



Above: Matthew Perry (left) with injured swan and Laurie Levy with an injured white ibis. The birds were rescued at Lake Boort. The swan later died but the ibis recovered after veterinary treatment.

DUCK SEASON '88

Patty Mark

The 1988 duck season opening was again riddled with cruelty. Fortunately, however, duckshooters' threats of extreme acts of violence against rescue workers did not eventuate.

Rescue teams in three Australian states - Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia - worked throughout the 19-20 March opening weekend to rescue injured birds and retrieve the bodies of illegally shot protected species. Numerous threats by shooters to 'kill rescue workers, fire at airplanes, smash kayaks and canoes and destroy walkie-talkies' failed to happen and animal liberationists were free to concentrate their energies on helping injured victims. The Victorian

Field and Game Association was reported to have had over 100 representatives on the wetlands to warn shooters to behave themselves when around rescue workers and not kill protected species.

National media coverage of the opening weekend brought to the general public graphic footage of the uncontrolled slaughter and suffering on Australia's magnificent wetlands. For the last 200 years, duckshooters have been blasting away at anything that moves, virtually unnoticed. But now the enormous amount of media coverage generated by the Animal Liberation campaign has clearly highlighted the plight of Australia's defenseless native waterfowl. These gentle birds are pitted against cowards who hide behind fence-posts or

makeshift hides and blast away at them with semi-automatic lethal weapons. Over the last three years the ducks have at last found a voice and are fighting back - and the duckshooters don't like it.

In Victoria, Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands Officers, together with animal liberationists, collected almost 200 dead protected birds on the opening weekend alone. This figure only accounts for the birds found and the number of Wildlife Officers was halved due to work bans. Shooters also failed to respect the legal opening time and started shooting over half an hour early in the semi-darkness.

Victorian Minister of Conservation Joan Kirner has put the future of duckshooting in her state in doubt because of the shooters' annual determination to break the law by shooting early and killing protected species. She stated that a review would decide whether duckshooting would be allowed in 1989. After statewide reports of early shooting she stated 'When they (shooters) break the rules, that makes it hard for them to maintain their season.'

The strongest weapon in the battle to ban duck season, however, will be the NSW Government Animal Welfare Advisory Committee's report on duckshooting handed down in February. The report of this broadly based committee comprising vets, farmers groups and researchers recommended a ban on duck season because of the cruelty involved. The Victorian Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) has been instructed by Minister for Agriculture Evan Walker to study the report and provide him with recommendations on the future of duck season.

Rescue actions

Victoria

The largest rescue teams were in Victoria, which has by far the most registered shooters. Laurie Levy, who has tirelessly masterminded the successful media expose of the cruelty, led the rescue workers into action to help save the injured birds. The massive job of organising 500 rescue workers throughout the state was coordinated by Debbie Tremayne. The majority of rescuers worked in the wetlands near Kerang, a small northern Victorian town near the Murray River billed as a 'waterbird wonderland'.

The Victorian Blue Cross Society certainly came to the rescue by donating the use of its mobile veterinary surgery which proved invaluable in saving the lives of many injured birds. Dr John Auty, ex-assistant director of the Bureau of Animal Health in the Department of Primary Industry, along with his wife Jean and daughter Kate, staffed the van and on opening day alone treated over 50 injured waterfowl from the Top Marsh near Kerang.

The persistent and courageous efforts of the rescue workers saved many birds and were interrupted only briefly by a shooter who amazingly lowered his gun and fired at Laurie Levy as he was racing to help an injured bird flapping on the water. I was nearby and witnessed the event with several other team members. Luckily the shot missed Laurie and he has reported the matter to the police. Two other rescuers sprayed by pellets shortly after the incident received minor injuries.

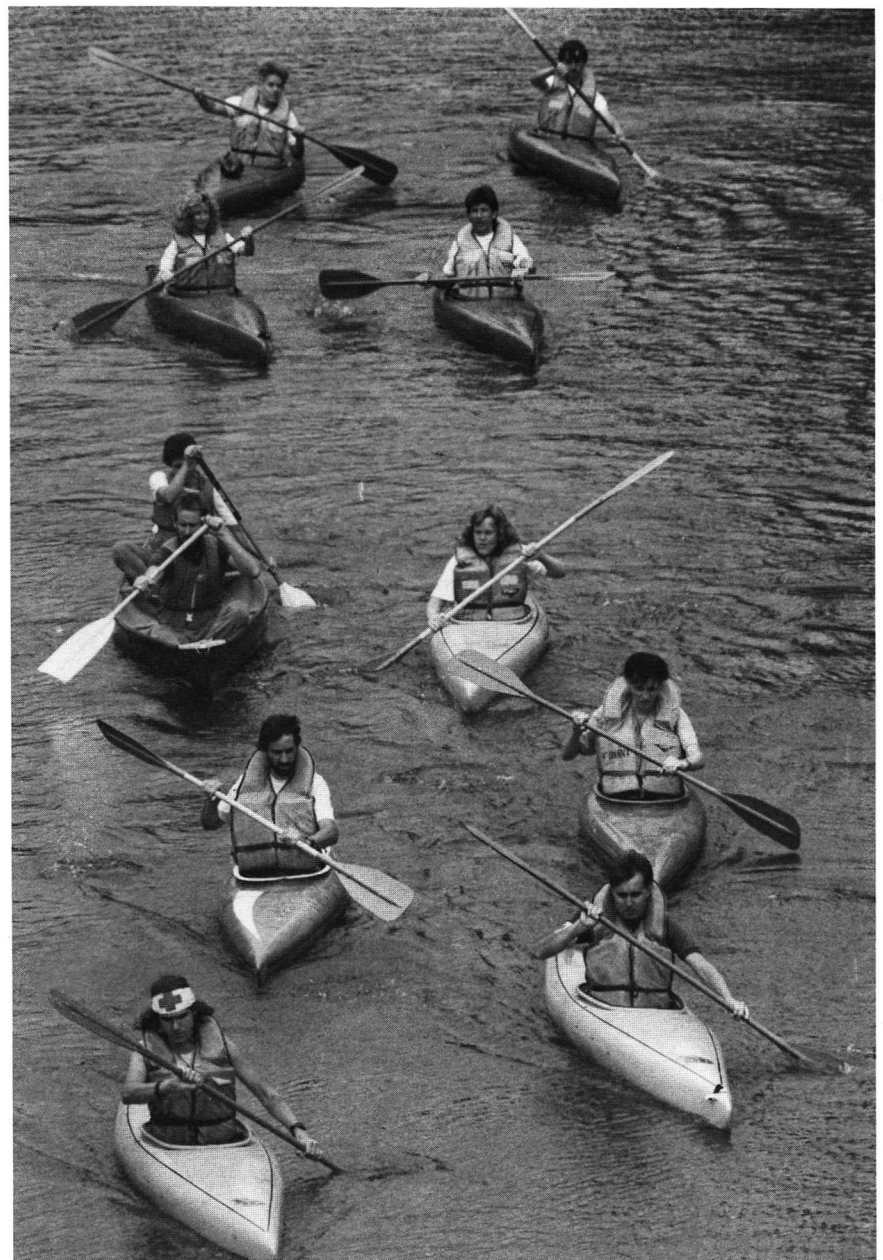
Animal Liberation air force was led by Wangaratta pilot Dianna Simpson in her Tiger Moth. Five aircraft buzzed the wetlands to move birds towards sanctuaries and to alert ground crews as to

