

### AUSTRALIAN HOBBIES TAKING FLYING ANTS.

Occasionally I have observed an Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* glide over my back yard in central Murray Bridge, South Australia and I have regularly, in the past year, seen two hobbies perched at or near the top of Norfolk Island Pines *Aracauria heterophylla* in the next street. The hobbies are very vocal at dusk with calls varying from 'kee kee kee' to rapid chattering. Dusk on 20 April 1998 was still and warm when I heard the familiar 'kee kee kee'. One hobby glided low over a neighbouring yard as the other skimmed over and around my yard at a height of two to four metres, seemingly oblivious of me. A swarm of flying ants hovered a short distance away. The latter hobby almost floated, barely moving its wings, as it worked back and forth, at times reaching approximately six metres from the centre of the swarm, taking flying ants from around the edges and not attempting to force into the centre of the swarm. Ants were taken with the talons and transferred to the mouth. When the hobby was very close a short snap was heard, after which the wings of the ant could be seen falling to the ground. The flying ants seemed to be such easy prey that the bird appeared to select certain individuals. Wallace and Gosper (1967) noted that mating ants were apparently targeted. This may have been the case in my observations as there were many mating ants in the vicinity, but the near darkness made it impossible to be sure.

At intervals the hobby in the neighbouring yard would call 'kee kee kee'. The hobbies would then fly close together without touching, before circl-

ing each other several times, calling as they flew. This occurred four times during my observation. On two occasions they returned to their previous positions again without further calling and twice they continued to call as they flew to the pines where they perched for a minute or two before returning to hunt flying ants. I can only presume that the same hobby returned to my garden each time as the other hobby always initiated the calling. The second hobby was at times hidden by houses and trees. Finally, both calling, the hobbies returned to perch in the top of the pine from whence several more calls were heard.

The hunting of flying ants by Australian Hobbies seems to be well documented (Czechura and Debus 1986; Barker and Vestjens 1989; Marchant and Higgins 1993), but the paper by Wallace and Gosper (1967) appears to be the only other published instance of an original observation.

### REFERENCES

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*Michelle Ludewigs: 15 Ida St, Murray Bridge, S.A. 5253*

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