

## SHORT NOTE

### Another Example of Tree-Nesting Harriers

Australasian Harriers (*Circus approximans gouldi*) nesting in New Zealand generally favour swamps but will also nest in scrub, fern and among crops. Tree nesting is most unusual. Skinner (1979, *Notornis* 26:119) mentioned two presumed nests in a tawa (*Beilschmiedia tawa*) at 12 m and 15 m, one containing what appeared to be a well-fledged juvenile, and also mentioned another nest at 2.5 m seen by Geoff Moon.

Recently, while checking on a pair of New Zealand Falcons (*Falco novae-seelandiae*) in the western King Country, I met Mr Andrew Haswell from Hauturu, who told me of a curious nest he and a workmate had found during the summer of 1981-82 when tree-felling on his parents' property. While working among trees felled the previous day they found two young Australasian Harriers sitting on the ground under a fallen tree amid the remains of a nest. From Mr Haswell's description the young Harriers, one well-feathered and the other still in down, were aged about two and four weeks. Both birds were taken by the workers but died within a short time. According to Mr Haswell the nest was constructed, rather loosely he thought, of sticks and was about 60 cm across. Although not sure, he thought the tree to be a mahoe (*Melicytus ramiflorus*) 5-7 m tall. Certainly it was not an emergent such as New Zealand Falcons nest in.

Naturally I checked the accuracy of these observations but Mr Haswell was adamant that the nest and young had been in the tree, and not under it when it fell, and that the young were Harriers and not Falcons. He had previously found other Harrier nests on the ground containing young, and he had watched an adult Harrier, which he presumed to be one of the parents, circle low over them while they examined the nest and young.

I am unable to explain why these birds chose to nest in a tree as there appeared nothing advantageous in the general situation of the nest, in a shallow bush-clad gully, and wide range of more typical nest sites was available nearby. However, two nestlings were being reared, and had these fledged, this nest would have been as successful as other more usual Harrier nests. Both of New Zealand's diurnal raptors, the Harrier and the New Zealand Falcon, have been reported as being markedly conservative and traditional in their choice of nest sites. It would be worthwhile for observers to report occurrences of tree-nesting Harriers so that the incidence of this behaviour can be established, together with just why these birds nest in this remarkable way.

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