke and Belah woodlands, grasslands and Savannah Mallee on high ground, with halophytic shrublands occurring on lower ground.

The river and creek systems allow the persistence of significant stands of River Red Gum and Black Box Woodland as well as lake-bed communities. Desert Stringybark communities are found in and around the Little Desert and the southern Big Desert.

A few of the more permanent lakes support populations of threatened fish species including the Murray Hardy-head and Southern Purple Spotted Gudgeon.

The reptile fauna is especially well-developed, with a greater diversity in the Victorian Mallee than in any other area of the State.

There is a distinctive range of birds, the best known being the Malleefowl which constructs huge mounds of sand and litter to incubate its eggs.

Parrots are also prominent, including the colourful Mallee Ringneck, Pink Cockatoo and Regent Parrot. In the understorey, diverse wattles and daisies grow among the widespread Porcupine Grass and low, heathy shrubs.

Clearing and subsequent habitat fragmentation has led to the decline of many species including the Black-eared miner, Malleefowl, Australian Bustard, Mallee Emu Wren and Western Whipbird.

Many mammal species in this region are found nowhere else in Victoria including the Red Kangaroo, Paucident Planigale, Mallee Ningau, and the Mitchell's Hopping-mouse. The Silky Mouse and Western Pygmy-possum are restricted to the Big and Little Deserts.

The region's biodiversity faces many challenges. Remnants of native vegetation continue to be at risk from the effects of fragmentation, including environmental weed invasion, predation and competition from feral animals, and the effects of increasing salinity. Large scale wild fire also presents a significant risk to North West Victoria's conservation reserves.

Large and significant natural areas on less fertile sands remain in the Big Desert and Sunset Country and have been set aside in conservation reserves. However, some of these areas were once extensive pastoral leases, and the recovery of perennial vegetation (particularly in woodland habitats) from the impacts of grazing and the continuing effects of rabbits, feral goats and kangaroos remains a challenge.

Further resources

For more information about Victoria's unique biodiversity, please visit www.dse.vic.gov.au/landwhitepaper



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Images: Malle Fowl - Photo: DSE, Western Pygmy-possum - Photo: Ian McCann.