

SILVER GULLS ROOSTING ON TEMPORARILY FLOODED LAND

By G. CLARKE.

Salisbury Highway is a main road feeding traffic into Salisbury from Adelaide and the South, and connects into the Adelaide-Port Wakefield road at its southern end, north of Cavan. The land adjacent to the south end of the Highway is subject to seasonal flooding, and during 1964 this situation was further aggravated by extra water being pumped onto the land by a large Public Works construction undertaking then being carried out.

This, together with the normal rainfall, resulted in a floodwater area of a few acres, which existed from the middle of June until the end of the year. The depth of this water at its deepest point could not have exceeded one foot.

The Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*) frequented this area in considerable numbers over the whole period of the flooding; for instance, there were an estimated 675-750 present at 1620 hrs. on October 31, though numbers were usually lower than this.

The water was used by the birds as a rest and toilet area on coming in from foraging over the surrounding countryside, and some birds could be found there throughout the day. However, the main concentrations were to be found in the late afternoon when they congregated prior to flying back to their normal roost, situated on the coast a few miles to the west and north-west. Likewise the area also served as a halting place when the birds returned the following morning from the roost on their way to the feeding grounds, the first action on alighting being usually to drink. Little time was spent here usually, the birds continuing onwards.

On December 13, at 1940 hrs., 100-120 birds were noted, half of which were packed in a tight bunch at the south end of the water facing into a southerly breeze. The remainder were spread out, mainly at their toilet. Returning at 2155 hrs. the birds were now found to be all bunched at the south

end, and this is my first note of them actually roosting here.

On December 21 I again visited the area and found 150-200 birds at roost at 2005 hrs. It was also noted that the water was receding fast, a large area of mud being visible around the edge.

December 26 saw an even larger number present, there being 200-250 at 2340 hrs., again bunched at the south end in a southerly breeze. The birds were, on all visits at night, visible in the reflections of the lights of Para Hills.

My next visit was on the evening of

December 31 at 2035 hrs., when only a relatively small area of water remained. There was no wind and 100-120 birds were found to be settled in the centre of the water. This was the last time that the birds were seen, as when I next visited the area at 1935 hrs. on January 3, 1965, the surface water was found to have disappeared completely.

From the foregoing it would appear that the roost was steadily building up in numbers when the falling water-table completely ended its use, and shows the species' adaptiveness in forming a new roost closer to their feeding grounds.