

**BATS, BOATS, FOSSILS MALLEEFOWL AND EUROPEAN CARP
AN EXPEDITION TO THE LOWER MURRAY VALLEY
22ND – 24TH SEPTEMBER 2017**

Expedition Leaders: Gaye and Tim Fischer

The Murraylands weekend of discovery and adventure began with 36 expeditioners arriving at their Mannum Motel rooms from 2 pm on Friday 22 September. At 3:30 pm we went as a group to the Mannum Dock Museum where Margaret Dowley outlined the features of their historic displays and encouraged us to also look at the adjacent dry dock and the famous Paddle Steamer Marion. The group returned to the motel for dinner, which, in the finest Waterhouse Club tradition, was preceded by drinks and pre-dinner nibbles.

After breakfast on Saturday morning we all boarded a bus for the day's travel, starting with David Hartley, owner of the motel, taking us on an informative tour of Mannum township.

At this point with Professor Steve Donnellan, the Chief Research Scientist of the Evolutionary Biology Unit at the South Australian Museum and Adelaide University micropalaeontologist Brian McGowran joined us, and we looked at the geological features of the Murravian Gulf at several sites they had chosen along the river. The Murray River is an ancient river, even by the time scale of geologists. Its origins date back about 130 million years ago.

Steve and Brian shared the stratigraphic and geo-historical context of the western Murray Valley. The Murravian Gulf existed at the height of the Middle Miocene marine transgression (16-15 million years ago) and we could see evidence of this in the many types of fossils at the locations.

Significant Murray fossil specimens collected by the museum over the years were also available for us to view. Next we visited Shell Hill, a deposit of oyster shells up to six metres deep from a Pliocene estuary.

In the afternoon we were driven on to Meldanda Bush Garden at Cambrai. Due to the wind we could not tour the garden, so we were comfortably accommodated in their meeting room where Aimee Linke, (Project Manager, Mid Murray Landcare) showed us pictures of the bush garden's history, growth and future plans. This was followed by excellent presentations on the Garden's resident bat population by Kyle Armstrong and Dennis Matthews.



Exploring Murray Valley Cliffs



Inspection of a working Mallee Fowl nest

We all enjoyed a delicious dinner of slow roast beef and vegetables followed by a hot desert courtesy Ed and Judy Cottam (the mobile caterers) and then made our way back on the bus to the motel.

Sunday morning guests checked out of the motel after breakfast and we convoyed to the nearby Mary Ann Reserve. Here we car-pooled and in convoy travelled to Mr Peter Lee's land to view a working Malleefowl nest. This visit was arranged by Rowena Danks from Murray Mallee Local Action Planning Group. Craig Gillespie (DEWNR) showed us a motion-activated camera that is used near nests to record bird activity. He also told us about the endangered Malleefowl lifestyle, population numbers and their predators.

The convoy returned to Mannum for a BBQ lunch at the Mannum Club. Due to the windy weather we were able to eat inside the club and enjoy their salad and vegetable bars as well. Professor Justin Brookes, water researcher from Adelaide University, presented on the planned eradication of the European Carp from the Murray.

We then boarded the MV Jester and Captain Chad Blatchford took us on a cruise down the river with commentary about the river, its banks and vegetation. We watched Whistling Kites being fed. Also on the cruise we had a chance to hear Debbie Smith ("the Carp Lady") to talk about catching and cooking carp. She provided carp pâté, jerky, cabana and carp cakes for us to try. Once the MV Jester returned to the Mary Ann Reserve area the expeditioners went their separate ways after a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting weekend.