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## Successful Rearing of Young of the Spotted Harrier in an Artificial Nest

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There are nine or ten species of harrier *Circus* in the world, depending on the taxonomic opinion. Except for the Spotted Harrier *C. assimilis* of Australia, Sulawesi and the Lesser Sunda Islands, all are ground-nesting hawks. The Spotted Harrier is the only one to nest regularly in a tree. This note describes how the nest of a Spotted Harrier was destroyed accidentally by man and how the two young birds were reared successfully by their parents in an artificial nest.

Near Underbool (35°10'S., 141°50'E.) in north-western Victoria, a nest of the Spotted Harrier was under observation between June and August 1979. The nesting tree was in a row of trees, between a farm road and a field of crops. The nest was on a sloping branch of a Slender Cypress-Pine *Callitris preissii*, 5.5 metres above the ground and 2.5 metres below the top of the tree. It was a rather flat platform built of sticks and twigs, enclosing only a shallow depression lined with small, narrow green leaves.

The dimensions of the nest in centimetres were: diameter 56, inside diameter 22, outside depth 18, inside depth 6. During the breeding season we visited the nest seven times to gather information for the RAOU Nest Record Scheme (Table 1). On our fifth visit the branch, which was rotten inside, broke and fell to the ground, together with the observer and the nest.

The nest contained three young and an infertile egg. P.K. took some photographs a few

TABLE 1

Details of seven visits to original and artificial nests of Spotted Harrier.

Order of Visits	Date	Time (Eastern Standard)	Nest Content	Notes
1	17.6.79	13:10	4 eggs	Original Nest
2	14.7.79	09:25	2 eggs and 2 young	Original Nest
3	14.7.79	16:10	1 egg and 3 young	Original Nest
4	15.7.79	10:35	1 egg and 3 young	Original Nest
5	4.8.79	08:50	1 egg infertile and 3 young	Original Nest Artificial Nest
6	5.8.79	08:10	3 young	Artificial Nest
7	31.8.79	11:35	Nest empty 2 young nearby on the ground	Artificial Nest

seconds before the accident happened. Neither the observer nor the young harriers were injured although the oldest chick was a bit shocked for a few minutes, however, it recovered shortly afterwards. For the next 20 minutes every effort was made to build an artificial nest by us. The nearest tree, also a Slender Cypress-Pine, about ten metres away was chosen for the new nest site.

The artificial nest was built using the same nesting material at the same height as the original nest. The new nest was about the same size or perhaps a little larger than the original. The young harriers were put on the new nest when it was completed, but the infertile egg was removed. During its construction, both adults were soaring over the nest-site.

The next day the parent birds again soared low over the new nest when we approached it, thus providing evidence that they had accepted the artificial nest, later to be confirmed by observations.

On our last visit, 31 August 1979, two fully fledged young were seen on the ground, one about 70 metres, the other about 50 metres from the nest site. Both juveniles flew well. The third young was not seen. Both adult birds appeared shortly after our arrival, soaring over the nest-site.

Frauca (1967) had a similar experience with a Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* at Moore Park, Queensland in 1963. A cyclone blew down the

tree with the nest and one downy chick. The adults had apparently brought food to it on the ground. (Some birds — as herons and egrets — never feed their young fallen on the ground from their nests). A nest was made from wire and sticks in a nearby tree — *Casuarina* as original — and the chick placed in it. It was visited every day for 28 days until it fledged successfully. Parents resumed feeding it from the day after the artificial nest was completed.

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