

# 4

## Human impacts

The adaptability of native wetland animals and plants over thousands or even millions of years was emphasised in the last chapter, but over the last two centuries that adaptability has been put to new tests as indigenous plants and animals have been threatened by an array of processes created by us, the European invaders of a country we still seem to have little understanding or appreciation of.

These threats and challenges cover a wide array of ills from depletion of natural water resources to increasing salinity, with the effects of global warming only really beginning to bite now. Introduction of vermin and weeds also continues despite the environmental problems they cause, but these two ills are discussed in the next two chapters.

### Drainage

The most frontal attack on wetlands is drainage, whether this is just a channel to run water off a low-lying corner of a paddock, or a massive system of canals such as have destroyed 90% of the wetlands in south-eastern South Australia, and possibly a similar area on the Swan coastal plain around Perth. At least one-third of all Victorian wetlands are gone, three-quarters of those in the Sydney area, and we don't really know how much has vanished in many other areas because no-one cared enough to note their passing.

The results have long been obvious. Storm waters run off to sea more rapidly, and carry more soil and nutrients than ever before (see Plate 17). Floods are more serious, because most watercourses have been altered so much that flows are less controlled by the natural processes which used to regulate them, including their