

# Racecourse resorts to bad calls to get the gulls out

Brendan Cormick

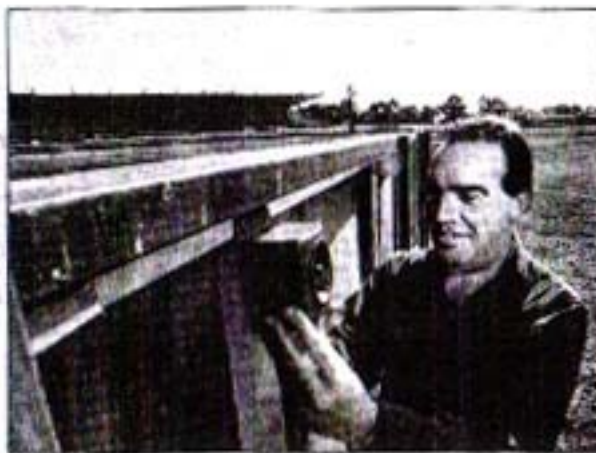
VICTORIAN racing officials have backed a winner with their ploy to take back Sandown racecourse from a flock of seagulls and return it to the horses.

A long-range, solar-powered, all-weather speaker system will broadcast a variety of bird calls to disperse unwanted birdlife.

The portable gadget, hooked up to four speakers, emulates the distress and predatory sounds of 60 different birds.

On March 30, seagulls, outnumbering racegoers by at least 50 to one, caused mayhem in the final race of the day. Thousands of birds congregated on the track and the lake inside the course, becoming airborne as the field turned into the home straight, blinding jockeys and causing five to be dislodged from their mounts.

"We've had problems with



**New tack:** Course manager Dane Hunt with a speaker

seagulls on and off for 20 years," Sandown racecourse manager Dane Hunt said yesterday. "Today, there are only about 100 seagulls on the track, so the signs are good."

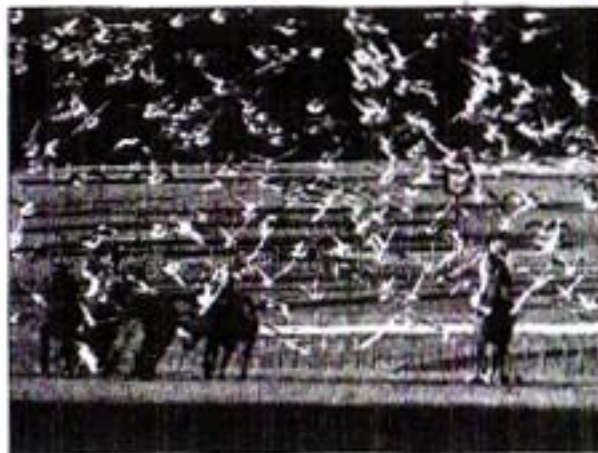
Some suggested remedies were as ridiculous as they were cruel, but the solution came from Tasmanian company PestX, which distrib-

utes the US-made Super Bird-Xpeller Pro. It can be programmed to emit the sounds any time across a 24 hour period with varying intervals over a 24ha area without distressing humans or horses.

The unit has already been used at the Zinifex Smelter in Hobart and succeeded in reducing the seagull population

by 90 per cent. Saturation coverage over a period of 10 days had a noticeable effect on the seagulls at Sandown, dramatically thinning their numbers. Subsequent race meetings have gone ahead without a hiccup, yet alone a squawk.

Extra staff patrol the inside of the racecourse during race meetings, the club desperate



**Up and down:** The birds disrupt a race on March 30

to prevent a recurrence of the March 30 fiasco.

"We've used the recording in conjunction with some other safety measures, including cutting our grass shorter and finishing our race meetings earlier, and have seen a major decline in seagull numbers," Melbourne Racing Club chief executive Warran Brown said.

"It isn't a victory yet but we see our trial of the technology as a possible longer-term solution that will help us ensure the safety of jockeys and horses."

The club is also looking into using the technology to rein in a pigeon problem around the stable complexes at its other course, Caulfield.

