

Park pass 'forgery'

MP accuses wildlife staff

By SIMON BENSON
Environment Reporter

NATIONAL Parks and Wildlife Service officers were involved in forging annual passes for free access to national parks, according to the NSW Opposition.

The staff also "lost" more than \$27,000 worth of legitimate passes, allegations levelled at the agency claim.

Despite the allegations having already been investigated by the ICAC, the Opposition chose to make the claims public by revealing them to Parliament.

Documents obtained by a former NPWS employee claim col-

our photocopiers were regularly used to forge annual passes to national parks — some worth hundreds of dollars each.

The employee, who refused to be named, also produced documents showing senior staff used corporate credit cards to pay for expenses of partners on business trips, plus alcohol and pizzas.

The allegations were raised in Parliament by National Party MP and member for Oxley, Andrew Stoner.

A spokesman for Environment Minister Bob Debus said

the allegations had been "thrown out" by the ICAC and the attack by the Opposition was without justification.

"The Opposition has an appalling record in regards to making these kinds of allegations, which upon investigation proved to be unsubstantiated," Mr Debus said.

"The majority of the claims which the member for Oxley read on to the record had been investigated and were found to have no substance."

Among the allegations were claims of unfettered spending, including expenses for \$1500 spent on a wallpaper consultant, an \$81,000 refurbishment of the Parramatta NPWS office and \$339 spent on a meal at Coffs Harbour.

The documents also allege gross financial mismanagement and the refusal to pay bills which forced the State Debt Recovery Office to intervene.

"These issues are of grave concern," Mr Stoner told NSW Parliament. "The seriousness of the financial ineptitude is

evidenced by the fact that one government agency owed money by the NPWS was forced to go to the State Debt Recovery Office ... on three separate occasions.

"Of equal concern is the cover-up culture in the NPWS.

"These issues have all been swept under the carpet by the management of the NPWS."

The allegations follow a number of embarrassing incidents for the NPWS, including the accidental killing of 42 penguins at Montague Island last weekend.

An investigation is also under way into the accidental killing of 1700 endangered bats in January this year.