

SHORT NOTE

HARRIERS FISHING

A. Habraken's (1979) recent observation of a Harrier (*Circus approximans*) seizing fish from the surface waters of the Waikato estuary coincides exactly with a fishing technique of the Harrier which I have often seen in Fiji.

Fiji Harriers commonly hunt low over rivers and creeks, tending to concentrate their activity about the heads of rapids and Fijian fish-trap weirs, where fish are exposed in very shallow, clear water. When catching a fish the Harrier swoops low over the surface and rakes the water with its feet, seizing a fish and flying with it to the river bank or a gravel bar to eat. Fish up to 15 cm long are often taken, their violent flexing and flapping leaving no doubt as to their being alive when seized.

Eels up to 90 cm long are also caught by this method, the ones I have seen being seized from shallow water fringed by dense grass or sedges.

I have also seen smaller fish (*Tilapia mossambica*) 7-10 cm long taken from pools in rice fields by Harriers. The Harrier typically swoops low over the rice, dropping down to alight in the shallow water to seize the fish in one foot. Frequently an unsuccessful bird will splash after the fish on foot, punching at the water. Once secured fish are carried to a dyke, either in the foot or in the beak, and eaten there. Where many fish are restricted to shrinking evaporating pools, this method can be highly successful, the dykes being littered with the remains of half-eaten fish. Several Harriers can be seen fishing a single field or sitting gorged on the dykes separating the fields, and despite the plentiful food, prey piracy and squabbles are commonplace, the birds sometimes even knocking feathers from each other. I have seen this kind of fishing several times since it was first reported by me (Clunie 1972: 4-5) and regard it as typical hunting behaviour of Harriers under these conditions.

Fish and eels are not the only prey taken from river shallows by Harriers, large freshwater prawns (Palaemonidae) also being taken. Fiji Goshawks (*Accipiter rufitorques*) also take prawns from time to time, and I have recorded one feeding on a fish, but do not know whether the fish was taken alive or stranded. These large freshwater prawns were probably responsible for Gurney's (1876) comments on the stomach contents of a Fiji Harrier. It contained "lizards and shrimps, the latter a remarkable diet for a bird of this genus."

LITERATURE CITED

- CLUNIE, F. 1972. Fijian Birds of Prey. Fiji Museum Educational Series No. 3. 14 pp. Suva.
GURNEY, J. H. 1876. Letter to the Editor of *Ibis* concerning *Accipiter rufitorques* and *Circus approximans*. *Ibis* 6: 383-384.
HABRAKEN, A. 1979. Harrier imitating Osprey. *Notornis* 26: 422.

FERGUS CLUNIE, *Fiji Museum, P.O. Box 2023, Suva, Fiji.*