

SURVEY OF BREMER BAY RESERVE

Fauna Protection Officer H.B. Shugg and Technical Officer J. Traynor, accompanied by Mr. Ray Aitken, of Dumbleyung, last month carried out an inspection of sections of this reserve. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain whether there was on the reserve a sufficiently large mallee fowl population to make it unnecessary to reserve a further area for the protection of that somewhat rare species.

The party first travelled through the reserve down the No. 2 rabbit-proof fence which cuts the western end of the reserve. The country in the vicinity of the Fitzgerald River was inspected, first at the head of the estuary, and later at its junction with the Twertup River near Jonaconak. Although extensive foot patrols were carried out in this latter region, it appeared that mallee fowl were not nearly as plentiful as had been reported. Six old nest-mounds were located, but no signs were seen of recent activity.

An attempt was made to enter the Twertup Creek area from a track off the Ravensthorpe Road, but after proceeding for some miles, the track disappeared in very rough and unpromising country and this traverse was abandoned.

Following local information, a visit was paid to the gorges and estuary of the Hamersley River, south-west of Ravensthorpe. In this wild and isolated country, which is said to have been at one time among the most picturesque in Australia, a few old mounds were located, but a great section of the best area had been burnt off. Mr. Aitken estimated that the habitat would not be restored to a condition suitable for mallee fowl for approximately 20 years. Other very large sections of the reserve had also been burnt - a lot of it, as at the Hamersley, since December of last year.

The party returned on the Ravensthorpe - Magenta - Pingrup track and passed through mallee and moort thickets which were considered to be ideal for the preservation of mallee fowl. Two old mounds and one live bird only were seen as no foot patrols were made due to lack of time and the fact that this area had

been surveyed by other parties in recent years. The absence of burnt areas was most noticeable, attributable to the fact that its geological character does not attract prospectors.

The opinion was formed that the Bremer Bay reserve is principally a flora reserve and although it harbours a wide variety of bird life, it does not, at least in its present condition, contain sufficient suitable areas to guarantee the conservation of mallee fowl.

The party was engaged on its survey for a period of one week, and travelled 378 miles in the reserve or adjacent country by land-rover and covered a lot of ground on foot.