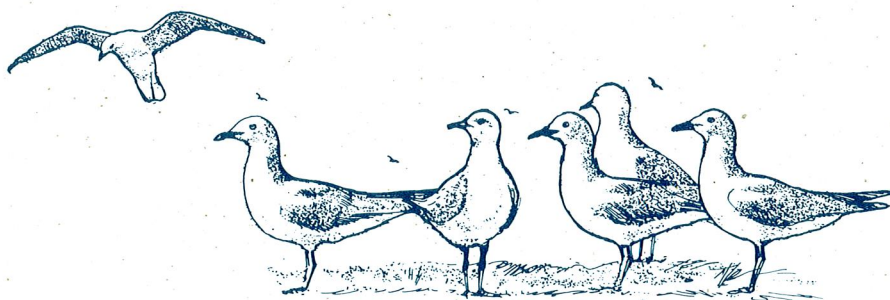


SILVER GULL

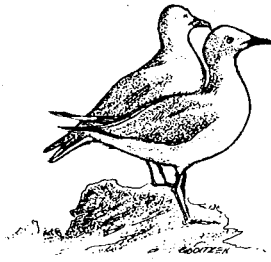
ACTION PLAN

FOR THE PERTH METROPOLITAN AREA



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Produced by the Department of Conservation and Land Management with the assistance of metropolitan local government authorities, Rottnest Island Authority, Perth Zoo, Murdoch University research staff, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - Western Australia and the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union.



FOREWORD

The silver gull is a familiar bird species in Western Australia, particularly in our coastal communities.

Apart from often being an uninvited guest at picnics and barbecues, the large population found in and around Perth has the potential to have other more serious effects on the human population and native fauna.

There is a need to address the problems posed by the increasing gull population.

This action plan is a significant step in that direction and was produced following a workshop on silver gull management organised by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in November 1992.

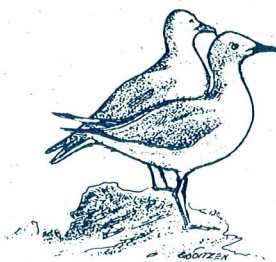
Those at the workshop recognised that a co-operative approach to silver gull management was required. It is pleasing to see that all those organisations represented are prepared to work together to manage silver gulls.

This action plan has been developed with the assistance and support of local government authorities, experts on gull biology and ecology, CALM staff and others.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'K. J. Minson'.

KEVIN MINSON MLA

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem

The common seagull of the Perth metropolitan area is the silver gull. This species is highly adaptive and able to obtain food by scavenging. The population in the Perth area has grown dramatically over the past 100 years or so due to the easy availability of food in the form of food scraps and rubbish left by people.

There are estimated to be about 40,000 silver gulls in the metropolitan area. Near Perth, large silver gull colonies can be found on Carnac, Penguin and Rottnest Islands. The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) receives many complaints about the nuisance they cause.

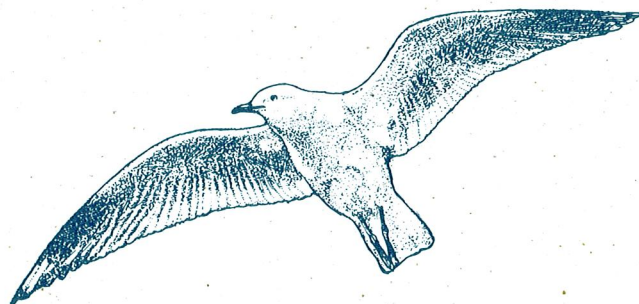
There is a need to prevent further silver gull population increases and reduce current populations to restrict:

- nuisance problems of gulls harassing people for food, as well as noise and pollution problems caused by large flocks of gulls at feeding, loafing and drinking sites;
- the risk of gulls transmitting diseases and infections to humans from their contact with food waste, people and food at picnic sites etc; and,
- their potential for preying on the young and eggs of other native birds, and crowding of other bird species at breeding sites, such as the crested terns on Penguin Island.

1.2 Action requirements

The principal factors limiting gull population growth are the availability of food and prime nesting habitat. Access to fresh water in summer is also important in limiting the distribution and probably the population size. Co-ordinated action involving metropolitan councils, CALM and the community is required to effectively limit the gulls' access to these resources.

This action plan identifies what should be done, and who should do it, in order to achieve successful silver gull population management.



