

Swamp Harrier attempting to take Pacific Black Duck

Mike Newman

7 Glenurie Close, Woodville, NSW 2321, Australia

At Morpeth Waste Water Treatment Works (32°44'S, 151°37'E) on 19 May 2002 I watched a Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans* harass two Pacific Black Ducks *Anas superciliosa*. Conditions were very windy and the harrier was able to hang almost stationary above one of the ducks, which submerged in defence. When the duck came up for air it would immediately submerge again and appeared very distressed. Pacific Black Ducks are dabbling rather than diving ducks and I presumed that its plumage was waterlogged. The duck's salvation was the presence of a second Pacific Black Duck, which was swimming nearby.

Occasionally the harrier had to reposition itself and as it executed this manoeuvre it switched its attention to the second duck, giving the other one time to "recover its breath". Eventually the harrier gave up and moved off to continue quartering the marsh in search of easier prey.

On consulting the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 110) to see if Pacific Black Duck were known prey of Swamp Harriers I found the exact behaviour I had observed described except that the prey was a Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*. In this case the victim was less fortunate and was eventually taken and dragged to the shore of a pond at Werribee Sewage Farm in Victoria. There was no record of Swamp Harriers taking Pacific Black Duck.

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.)