

# BIRDS DROWNING IN OPEN TOP TANKS

Just how important it is for members of the public to express their ideas on conservation problems was brought home to us recently when the Department received the following letter from Mr A. E. Leer of Manly Vale, N.S.W.

"Dear Sir,

I am a keen aviculturist and in the past have had an open permit from the Chief Secretary's Department to keep all Australian birds.

Just recently I returned from a trip through various States and down through the centre of Australia and during this period I found a lot of evidence of one of the worst things that happen to birds each year—that of drowning.

They drown in open-top tanks at windmills and bores. The birds travel hundreds of miles to water in the heat and when they get there in mobs, they land on one another on the edge of the tanks and push one another in. A big percentage get drowned. I think every open-top tank, galvanised or iron, should have a wire netting top over it, preferably the netting just hanging into the water to enable the birds to have a drink and a bath if they need it and, if any of them did happen to fall in when pushed, they could get out on the wire netting—dry themselves then fly away. Failing this, some old wooden ends from cable drums could be left floating in the water so they could have their drink from the boards or get out on to the boards if they fell in. This idea, I feel, should be made compulsory on all bores and windmill sites and I am sure the property owners

would co-operate. I have noticed on numerous occasions every time you go to the tank there are always bird skeletons which have to be pulled out. If tanks were ever drained they would find hundreds of skulls of various types of birds.

In the past I used to trap and collect birds and animals for the late Sir Edward Hallstrom from all over Australia. In 1952 I went to Cook on the Nullarbor Plains in search of the Night Parrot, travelling through towards Lake Morris and some 30 miles out from Cook there are some holes marked on the map called the Nigger Holes—the only surface fresh water for some 80 miles. When I arrived, the water was down 6 inches from the top of the rock and some were only two feet deep. I raked out the residue from the bottom of one of these holes and pulled out some 70 skulls of Port Lincoln or Twenty Eight Parrots, showing what percentage of birds do die from drowning and the hole was only about 3 feet round.

The birds cannot breed quickly enough to make up for the numbers getting drowned. Even the numbers of the common love-bird have been reduced by half by drowning in man-made water sites."

In reply, the Department promised to give these excellent thoughts and ideas the publicity they deserve. Honorary Wardens and other readers who have the opportunity to put Mr Leer's theories into practice are urged to do so; we would be interested to hear of the results.