

## Swamp Harrier – unusual food?

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On 20 July 2010 the authors were returning from the monthly survey of the Hunter Wetlands National Park, Tomago site (32°50'24"S, 151°44'00"E), adjacent to the North Arm of the Hunter River.

We saw a Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*, a common species in the lower Hunter Estuary, on the ground and Ray McLean approached the bird in order to see what it was eating. To our surprise, he found half an avocado and its seed. No flesh remained in the shell, but clear and obvious scratch marks were present on the inside of the skin. The harrier may have been eating the flesh of the fruit or possibly just investigating. It is a mystery as to how the avocado got to this site, but presumably there is a tree in the area or another bird – perhaps

Australian Magpie *Cracticus tibicen* or Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* – stole the avocado and dropped it. The incident took place on treeless land covered in grass and weeds, but recently mown.

The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 110) lists the prey items of this species and there is no reference to vegetable matter. Swamp Harriers will eat carrion, but it is not their preferred food.

### REFERENCE

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (Eds) (1993). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings.' (Oxford University Press: Melbourne, pp.105-122.)