

FAUNA

Since purchasing our bush property at Westonia last year, we have known that we shared the bush with Malleefowl, as we often saw their footprints on our dirt tracks. For twelve months we diligently searched for an active mound, and found six inactive ones in the process, but it was not until last November that we finally found what we were looking for – a mound that was being actively worked. Delighted, we set to work erecting a bird hide so that we could watch their daily lives without disturbing them.

A simple, one-person bird hide is easy to assemble. Birds Australia (http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/infosheets/08_hides.pdf) recommends that they should be light in weight, drab in colour, with a non-shiny texture, easily carried and set up, weather proof but breathable, stable and without loose flaps. I made mine out of a wool pack and four broom handles, giving a cubicle 70 cm wide, 70 cm deep and 140 cm tall, in which I can just fit a camping chair and one person.

1. Turn the wool pack upside down.
2. Undo one of the vertical seams, creating a doorway.
3. Attach a couple of tape ties so that the doorway can be closed from inside.
4. Insert a bullet-head nail into the rounded end of each broom stick to form a spike.
5. Push the spike of each broom stick between the stitching at the top corners of the wool pack.
6. Cut a narrow slit at an appropriate height across the front of the wool pack.



DIY BIRD HIDE

Lesley Brooker

Voilà - Place in situ and secure with guy ropes.

This is the very basic version, which is good if you are in a hurry or need to use the hide for only a short period of time. It does, however, have some drawbacks – it can become very hot and stuffy, especially after sunrise; the roof will become a puddle

if it rains; the slit will fray and is not adjustable and the colour is not exactly inconspicuous.



For the deluxe version:-

1. Purchase 2m of camouflage netting and sew into the sides as windows (approx \$11 per metre from army disposal stores).
2. Sew a loop into the centre of the roof to allow a tie to an overhanging branch, so that the rain will run off.
3. Cut a rectangular viewing window and bind with bias binding. Cut a larger rectangle from the material cut from the sides and attach this as a flap to the inside of the viewing window. This flap can then be adjusted as required with pegs or safety pins.
4. Spray with a dark coloured paint.

IMPORTANT

The aim of the hide is to allow you to watch birds without disturbing them. If there is any evidence that the birds are disturbed by the hide then it should be removed. Position the hide where you have a good line of sight (with binoculars) without removing any vegetation. In the case of Malleefowl, erect the hide at least 20 m from the mound at a time of least activity (mid afternoon). Resist the urge to sit and watch immediately. Leave the hide

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for 24 h. When you are sure that the Malleefowl have accepted the hide (i.e. they have returned and worked the mound during your absence) then it is ready for use. If not, move the hide further back or remove altogether. Always enter and leave the hide from the same direction (away from the mound). After erecting the hide do not approach the mound. When using the hide be as quiet as possible (no talking) and make as little movement as possible. You will need to take a camping chair, binoculars, can of fly spray and a couple of safety pins (for adjusting the viewing slit).

The best time to watch Malleefowl is in the early morning when the male will usually (but not always) open the mound to check the temperature. If you are lucky you may see the female also. You may see the male put his head down between his legs and “boom” from the mound. And if you’re very, very patient and very, very quiet, you may even see the female lay.

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