

2013 Indian Myna Conference – Speaker Abstracts

Andrea Griffin / Marie Diquelou: University of Newcastle: *Learning, opportunism and adaptability in the Indian myna: Implications of such traits for species management*

The Indian myna, *Acridotheres tristis*, is one of just three avian species to be listed amongst the “100 World’s most invasive alien species” by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Since its introduction to Australia mid XIX century, the species has undergone a dramatic rise in numbers and range expansion. Public opinion considers it as the most significant pest across Australia (<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/wildwatch/results/award.htm>; accessed 23/05/13). The extraordinary learning abilities of mynas make them a fascinating species in which to test theoretical models of learning and fundamental theories of evolution and ecology, the role of opportunism, adaptability and competition in invasive species range expansion, and finally the potential for learning and adaptability to compromise ongoing management practices. Our research group has been studying mynas both in the field and in captivity since 2006. Here, we will review data we have collected on the individual and social learning abilities of mynas and discuss the implications of our findings for our understanding of the mechanisms underpinning the ecological success of mynas, as well as for myna management. We will present recent work on the development of trap avoidance. Finally, we will discuss our view of future research priorities for the species.

Kate Grarock: *Myna impacts on native birds / Does trapping help?*

Kate will be talking about the results of her PhD research. She will focus on the invasion process (stages and tailored management actions), the impact of the common myna on native birds in Canberra and control of the common myna through community trapping and other potential methods.

Peter West, Invasive Animals CRC: *MynaScan: What it tells us and new developments*

MynaScan (available at www.feralscan.org.au/mynascan) is a dedicated website that is part of a national citizen science program called FeralScan managed by the Invasive Animals CRC. MynaScan has been developed exclusively for land holders, community groups and local government to record information about myna birds and the problems they cause. It provides a range of vital information on myna birds and a real-time web-mapping service using Google Maps allowing you to record sightings, damage and control activities (such as trapping) in your local area. This information can then be used by local control groups to target myna bird populations.

MynaScan also provides information on controlling the species, links to community groups and local government, and image galleries. Users can import datasets, export data, filter data, create their own local area maps, and manage their data securely over a password protected data server. MynaScan can be used to record sightings of myna birds, nest sites, communal roost sites, damage, and control activities. To date, community and local government participants have recorded over 12,000 sighting observations in MynaScan as well as damage and control information. This data provides the most comprehensive layer of records gathered on Myna birds in Australia, and when married with other longer-term data from Birds Australia, reveals that myna populations are indeed expanding and spreading in many directions.

Anyone can join MynaScan and record evidence of myna birds in their local area – the more data entered, the more useful MynaScan will become. Data entered in MynaScan can help to improve the effectiveness of control, monitor populations, detect incursions, prevent new populations from establishing, and bring people together to address the problems myna birds cause. MynaScan also aims to improve our collective understanding of myna bird populations at the landscape and regional scale, and how populations respond to changes in control. MynaScan is undergoing an upgrade to provide many new facilities and services to help community groups and local government work cooperatively to control myna birds. We have developed an optimised website for mobile phone users for faster data entry while in the field. We have developed improved data recording facilities so anyone can record sightings. We are progressively developing customised websites for community groups and local government (such as Canberra Indian Myna Action Group), and we are developing secure community login facilities so people can join groups and securely share their data with other members of a group to increase a coordinated approach to myna control.

Martin O'Brien: *Does the Impact of Indian (Common) Myna on native fauna meet the criteria for being listed as a threatening process?*

Background on the Scientific Advisory Committee

The SAC is constituted under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act). The SAC comprises seven biological scientists, a majority of whom are non-government. The SAC advises the Victorian Minister for Environment & Climate Change and the Minister for Agriculture & Food Security on nature conservation matters, particularly nominations for listing of threatened species, communities and potentially threatening processes (PTPs).

Nominations can be made by any interested person and must meet certain conditions (the prescribed information) before they can be considered by the SAC. Nominations for listing must show that one or more 'listing criteria' must be met before the SAC can recommend to the Minister that a nomination should be supported. These criteria are specified in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Regulations 2011.

Since 1988 the SAC has considered over 840 nominations for listing of which 67 have been rejected. Eleven of these rejections have been for PTPs.

