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SHORT NOTE

HARRIER RECOVERS DEAD DUCK FROM WATER

On 5 June 1976, while I was in a hide beside a large dam near Martinborough (Wairarapa), a harrier (*Circus approximans gouldi*) circled, then alighted on a dead duck floating 10 m from shore. Under the weight of the harrier, the duck tilted and slowly sank until the harrier's legs and lower breast were immersed. To balance, the harrier spread its wings on the surface. Some 3-4 minutes later, the harrier endeavoured to feed on the small portion of the duck's rump above water, but on each attempt lost balance as the corpse moved. After another minute or two (of apparent intense deliberation) the harrier tried twice, without success, to lift the duck clear of the water. Finally, grasping the duck's neck with one foot, the harrier slowly progressed toward the more distant shore about 20 m away, by vigorously flapping 4 or 5 times, then resting for up to a minute. At rest, the harrier floated with wings outstretched on the water. Approximately 15-20 minutes later, the thoroughly wet harrier reached shore and pulled the duck partially clear of the water. Despite the long time in the water, the harrier flew without any apparent difficulty when the ownership of the duck was disputed!

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