

## SHORT NOTE

### Harrier attacking Black-billed Gull

On 16 December 1985, I saw an Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans*) attack a Black-billed Gull (*Larus bulleri*) that was sitting on Lake Te Anau about 20 metres from the shore.

The Harrier grasped the gull with both talons, pushing it under the surface until the Harrier itself appeared to be resting on the water. Having held the gull under the surface for about 10 seconds the Harrier then made three unsuccessful attempts to fly away with it. Another gull then appeared on the scene and harried the Harrier, which then released the gull it had been holding, took flight and began circling the gull on the water. It then made five low passes over the gull, twice attempting to grasp it. Throughout this time it was constantly harried by the second gull. With the arrival on the scene of a further two Black-billed Gulls the Harrier flew away, leaving the gull it had attacked to swim away towards the shore, where it was subsequently seen, showing no visible signs of the attack. The whole incident lasted less than 4 minutes.

Harriers have been seen taking fish from surface waters of the Waikato estuary (Habraken 1979) and fish, eels, and freshwater prawns from rivers, creeks and rice field pools in Fiji (Clunie 1980). Falla *et al.* (1979) recorded Harriers as being known to wade into shallow water after frogs and tadpoles, an action reported by Stead (Oliver 1955). Oliver also stated that Harriers are "known to catch mullet, eels and trout" and reproduced a photograph by Stead of a Harrier "picking up a floating carcass". McLennan (1976) saw a Harrier recover a dead duck from the surface of water, during which action the Harrier immersed its legs and lower breast. I have, however, been unable to find a previous record of a Harrier attacking a live bird sitting on water.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- CLUNIE, F. 1980. Harriers fishing. *Notornis* 27:114.  
 FALLA, R.A.; SIBSON, R.B.; TURBOTT, E.G. 1979. *The New Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*. Collins.  
 HABRAKEN, A. 1979. Harrier imitating osprey. *Notornis* 26:422.  
 McLENNAN, J.A. 1976. Harrier recovers dead duck from water. *Notornis* 23:249.  
 OLIVER, W.R.B. 1955. *New Zealand Birds*. 2nd edition. Reed.

WYNSTON COOPER, *Department of Conservation, PO Box 743, Invercargill*