

## SHORT NOTE

### Tree-nesting Harriers

On 28 October 1986, while walking through a bush remnant on my farm between Egmont Village and the National Park boundary I saw a Harrier (*Circus approximans*) fly from the top of a mahoe tree. On closer examination I saw a dark structure that might be a nest among supplejack growing in the top of the mahoe. By climbing an adjacent tree I was able to confirm that this structure 7 metres above the ground was in fact a nest containing three large white eggs. I tried to watch the nest every few days, but found this difficult to do without disturbing the female Harrier, which by 14 November had deserted the nest.

During each subsequent spring I have noticed considerable Harrier activity over this bush remnant, including aerial displays and low flying among the tree tops with wings held upwards at an angle to the body.

Some three years later and 5 km to the northeast I discovered another example of Harriers nesting in trees. On 3 December, I was shown three Harrier chicks by Ross Drinkwater on his property on Lepper Road, Inglewood. The chicks, all at the white down stage, were sitting together on the grass beside a creek and were not too upset at our close approach. We found the nest, a large bulky structure which had been built 4.5 metres above the creek bed where the foliage of a large barberry and some native mahoe and wineberry came together. The nest was constructed of dried grass, old hay, barberry hedge clippings, and many sticks and twigs up to a diameter of 2.5 cm. On 10 December 1989 we returned to the site with an extension ladder and much to our surprise found a fourth chick still on the nest platform. All four chicks were starting to grow feathers. On our third visit, on 17 December 1989, we found one young Harrier fully feathered and able to fly a short distance, one still growing but well behind its feathered mate, and one dead in the creek bed. The fourth chick was still on the nest platform but did not seem to have grown much. On 24 December 1989 we found only two young Harriers. One was an accomplished flier. The other, with patches of down still around its neck, was reluctant to fly and attempted to hide from us in some scrub. The fourth chick was not on the nest platform and was not seen again. During our visits we saw both adult Harriers. One, a very pale bird, if present when we arrived would simply fly off and circle at a distance. The other, darker and slightly larger, often called as we approached or began calling if it returned to the nest area and found us there.

The remains of prey found in the feeding areas included rats, pukeko, rabbit, duck and blackbird.

Ross, while going about his farm in the autumn, has frequently noticed one or two young Harriers perched on small trees or fence posts, indicating that two birds fledged successfully.

BILL MESSENGER, RD2, Upland Road, New Plymouth