

PREDATION BY SILVER GULLS ON MALLARD x PACIFIC BLACK DUCK HYBRID DUCKLINGS. In August-September 1986 a Mallard x Pacific Black Duck *Anas platyrhynchos* x *superciliosa* hybrid incubated and hatched a clutch of 11 eggs at a nest in my back yard at West Lakes, ca 12 km NW of the centre of Adelaide. The female duck was similar to a Pacific Black Duck but had less distinct facial markings, dark yellow-green legs and bill, and a purple-blue speculum with wing coverts anterior to the spectrum edged with white. The male duck that defended the nest area during incubation lacked the white collar and the green head of the Mallard; also, the chestnut of its breast, although still evident, was mottled with dull colours similar to those of the female.

The property backs onto the artificial fresh water pond on Delfin Island and is used daily by the resident ducks of the pond to feed on the clover in the lawns and the garden snails and slugs.

On 17 September 1986, eleven ducklings hatched. By the afternoon of 19 September the females and the ducklings had disappeared from the yard. A search of the pond was made and the

female, with only nine ducklings, was located in the one metre wide overflow channel from the main pond. A neighbour confirmed that the female had been seen walking with the ducklings down the street towards the overflow channel. To reach the street, the female would presumably have had to fly over the two metre high brush fence and then coax the ducklings through the only gap between the fence and my garage.

At 1530 hours on 19 September, the female was observed on the centre of the main pond with the nine ducklings. By 1600 all of the ducklings had been killed by Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae*, which are always present in the area.

The gulls employed a mobbing tactic whereby they encircled the family group of ducks. One gull then attempted to take one of the ducklings and this immediately caused a response in the adult female duck. She attacked the gull and, seizing it, dragged it under the water. While she was engaged in this activity, the rest of the gulls picked up the rest of the ducklings and carried them off.

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