2. ACTIONS

BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES AND ROTTNEST ISLAND
AUTHORITY TO REDUCE SILVER GULL ACCESS TO ARTIFICIAL FOOD
SOURCES

2.1 LANDFILL SITE MANAGEMENT

2.1.1 Introduction

All landfill sites in the metropolitan area should be managed to reduce silver gull access as far as possible within public health requirements and site limitations. This is important whether silver gulls are currently a problem or not. Experience with gulls both in Australia and overseas has shown that if this is not done, successful management at current problem sites will only drive gulls to other landfill sites.

2.1.2 Covering refuse

Ideally, tipping faces at landfill sites should be screened to prevent silver gull access. This will, however be costly and difficult to achieve in practice. Covering waste on the tipping face continuously during the day will reduce silver gull access to food. A small tipping area should be compacted and covered to minimise silver gull access. All waste should be covered at the end of the day.

2.1.3 Restriction on size of the waste disposal face

The tip face should be kept as small as possible, so that there is less surface area over which the silver gulls are able to feed. A smaller face will mean fewer gulls can feed at any one time and if the face can be compacted and covered quickly, fewer gulls in total will have access to food.

2.1.4 Elimination of ponded water

Surface water at or near landfill sites allows silver gulls to feed and then bathe, preen and loaf without leaving the area. Thus all of the gulls' daytime habitat requirements can be met on site. They are then able to respond quickly to waste arrivals and maximise their feeding opportunities.

All holding ponds should be covered to deny silver gulls access. Covering the ponds with exclusion netting or nylon string lines can exclude, or at least restrict the number of gulls gaining access to these areas. Care needs to be taken when establishing such barriers to reduce possibilities of entanglement for gulls and other bird species. If

covering the ponds is not possible, a variety of scaring devices should be used randomly to deter gulls, but not excessively, as gulls will soon lose their fear of such devices.

2.1.5 Special arrangements for large loads of organic waste

If large loads of organic waste (such as offal) are periodically dumped at the landfill site, special arrangements should be made to bury the waste immediately in a special excavation, or as it is deposited on the face. Prior notification to the landfill site manager should be required for such dumping. Those regularly disposing of large volumes of this type of waste should be identified and advised of this requirement. Also, alternatives to dumping should be explored.

2.1.6 Reducing the volume of waste entering landfill sites

Councils should encourage households and businesses to reduce the volume of waste directed to landfills by encouraging composting and recycling. Composting is an effective and efficient means of dealing with organic waste and will at the same time reduce the volume of food available to gulls at landfill sites. Any reduction in available waste at landfill sites will result in a corresponding reduction in gull numbers. It will also prolong the life of particular landfill sites and thereby assist in covering costs of more intensive management of waste at those sites.

Council programs involving the provision of subsidised compost bins to residents and other initiatives to help promote recycling in local council areas, would assist management of silver gulls.

2.2 CONTROL ACTIONS IN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND COMMERCIAL AREAS

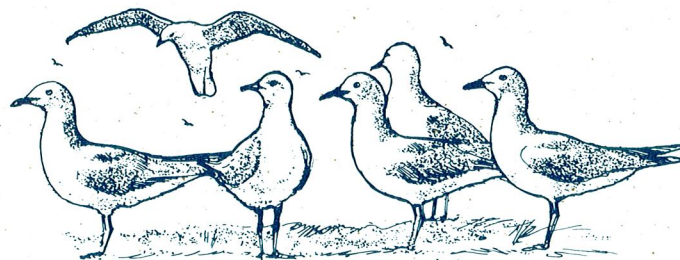
2.2.1 Lidded bins

Lidded bins deny gulls and other birds ready access to food scraps. Many people are reluctant to use bins where there is a need to lift a lid and so versions with a side-facing opening are preferred. Such bins should be installed in public areas throughout the city where gulls may become a problem, and also on Rottne Island.

Proper use of lidded bins to deny access to silver gulls at restaurants, fast food outlets, shopping centres, factories and food processing facilities would also assist silver gull management.

2.2.2 Planning actions

As silver gulls require open space areas with access to water for drinking, bathing, loafing and preening, it would be preferable for any new developments incorporating such features to be sited well away from current or proposed landfill sites or for the landfill sites to be resituated to more remote areas. Those planning such water features as part of housing, industrial or recreational developments should be advised of the possible problems related to the particular site and its proximity to gull problem areas.



3. COMBINED ACTIONS BY CALM AND COUNCILS

3.1 Education programs and signposting to reduce gull feeding in open space, recreation and 'al fresco' dining areas

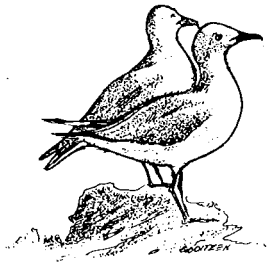
Standard signs or stickers advising of the benefits of using rubbish bins and the problems which can be caused by hand feeding of gulls and other birds should be developed by CALM and councils and used widely in open space areas. CALM should prepare a pamphlet on gull feeding and design standard signs and bin stickers that can be distributed by councils.

