

Note

NORTHERN HARRIER FEEDING ON PIPPING MALLARD EGGS — While the northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) has been found to occasionally prey on waterfowl ducklings (Hecht, 1951, Wilson Bull. 63:167-76; SOWLS 1955, Prairie Ducks, Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Pa.), they are not considered to be important predators of waterfowl eggs. Harriers and waterfowl often nest within close proximity (Houston, 1949, Can. Field-Nat. 63:215-41; Duebbert and Lokemoen, 1977, Prairie Nat. 9:33-40), but observations of harriers feeding on duck eggs are limited to a single report by Balser (1968, J. Wildl. Manage. 32:669-682).

We observed an incident of harrier predation on an active duck nest while working on Mallard Island near Riverdale, North Dakota. On the afternoon of 27 June 1984, we attempted to capture a mallard hen (*Anas platyrhynchos*) by use of a nest trap. When the trap was set the nest contained seven pipping eggs which we re-covered with down before leaving. When the trap was tripped later that evening we captured an adult female northern harrier, instead of the intended mallard hen which flushed about 6 m away from the nest. Upon examining the nest we found two eggs destroyed and five eggs still intact. One of the eggs had been moved just outside of the nest bowl. The remaining eggs were cool indicating the mallard hen had probably not been incubating when the harrier appeared. Only one of the destroyed eggs could be found and it was punctured on the side and the embryo was missing.

According to Rice (1982, Auk 99:403-413) northern harriers can detect prey acoustically from a distance of 3-4 m. Thus, it seems quite possible that a harrier flying low over an unattended duck nest with pipping eggs and vocalizing young would be able to locate them in nesting cover. However, the importance of harriers as waterfowl nest predators would probably be minimal since 1) it seems unlikely they would frequently be able to force incubating hens off nests given the larger body size and incubation tenacity of most duck species, and 2) most hens with pipping eggs remain attentive to the clutch. As a result, the harriers impact is probably limited to opportunistic situations when the incubating hen is absent from the nest.

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