

4

THE MOUND

The scrub-fowl is a mighty builder, using 'cartloads' of dark, sandy soil mixed with decaying vegetation, twigs, sticks, etc. Sand and shells are the principal building material when the egg-mound is near the seashore. (C. Barrett 1931: 117)¹

We think of invention as the sole prerogative of man. Yet nature was perfecting her inventions long before man was born. For instance, there are the incubating nest-mounds of the Australian megapodes, or mound-builders, predating man's invention of the incubator by an incalculable period of time. (A. Russell 1944: 83)²

All of the Australian megapodes are mound-builders, in contrast to the 'burrow nesters' in some areas outside Australia (see Chapter 1). Megapode mounds are large heaps of decomposing organic material, which contain whatever the birds scratch together at the mound location: leaf litter, fibrous roots, smaller pebbles and stones, branches, some top soil, etc. While the most important material will be that which can be broken down by micro-organisms, a lot of other objects may be inadvertently gathered up in the process, even though this latter material may play no part in the