Talk Abstract

In August 2011 a member of the public made a nomination for listing of the following item to the SAC: 'Competition with native fauna by the Common Myna *Sturnus tristis*'.

The SAC assessed this nomination over 2012, eventually advising the Ministers to reject listing of the item. This advice was eventually received by the responsible Ministers in April 2013 who accepted the recommendation not to list the nomination.

The main reason the SAC provided in its advice was that none of the listing criteria were shown to be met by the nomination documentation.

Martin will explain the listing process under Victorian legislation and the decision making approach used by the SAC to arrive at its recommendation to the Ministers.

Peter Bird & John Virtue: *Prioritising Pest Animals – Where does the Common (Indian) Myna fit*

There are at least 84 exotic animal species gone wild in Australia – too many to eradicate or even to effectively contain, especially given declining government spending. In South Australia a Pest Animal Risk Management System has been developed to help inform resource prioritisation for regional pest management. The system ranks species and recommends management options based on a matrix of pest animal risk versus feasibility of containment. A panel of experts offer opinions on a series of technical questions to score invasiveness, impacts and potential distribution to calculate pest animal risk. They similarly score costs, current distribution and persistence to calculate feasibility of containment.

The Common (or Indian) Myna *Sturnus tristis* was introduced to Melbourne in 1862 and now occurs in a near-continuous 3,000 km stretch of eastern Australian seaboard. The cat would seem to be well and truly out of the bag. And yet mynas have failed to expand their range substantially west of Melbourne. How does the myna score if say a Catchment Management Authority from Western Victoria were to use the SA Pest Animal Risk Management System to assess risk and feasibility of containment? Surprisingly, 150 years after its introduction and despite little history of control, the myna still ranks as worthy of 'Destroying Populations' on the risk management matrix for this region, only one rank below top-placed 'Eradication'.

This ranking comes about because the myna is still yet to reach its potential distribution and because it possesses a range of characters that boost its score on feasibility of containment. Mynas are sedentary, commensal, social, conspicuous, unpopular and climatically ill-matched to western Victoria. As well there are demonstrably effective control options available in the form of low-cost community-based trapping programs as exemplified by the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group. That mynas have struggled to colonise much of central and western Victoria to date provides hope that by destroying invading populations their spread can be further slowed, halted or even reversed.

For South Australia the myna ranks as an "Alert Pest", as it is not established, a high pest risk and any incursions are targeted for eradication.

Michael Linke / Greg Flowers: *Animal welfare issues / treatment. The most humane disposal method*

Susana Saavedra Cruz: *Indian Myna eradication – it can be done!*

Bill Handke: *Community action to tackle Indian Mynas – what can be achieved, what is needed.*

Many pest species require concerted government effort to manage or control. They do not lend themselves readily to broad scale community control activity: either because of their location, their characteristics or their behaviours.

The Indian Myna control activities of the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group Inc, however, clearly demonstrate that mynas are one pest that is amenable to a community-action control program. Such community-action can be either facilitated and supported by local government or arise as a stand-alone activity growing from collective community concern.

The Canberra community has now demonstrated what can be achieved by a concerted, sustained and coordinated program of community backyard trapping.

This is just one model for tackling mynas: an integrated local council-community action approach is another, while local government alone is a third. The integrated approach has particular advantages as it draws on the skills and capabilities of both local government and the community: it is a low cost / high impact approach for local government.

Paul Formosa, Wollongong City Council

The Wollongong Indian Myna Bird Program was launched in March 2011 at the Corrimal Community Men's shed, since the program's launch there have been 48 workshops held with 708 participants, and 493 traps sold, a 2 year research project is also in progress with the University of Western Sydney Invasive Species Unit, as well as integrating the MynaScans database into the monitoring program. Today's brief presentation will focus on the program structure and if time allows the workshop components.

Martin Gauci, Hawkesbury City Council

The Hawkesbury Indian Myna Action Group (HIMAG) was established in 2009 and aims to improve the biodiversity of the Hawkesbury area through community education and the humane control of Indian Mynas. From its humble begins with a limited volunteer base, now over 550 people have joined the community-driven trapping program facilitated by Hawkesbury City Council. The well-established program in the Hawkesbury was adapted from various other areas programs and tailored to suit the Hawkesbury community. The program has had highs and lows and has a wealth of experience and knowledge for other councils and organisations to learn from.