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Mysterious ways: Don White with one of his mysterious circles.

The dance of the echidnas

By **SANDRA GODWIN**

UFOs or whirlwinds, Don White of Tandarra, north of Bendigo, has no idea who or what made the large circles in his wheat crop.

The latest theory from a Natural Resources and Environment officer is that they are the work of frisky, earnest echidnas — that they are the result of a prickly love-in.

NRE spokesman John Quinlan said a staff member swears they are the marks left by mating echidnas.

The female echidna, apparently, attracts a harem of males and leads them on a merry old chase, around and around in circles until all but one weaken, either from exhaustion or a broken spirit.

That leaves the strongest, usually the largest, to mate.

The whole lively process has left 25 circles about 2m in diameter and wheat flattened in an anticlockwise direction.

The straw is pulverised and the grain belted from the heads. The soil is smoothed and compacted by the downward force of the phenomenon.

In some cases, a patch

of wheat in the centre of the rings is still standing.

Mr White is convinced it wasn't a prank and has ruled out kangaroos and whirlwinds.

"No one has seen anything like it," he said.

He found the circles in his meering wheat in November when it was still green.

He said the dead patches of the circles near a fence had stood out like beacons.

His 400ha farm has been visited by hundreds of people since his find and most have a theory.

Wind, heat, magnetic fields related to underground water and UFOs are the most popular.

Mr Quinlan said the department was still searching for a more scientific answer, but he expected tests to prove inconclusive.

Mr White, a man of few words, said the novelty of all the attention had worn off and he and his family were sick of the phone calls.

He is now curious to find out whether the phenomenon has left the ground sterile."

Not if that biggest of echidnas is still anywhere in the area.