

SILVER GULLS AND EMERGING PROBLEMS FROM INCREASING ABUNDANCE

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Silver Gull populations have increased substantially in the past 50 years. This is primarily because they are scavengers and have been able to utilize human refuse. They have been implicated as problems to aircraft movements and water supplies, because they defaecate in water reservoirs and are known to be agents of human enteric diseases. Should a management programme be instigated to reduce gull numbers, a major priority should be to reduce access to artificial food sources.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, gulls are increasingly attaining pest status (Brough 1985; Blokpoel and Tessier 1986; Furness and Monaghan 1987). This has been attributed to increasing numbers in urban environments. Most gulls, including the Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* are scavengers and diet generalists. Populations have apparently increased because of increased availability of 'artificial' food at urban centres, where abundant food now exists at waste disposal depots, in parks, near sewage outfalls and around fishing boats, leading to greater fecundity and decreased mortality (Furness and Monaghan 1987). Some species are also highly adaptable in their nesting habits and this has led to nesting on human-made structures such as roof tops (Cramp 1971; Monaghan and Coulson 1977). The increase in numbers, coupled with the proximity of food sources to cities, has led to their becoming increasingly implicated as threats to aircraft safety and contaminators of water supplies.

Recent research on Silver Gulls in Australia has been management oriented, following at least three decades of ecological, biological and behavioural studies of the species. This paper reviews available information and discusses problems posed by the species and the measures taken to overcome them in Australia. The Australian localities referred to in the text are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

The Silver Gull has been placed in the *Larus cirrocephalus* species-group (Johnstone 1982). The four species from the southern hemisphere belonging to the group are the Grey-headed Gull (*L. cirrocephalus* Vieillot), Hartlaub's Gull (*L. hartlaubii* Bruch), Black-billed Gull (*L. bulleri* Hutton) and Silver Gull (*L. novaehollandiae* Stephens). There are three subspecies of Silver Gull: *L. n. forsteri*, *L. n. novaehollandiae* and *L. n. scopulinus*.

DISTRIBUTION

The Silver Gull can be found on most beaches around the Australian coastline, but also occurs far inland, along rivers, on lakes, in marshes and in inland towns. Breeding occurs mainly in colonies on coastal and inland islands throughout Australia, but also on artificial constructions in saltworks (Wheeler and Watson 1963), on causeways (Skira and Wapstra 1990) and pylons (Dalby *et al.* 1984). The largest colonies tend to be near large cities (Blakers *et al.* 1984).

L. n. forsteri is found along northern coasts of Australia and the nominate *L. n. novaehollandiae* is present elsewhere (Blakers *et al.* 1984). *L. n. forsteri* also occurs in New Caledonia. The Red-billed Gull *L. n. scopulinus* is found in New Zealand (Pringle 1987).