

BIRD NOTE

GALAH DEATHS IN ADELAIDE. In late June 1984 there were reports in the local media in Adelaide of considerable numbers of Galahs, *Cacatua roseicapilla* dying in two of Adelaide's southern suburbs after eating almonds. There was concern that the nuts may have been poisoned. An investigation carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service confirmed that at least two flocks of Galahs containing about 60 birds were affected. Post mortem of six birds by the South Australian Department of Supply, Division of Chemistry, showed that kernels from the nuts contained high levels (230 mg/kg) of hydrocyanic acid whereas the maximum level permitted in almonds, under regulation of the Food and Drugs Act, is 5 mg per kg. No traces of pesticides, arsenic or strychnine were detected.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has had several similar cases of Galah deaths

reported to it in the past. The common factor has always been mature almond eaten during the winter months, especially during periods of damp weather. It appears as though the hydrocyanic acid level of mature almonds increases when the almonds become damp, possibly because they commence to germinate. Some hard-shelled almond varieties are known to have higher levels of cyanogenetic compounds than the soft-shelled varieties commonly grown for commercial crops (pers. comm. Dept. of Agric.).

L. Delroy, South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, Box 1782, Adelaide, S.A. 5001.

Accepted 12 February 1985