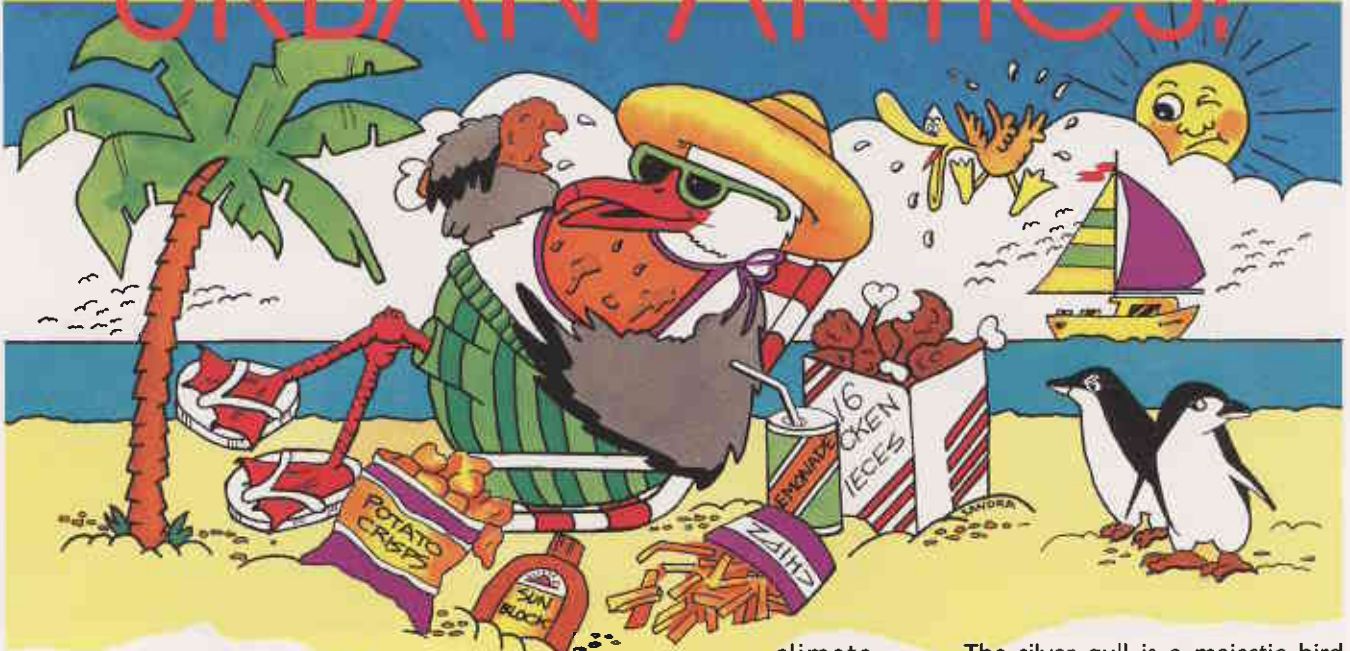


URBAN ANTICS!



GULLS, GULLS, GULLS

"Thick as flies," the old bloke muttered through clenched teeth.

"Once you could turn your back on 'em for a second, but now it's a sure way to lose your bait, your lunch, your fishin' spot and your bleedin' cool."

I thought for a moment. He was right. Whether it's the Hay Street Mall in Perth, or dodging the flocks on Lake Monger Drive, there are a lot more gulls now than there used to be.

The silver gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*) is often wrongly called a seagull, but gulls are essentially shorebirds. (Most seabirds, like penguins, albatross and petrels return to the land only to breed.)

Equally at home in city parks, inland river systems, rubbish dumps and coastal beaches, most silver gulls in Western Australia are found in the south-west of the State. They breed on about 100 islands around the coastline, mostly in small colonies. Around centres of human habitation however, the colonies have exploded.

Islands near Perth where increases have occurred include those in Shoalwater Bay (Penguin Island), Carnac and islets around Rottnest. Elsewhere, numbers have increased on Green Islet (Oyster Harbour, Albany) and Lancelin Island. There are also indications of increases on Pilbara islands.

Around Australia, most gull species nest once a year, but because of Perth's

climate, local silver gulls more often lay two eggs in both spring and autumn. The availability of freshwater lakes and reservoirs around the metropolitan area helps the gulls survive during hot summers.

Silver gulls eat almost anything and their diet varies greatly with locality. They feed naturally on dead fish, plankton and crustaceans washed up in beached seaweed. However, research has shown that a high proportion of gulls' food now consists of fried chicken, sausages and bread.

Unfortunately, the great adaptability of silver gulls to human environments - especially open rubbish tips - and the bad habits of people hand-feeding them with food scraps, have seen this bird develop into an urban nuisance and have made the naturally aggressive gull even bolder.

Local recreation grounds and picnic spots are often turned into gull begging sites with squabbling, noisy free-for-alls. Other places are simply spoiled by the sheer numbers of gulls present.

On Rottnest Island and City Beach, gulls have attacked children and adults either to extort food or because a loafing flock has had its section of the beach disturbed. Some metropolitan swimming pools have been 'poo-luted' by waiting flocks, while vegetation on small islands has been taken for nesting material, causing concern about wind erosion.

The silver gull is a majestic bird and its cohabitation with humans has always brought pleasure to all. To retrieve that natural balance and tolerant situation in our towns and cities, where gulls once existed in scattered small groups, local governments, corporations and individuals must not feed the wild animals!

Do the gulls a favour - wrap your unwanted fish and chips and put them in the bin, and Jonathon Livingston Seagull may again soar in effortless flight, to be admired and not admonished.

JOHN HUNTER

DID YOU KNOW?

- Gulls are migratory birds and become regular residents of particular places, leaving only to breed and returning year after year. Some 80 000 exist in Western Australia.
- Seasonally, flocks of silver gulls will venture inland in a feeding frenzy over suburban areas, to feast on swarms of flying ants.
- Immature gulls have brown eyes, legs and bills. Adults have white eyes with a red eye-ring and scarlet bill and legs. Any group of silver gulls establishes a hierarchy of dominance at a feeding ground. At night they all leave their feeding grounds to roost.

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHT NO. 3 AUTUMN ISSUE 1993



'Where there's fire there's smoke'. We look at one of the lesser known and misunderstood products of bushfires on page 10.



Banksias and blackboys are normally associated with the sandplains of the coast and wheatbelt rather than the Great Victoria Desert. See page 22.



The mountains of the Stirling Range are a refuge harbouring many ancient species of spiders. Spider expert Barbara York Main shows us some of them on page 28.



The disappearance of the Zuytdorp remained a mystery for many years. The story of its rediscovery and the formation of the Zuytdorp Nature Reserve is on page 42.



A new book, Perth Outdoors, aims to encourage people to get outdoors and enjoy nature and to learn more about Perth's unique natural communities. See page 35.

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COVER

The palisade spider (Neohomogona stirlingi) is endemic to the Stirling and Porongurup Ranges. It builds a shallow burrow with an open entrance surrounded by a palisade, or collar of leaves and twigs, which may project several centimetres above the ground or litter.

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