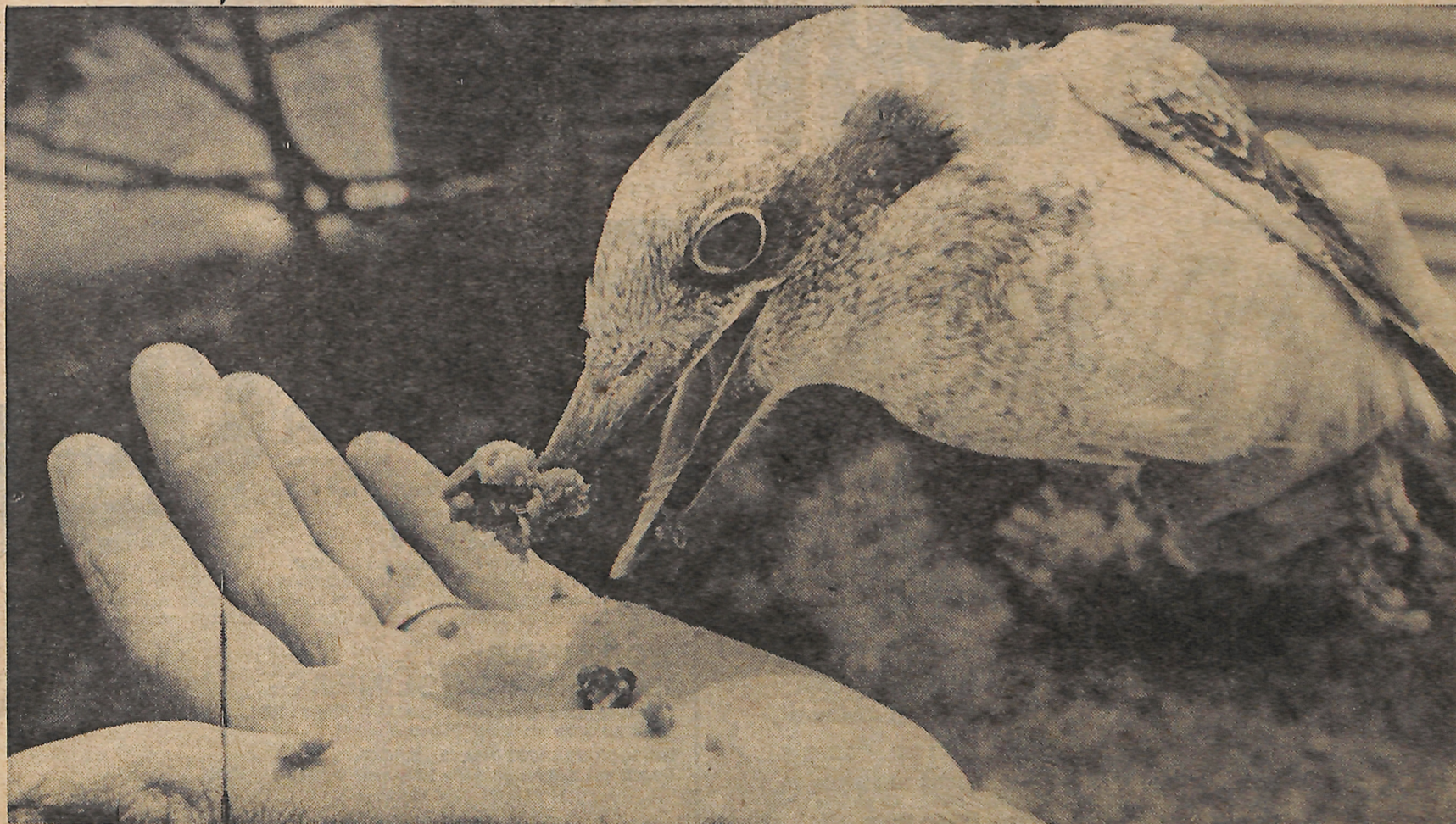**MR GAVIN CERINI,** manager of the Tower Hill State Game Reserve, looks towards Tower Hill.

THREE emus stroll past the Natural History Centre and administrative block at the reserve. It was designed by the late R o b i n Boyd.

JANE CERINI, 4, the reserve manager's daughter, with a sugar glider. The Tower Hill reserve is near Warrnambool.

A YOUNG koo... Mr Cerini's han... kookaburras an... Cerini is rearing... them loose in...

NATURE GETS A SECOND CHANCE . . .

WILDLIFE IN THE SUN

Tower Hill lives again

Pictures: IAN McPHERSON

By KEVIN KILLEY

THE sign at the Tower Hill State Game Reserve reads:

"Destruction is so easy. Man's part in recreation is small indeed. Can we recreate the whole? This is doubtful. Whether we are successful or not, this restoration will widen our understanding of the environment . . . "

As you drive through this 1500-acre reserve, pillaged by 100 years of farming and quarrying, these words have a chilling effect.

Everywhere you look there are scars — landscape disfigurement.

Hills have been decapitated, farmlands gutted, wildlife habitats destroyed.

This is an area where once 30 species of native mammals roamed. There were thousands of thousands of animals.

Today only three species are left. You can almost count the number of animals on one hand.

The cold, crazy truth is driven home when you visit the Tower Hill manager's residence which overlooks the reserve.

There you see three kookaburras and a sugar glider being hand fed. The chances are that one day they will be turned loose in the area they once r o a m e d freely.

But at least at Tower Hill there's still hope.

The first steps of restoring the reserve have started.

Eighty-five - thousand trees have been planted and another 30,000 will be planted next year.

The bird life has already started returning to the area.

The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife is in charge of this unique restoration and management program.

Tower Hill, eight miles west of Warrnambool, is 171 miles west of Melbourne.

It is made up of three islands Main Island, 320 acres; Fairy Island, 60 acres; Hat Island, two acres. A lake covers almost 900 acres.

Volcano

It is believed the shape of the reserve was formed by a volcano about 7300 years ago.

A look at the history of Tower Hill shows how this area has been ravaged.

In the 1850s the pioneers to the district noted "heavy undergrowth of ferns and native laburnum, thick forests of stunted gums . . . heavily timbered."

In 1855, the European painter, Eugene von Guerard, was commissioned to paint the magnificence of Tower Hill. The painting is on display in the reserve's Natural History Centre.

By 1870, burning, grazing and cutting for firewood had destroyed most of the natural vegetation.

Such was the rate of natural destruction that an attempt was made in the 1860s to improve the area.

European plants, animals and birds were introduced with disastrous results.

For a time the island was used as a common, while around the rim of the lake illegal squatters, vegetable growers, and graziers depleted the natural resources.

Soon little wildlife remained.

Then came the quarrying.

Vegetation

But, following moves begun in 1959, Tower Hill was proclaimed Victoria's seventh wildlife reserve in 1961. This meant that all quarrying on the reserve stopped and vermin control programs had an immediate effect on the vegetation.

Mr Gavin Cerini, 32, the area's game management officer, describes Tower Hill as a "challenge."

"It's a start, a good start," he said.

"From this restoration program we will learn a lot.

"Tower Hill is an educational centre in conservation.

"The accent will be on teaching people from all over the state."

Victoria has 35 wildlife reserves. More are planned.

ONE of the emus at the reserve. The area once teemed with wildlife, but farming and quarrying drove the animals out. Mr Cerini said the reserve was a "challenge." He said Tower Hill was an educational centre in conservation and a lot would be learned from it.

...kaburra eats out of ...d. It is one of three ...a sugar glider Mr ...He hopes to turn ...the reserve.