The possible health and safety problems associated with feeding gulls should be highlighted. Other side-effects of feeding, such as pollution of lakes with bird droppings and decaying uneaten food, should also be mentioned.

News releases, media interviews, publications such as *LANDSCOPE* and *CALM News*, signposting, pamphlet drops and stickers should be used in an ongoing education plan. CALM should be involved in preparation of publications and news releases. Councils have more direct access to residents and should therefore distribute pamphlets, erect signs and provide bins etc. Material could also be provided around fast food outlets and 'al fresco' eating areas by councils. Councils could also write to such establishments advising of the need to restrict the gulls' access to food and enclosing copies of the pamphlet on gull management.

An adequate number of suitably lidded bins and signposting/stickers will be needed to reinforce the education campaign.

There is scope for the public education program to be extended to schools and the Ministry of Education should be consulted on this point. School activities could include discussion of the problems caused by feeding gulls or leaving scraps which can be eaten by gulls and also perhaps, a project to count the number of gulls at a local reserve regularly to see how this changes with time. Results of co-ordinated counts at a number of sites over several years will help with an overall assessment of gull abundance.

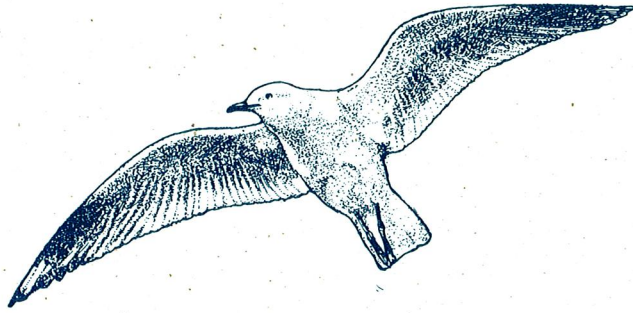


4. ACTIONS BY CALM

4.1 Population control at breeding sites

Experience from around Australia and overseas has shown that culling operations on breeding sites would be inefficient and ineffective in controlling overall gull numbers. This is because there is an extensive non-breeding population that would quickly take the place of culled animals. Also, silver gulls in Perth have an extended nine-month breeding season which allows pairs to replace eggs or young lost as a result of control operations or natural causes. CALM and the Rottnest Island Authority should nevertheless monitor gull populations on the islands they manage. CALM should also oversee monitoring of all gull breeding sites and work to prevent the establishment of new gull breeding areas. Such areas would not establish if controls on landfill and other feeding areas are effective.

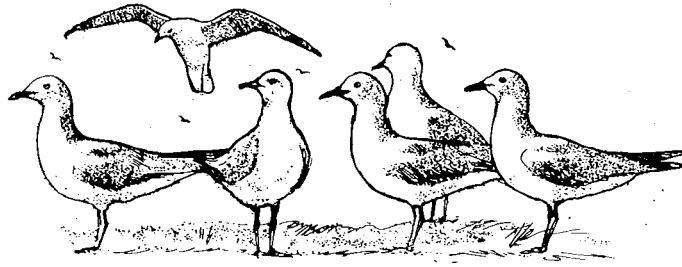
CALM should also employ the litter and food waste control methods identified in 2.2.1 in recreation areas under its management.



5. ACTIONS BY OTHER AUTHORITIES/ DEPARTMENTS

Those involved in outdoor recreation should provide lidded bins and adopt education campaigns and material developed under Sections 2 and 3 above.

Those experiencing particular problems with increasingly large gull populations should endeavour to reduce or eliminate the food supply or other attractions to the gulls or modify the attraction to reduce gull access or interest. Scaring devices can be employed in some areas and can be effective if used in combination and with variety. Vigilance is required and most scaring devices prove to be labour-intensive and therefore costly. Nevertheless, they do have their place where no other control options are practical.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dr Ron Wooller and Dr Catherine Meathrel of Murdoch University, Rottnest Island Authority, WA Municipal Association, City of South Perth, Town of Bassendean, City of Cockburn, City of Belmont, City of Melville, City of Gosnells, City of Canning, City of Rockingham, City of Fremantle, City of Stirling, City of Perth, Shire of Swan, Town of Cottesloe, Mindarie Regional Council, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - Western Australia, Perth Zoo and the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union.