

# The ponds of doom

**Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance**

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MUCH has been written around the world on tailing dams as the cause of deaths of local fauna.

Writing in 2019, Gao and Guo describe tailing dams or ponds as “*part of the industrial process used to store mine tailings, which are end-of-the-pipe waste sand products of mining operations*”.

These ponds sometimes resemble lakes or wetlands. Their similarity to natural lakes attracts birds seeking roosting sites and foraging opportunities.

The inability to differentiate between a natural lake and a tailings pond affects bird survival, including in Australia where tailings dams have been responsible for an enormous number of bird deaths.

An example includes the Mt Windarra Mine, a nickel mining venture in the goldfields of Western Australia.

Research by Ryan and Shanks (1996) found that in late 1985, 60,000 Budgerigars died as a result of the water solution containing cyanide.

Northparkes Mine in NSW is a copper and gold mine still operating today.

In 1995 about two years after operations commenced 2700 bird deaths were attributed to the same cyanide solution.

Ryan and Shanks found affected birds included waterfowl along with other species including Kites, Terns, and Stilts.

Mount Todd in the Northern Territory which has a tailings dam of approximately 130ha has had similar problems.

Seed-eating birds such as finches, consumed what they believed was water, subsequently dying.

In 1996 the Mineral Council advised approximately 1000 birds die annually at gold mine tailings dams in Australia.

I believe these figures would be a very low estimate as this is one problem mining companies are likely to keep quiet about.

Chalice Mining in the Toodyay Shire is

situated on private land.

However, it is next door to Julimar Forest which has a number of protected species.

To date 140 species of birds have been recorded, 8 species of bats and a large number of native mammals many of which are considered endangered.

While Chalice has responded to the earthquake risk at Gonneville it has yet to explain averting the problem of local fauna being attracted to tailings dam and subsequent death.

Terrestrial fauna can be fenced out, but flying fauna cannot.

This begs the question – what is the community’s responsibility to native fauna?

Australia is one of the worst countries in the world for the number of species that have been lost, never to be seen again.