

Banding of Swamp Harriers on King Island, Tasmania

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Between January 1971 and June 1973, 26 Swamp Harriers *Circus approximans* were banded at Loorana on the central west coast of King Island, Tasmania. King Island is situated in Bass Strait about 100 kilometres north-west of mainland Tasmania.

Swamp Harriers are breeding visitors to King Island and are absent from April to July, except for occasional sightings. Numbers increase from single birds in August, and by late October pairs are found in their breeding territories. Egg-laying commences in early November, with chicks hatching in the latter part of December. By early February the young birds are flying and are starting to hunt with the adults. In late February and early March there is a noticeable increase in numbers, possibly caused by birds moving through from mainland Tasmania. During this period loose groups of up to ten birds have been observed soaring high in the air and drifting northwards. A group of 16 was observed resting together in open pasture on 4 March 1971. The migration of Swamp Harriers across Bass Strait has been reported previously by Sharland (1958) and Hobbs (1959).

Banding

A wire netting cage two metres square and one and a half metres high, with an entrance hole 60 cm diameter cut in the top, was used for trapping free-flying birds. The cage was built in a natural hollow beside swampy ground near a creek. At first dead animals, mainly rats, were used as bait but these became putrid rapidly and failed to attract any birds. White plastic eggs and fresh fowl eggs were then used success-

Month	1971	1972	1973	Total
January	2 ¹	3	2	7
February		1	4	5
March	2	1	1	4
Apr.-Aug.				nil
September		1		1
October				nil
November	1	2		3
December		6 ²		6
Totals	5	14	7	26

¹ Nestlings. ² Includes two nestlings.

fully and after a Swamp Harrier was seen feeding on the eggs of a wild pheasant, this bait was used with similar success. The trap was set continually from August to April and as it was only a kilometre from my house, it was checked at midday and sundown.

The first two birds banded were nestlings that had been rescued after their nest was destroyed during harvesting. They were raised in my garden with freedom to roam at will, and when fledged, attracted two juveniles and an adult to the house. One nestling disappeared on 24 February 1971 and was found with an injured wing by a neighbour. It was looked after until the wound healed and finally left the area in July. The second bird

TABLE 2

Details of recoveries.

Band Number	Date Banded	Age at Banding	Where Recovered	Date Recovered	Distance	Time Elapsed
110-50112	14.11.71	A	Loorana, K.I.	4. 2.73	b/p	447 days
110-50113	24. 1.72	A	Loorana, K.I.	11.12.72	b/p	332 days
110-50114	28. 1.72	A	Loorana, K.I.	11.12.72	b/p	318 days
				16. 1.73	b/p	354 days
				19. 1.73	b/p	357 days
110-50116	23. 2.72	J	Langhorne Ck., S.A.	2. 3.72	644 km NW	8 days
110-50121	11.12.72	A	Loorana, K.I.	20. 1.73	b/p	39 days
110-50129	1. 2.73	A	Loorana, K.I.	6. 2.73	b/p	5 days
				8. 2.73	b/p	7 days
				27. 2.73	b/p	26 days
110-50130	18. 3.73	A	Loorana, K.I.	24. 2.73	b/p	6 days
110-50132	26. 2.73	A	Egg Lagoon, K.I.	9. 5.73*	33 km N.	73 days

* very decomposed when found; probably died a few days after banding.

was last observed on 10 March 1971, when other Swamp Harriers were moving north.

Table 1 shows the number of Swamp Harriers banded and the months in which they were banded. Of these—17 adults, four juveniles and two nestlings were banded at Loorana; one adult at Reekara (20 km north of Loorana); and two nestlings at Pegarah (15 km south-east of Loorana).

Table 2 lists the Swamp Harriers which were recovered. Of these, two were recovered away from banding place, one found dead, and the other killed after it was caught in a rabbit trap. One (110-50116) which was recovered at Langhorne Creek, S.A. ("Caught in a rabbit trap"), supplies some information on the extent of migration in the species. A map illustrating the movement of this and two other Swamp Harriers banded in Tasmania was prepared by Purchase (1973). Another (110-50132) believed to be a migrating bird was found in a well at the northern end of King Island in a very decomposed condition and possibly died a few days after banding.

A summary of the banding and recovery data is given in Table 3.

During the summer of 1972-73, 12 adults were caught in the banding area during the breeding season. These included three banded as adults in the same area during the previous breeding season. This suggests that adult birds may return to the same area each year. The large number of adults present in the area could also suggest

TABLE 3

Summary of Banding and Recovery Data.

	Banded	Recovered	
		Dead	Alive
Adults	18	1	6
Juveniles	4	1	
Nestlings	4		
Totals	26	2	6

that, except in close proximity to the nest, Swamp Harriers have loose territory boundaries when breeding. In late January a nest with three fledged young which avoided capture, was found within one kilometre of the trap, thus providing further support for the theory.

This study was terminated after the summer of 1972-73 when I left King Island.

References

- Hobbs, J. N. (1959), 'Migratory Movements of the Swamp Harrier', *Emu* 59: 87-88.
 Purchase, D. (1973), Eighteenth Annual Report of the Australian Bird-banding Scheme. July 1971 to June 1972. Tech. Pap. Wildl. Res. CSIRO, Aust., No. 27.
 Sharland, M. (1958), 'The Swamp Harrier as a Migrant'. *Emu* 58: 75-80.

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