

HARRIER WITHOUT FEET

In the 1950s some acclimatisation societies still entertained a few quaint ideas about the value of control of alleged predators. This was something of a legacy from more primitive days. At this time Harrier Hawks (*Circus approximans*) were still regarded as something of a menace, and it was with some misgivings that I found myself involved in a control programme. A bounty of one shilling was paid for every pair of feet brought in, and in addition I was expected to shoot a monthly quota.

On a calm winter's evening in 1958 I went to a known roosting area in the Waimatuku district of Southland to carry out this instruction. The first incoming bird appeared as expected at about 5 p.m. and was called up and shot. On retrieving the dead bird I immediately noticed that it had no feet. A closer examination showed that the feet plus about one third of the tarsus were missing and the stumps were completely healed over. The bird, while not a large specimen, was in at least average condition. Further examination revealed that its crop was well filled with carrion which appeared to be mutton.

I suspect that the explanation for this footless Harrier is roughly as follows: a bounty hunter had trapped the bird and attempted to kill it, probably by striking it with a stick, but in fact had only stunned it. The feet had then been cut off. Some time later the bird must have regained consciousness and flown off. In the period of unknown duration between the amputation of its feet and finally being shot this luckless Harrier had made a good recovery and adapted itself to life without the use of feet.

The futility of bounty schemes is adequately documented and no further comment on this matter is required here.

The fact that the bird survived without feet is evidence which casts further doubt on allegations that Harriers are essentially predators. In areas which carry a heavy animal population, particularly sheep, such as Southland, modern Harriers appear to be much less dependent on their ability to catch their own food than formerly.

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INCREASE IN WELCOME SWALLOWS
NEAR WHANGAREI, 1968-71

In 1968 a search for swallow nests along all main roads and most by-roads in Whangarei County located 150 breeding pairs (Munro 1969). At that time swallows were well established north of Whangarei-Dargaville highway and north-east of Whangarei, but still scarce elsewhere in the county. In the last three years there has been a remarkable increase of swallows in the city and in areas to east and south of it. In 1971 most farmers reported, for example, "the first birds appeared about two years ago, a pair nested last summer and now they are everywhere."