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."

The map shows the results of a survey of nest sites carried out during the last week of November 1971 in the area surrounding Whangarei Harbour, from roughly a line through Pataua to a line through Ruakaka. As in 1968, all main roads and most by-roads were traversed: total distance covered within this area in both 1968 and 1971 surveys was approximately 120 miles. The area surveyed falls into three sections — East Coast (Pataua-Bream Head), Southern area (Oakleigh-Ruakaka), and City.

	Nest sites located	
	1968	November 1971
East Coast	3	34
Southern Area	3	34
City	1	12
Total	7	80

Swallow population is certainly well in excess of 80 pairs. At the time of the 1971 survey no bridge had more than one nest containing eggs but about 50% of bridges inspected carried between two and six nests, some of which may have been those of a previous season; many pairs undoubtedly nest away from roads, and in the urban area especially many nest sites may have been missed. Maximum clutch observed was four eggs (six nests). All 1968 nest sites were still occupied in 1971.

The breakdown of recorded nest sites is as follows:—

Bridges	55	(including 15 farm bridges)
Culverts	5	
Buildings	15	
Wharves	2	
Sundry	3	
	80	

" Sundry " includes a nest on a fishing boat and another on a working dredge at Parua Bay, and a nest on a working dragline excavator near Ocean Beach; the parents followed their nest up and down the swamp as the dragline moved. One of the culvert nests was on the upper half of an 18" culvert which at least half filled with water at high tides. In the east section all eight county road bridges were occupied and nine nests were attached to buildings. In the South section only twenty of the 35 county road bridges were occupied and plenty of bridge sites are still available.

Of a total of 85 new and old nests found under bridges, 40 were attached to concrete girders; four of these were attached to bolts, 36 were of the unsupported type. 30 nests on steel girders, of which 10 unsupported, 15 flat nests usually on cross girders, 5 partially supported by the lower lips of the steel girders, one of these being a small flat nest built on a two-foot long foundation of mud pellets.

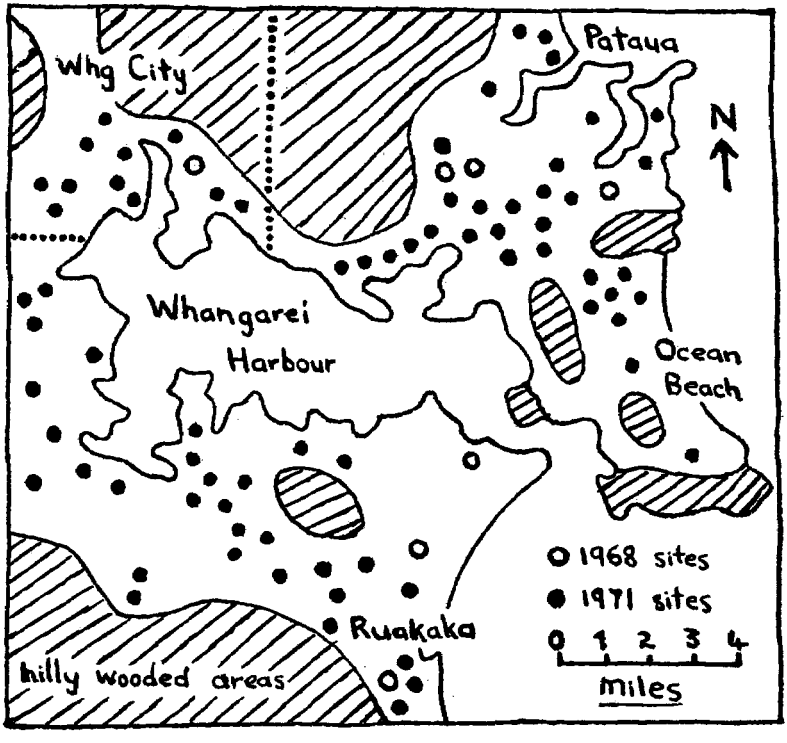

FIGURE 1: Nest sites of Welcome Swallow in area around Whangarei Harbour in 1968 and 1971.

15 nests on wooden girders, all unsupported except two flat nests on logs.

An unusual nest hung suspended from a hook of wire protruding from the concrete decking of a small farm bridge. This large nest was supported by grass stalks looped through the wire hook and cemented into the mud. The nesting cavity was built in one end of the tubular nest, the rim edges being at an angle of 45 degrees to the horizontal. A brood of chicks was successfully reared in this nest, which is now in the Auckland Museum.

My thanks are due to Mr A. T. Edgar and Mr E. G. Turbott for helpful discussion and advice.

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