

Spines and hair of hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) were found in 15 castings, and skins complete with spines were found at the nests (Table 2) and once on the terrace. Although Harriers have been observed feeding from hedgehogs killed on roads it was surprising to find these animals included in the diet of the study birds as the nearest back country road is some six miles away.

Rabbits are scarce in the area, and only one casting contained fur of this animal. The remainder of the mammalian foods were carrion of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) and sheep, which were identified by hair and wool.

Remains of birds were found in ten castings. Seven contained small unidentified birds, probably Pipits *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, and one each contained remains of: a Paradise Duck *Tadorna variegata*; a juvenile Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*; a young Magpie *Gymnorhina* sp. A partly devoured Yellow-hammer *Emberiza citrinella* was found at one of the nests, and the carcass of a young Magpie on the terrace.

The most common insect material in 13 castings was of Carabid beetles; the remains of wetas (*Hemideina thoracica*), cicadas (*Melampsalta* sp.), grasshoppers and large dragonflies (*Uroptala carovei*) were also recorded.

It is evident that a large part of the food of these Harriers was carrion.

#### REFERENCE

FLEMING, C. A., 1941: Summarized classified notes. Annu. Rep. N.Z. Orn. Soc. 1940-41, p. 48.



## SHORT NOTE

### HARRIER CHASES AND CAPTURES BLACKBIRD

Oliver (1955, New Zealand Birds, p. 430) states that the Harrier *Circus approximans* has been recorded taking birds on the wing, and Witherby *et al.* (1939, The Handbook of British Birds, vol. 3, p. 66) report similarly of the Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus*. In my experience of several species of harriers, they almost always rely on surprise to catch birds and until recently I had never seen one chase and catch an apparently healthy bird.

At about 14.00 hours on 31/12/69, near Cape Palliser, southern Wairarapa, I noticed a Harrier flying fast down wind towards the sea at a height of about 20 feet above the coastal dune; and through binoculars I saw that it was chasing a Blackbird *Turdus merula* flying low over the ground some 30 yards ahead of it. The shore was here quite exposed and entirely without cover for the Blackbird, which found itself "cornered" between the Harrier and the deep blue sea. With a stiff off-shore breeze the Blackbird funkled the sea and landed on the sand at the top of the beach, about 20 yards from the water. The Harrier came in low and slightly overshot the Blackbird, wheeled smartly and dropped onto it. After standing still with the Blackbird in its talons for two or three minutes, the Harrier took off and flew inland with its kill, without leaving any feathers from which to age or sex the Blackbird.

This incident shows how efficiently a Harrier can "corner" a bird that has strayed from cover, and how vulnerable such a bird may be. As this was the only Blackbird I saw in three days on this exposed shore, perhaps it paid the price for trespassing into unsuitable habitat.

— J. A. GIBB