

BIRD NOTES

SILVER GULL ATTEMPTING TO

SWALLOW A SNAKE. Together with E.B. Ashton on 19 December 1979 at the I.C.I. Saltfields, St Kilda, I observed a Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* attempting to swallow a dead snake. The snake, (*Pseudonaja* sp. ?) was ca 400mm in length, 15mm thick, lightish brown dorsally, pale yellowish ventrally and with a small bullet-shaped head. Observed from 30m the bird, having pecked at the snake, held it centrally for six seconds before swallowing it head first. However, the last 35mm or so of the snake protruded from the bird's bill; the bird's neck was much swollen and distorted! The gull then walked across to a pool and tried swallowing the snake with sips of salt water. After further unsuccessful "neck-stretchings" the gull tried swallowing sandy mud. Several times it regurgitated the snake and tried again. Our observations ended after 20 minutes when, with another Silver Gull coming to investigate, the first gull rather arduously flew off, snake tip protruding from its bill, the second gull in pursuit.

Although Silver Gulls are opportunistic and ambitious feeders, it would appear that they have little experience with snakes. One wonders at the possibility of impaction as has been recorded in the case of a Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus* choking to death when attempting to swallow a skink (Hobbs, J., 1979, *Aust. Birdwatcher* 8: 65).

----- C.B. ASHTON. Accepted 28 April 1983.