where the shooting was most dense.

The Geelong area team was led by Professor Peter Singer who reported that a lot of shooting occurred despite the persistence of fog conditions until 10am. He said shooting there also started well before the legal time. Singer, a member of the Victorian AWAC, stated that his eyewitness account of the cruelty would be important when AWAC reviews the future of duck season in Victoria.

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Below: Members of the Victorian duck rescue team having kayak training on the Yarra River prior to the opening of the season. Photo courtesy *The Age*.



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The Albury-Wodonga team led by Tony Clunies-Ross and Bethany Aldridge picked up 32 dead birds. The team leaders said they did not see one Fisheries and Wildlife Officer in the area; Superintendent Peter Moore of the National Parks and Wildlife Service confirmed that no officers were assigned to the Albury region at the weekend. He said, 'Our department has a lack of funds, so we are short-staffed.' Clunies-Ross, Vice-President of Animal Liberation Victoria, stated that duckshooting was totally out of control in the area and that his rescue team, by patrolling it, was doing the job of the absent Wildlife Officers.

Members of the kayak rescue squad, expertly trained and led by Marc Busch and Terri McEwan, were spread among the teams and did an excellent job ferrying the injured birds to the shore for veterinary treatment.

New South Wales

A team of 20 Animal Liberation NSW members and two members of Fund for Animals drove for nine hours to Barren Box Swamp in southern NSW to help native waterfowl. The dead protected birds collected, including a galah and heron, were delivered to the newly elected Premier of NSW, Nick Greiner, at a Parliament House rally. Noted Australian naturalist and wildlife author Vincent Serventy addressed the rally and appealed for an end to duck season.

Christine Townend, who led a team to Tullacool near Deniliquin, also spoke about the cruelty she witnessed: 'The ducks were just coming in from other areas to feed when they were shot at and hit, some by several bullets from different shooters. It was just a slaughter. They were blasting at ducks still flapping and dying in the water. I saw one shooter grab a duck and crush its head beneath the heel of his boot. It was awful.'

Also speaking out against duck season at the rally were Milo Dunphy, Vice-President of the Australian Conservation Foundation; Richard Jones, editor of *Simply Living* magazine and potentially successful MP candidate; and Lindy Stacker, representing Greenpeace.

South Australia

Animal liberationists attending the opening at Bool Lagoon reported shooting before the legal time, but said shooters' numbers were dropping off due to the presence of liberationists. They welcomed the erection of boardwalks by the National Parks and Wildlife Service as a positive move to attract tourists to the area. NPWS expects Bool Lagoon to be self-sufficient in three years thanks to tourist dollars.

Western Australia

The Western Australian Government declared a two-year moratorium on duckshooting because of drought conditions.

Action

Words on paper can never adequately describe the senseless slaughter and agony these gentle birds suffer. The armies of men dressed in camouflage gear with big guns and belts of bullets around their waists, hiding behind fence-posts and trees, must be stopped. Duckshooting must come to an end.

Below: Dr John Auty, ex assistant director of the Federal Bureau of Animal Health, examines an injured swan. Photo: Patty Mark

Animal liberationists and other concerned members of the public will not stop their campaign to rescue the victims of this one-sided massacre. Rescue teams will continue to go out to the wetlands for the rest of the three-month season. Members of the public are invited to contact the Animal Liberation office in their state should they wish to volunteer their assistance.

There are many ways to help get this barbaric 'sport' outlawed. Write letters to your state premier, local member of parliament, minister for conservation, local newspaper. Send a contribution to Animal Liberation: high-profile campaigns which have to safeguard people's safety cost a lot of money.

If we all help out it won't be long before the swans, cygnets, ducks, herons and many other gentle waterbirds will be able to live their lives in peace undisturbed by cowardly men playing games with lethal weapons.

Opposite page: Animal Liberation Victoria Vice President, Tony Clunies-Ross with illegally shot dead protected species retrieved on the opening of duck season. Photo courtesy *Border Morning Mail*.



