

# Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

unique way of hunting prey by drowning





On 11<sup>th</sup> February 2007. Co-birder Dr. Mukesh Samani and I were birding at Ishwariya Pond, Rajkot. I saw a Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) attacking an Egret foraging in shallow water. After two successive attacks, Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) succeeded and caught Egret by its claw. Surprisingly, it was not moving and was seated on its prey (Photo 1A), making it underwater. Western Marsh Harrier was making suffocate egret under water. After some time, when it felt that Egret was dead it leisurely flew and perched on a nearby babul tree. (Photo 1B). The dead egret was floating and moving slowly with the wind. Western Marsh Harrier was watching its prey constantly from perch. A few minutes later, Western Marsh Harrier took flight and lifted the floating Egret with claws after two trials from the water's surface and landed far on the bank. (Photo 1C & Photo 2).

In searching for literature on the hunting behavior of harriers, I found a historical note by Shri Humayun Abdulali's observation of a Western Marsh harrier drowning a duck by settling on it in water at a pond in Nasik district, Maharashtra (Abudulali 1958). A similar hunting technique was noted on the website (<http://www.pauldfrost.co.uk/mharrier.html#:~:text=They%20will%20eat%20birds'%20eggs,itself%2C%20until%20it%20was%20dead>) of the United Kingdom on Raptors is mentioned as '*Marsh Harrier has been observed drowning its prey after capturing it on the water, it sat on its prey, almost chest height in water itself until it was dead*'

**Reference**

Abdulali, H. 1958, Deliberate drowning by raptorial bird. *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* 55(2): 353-354.

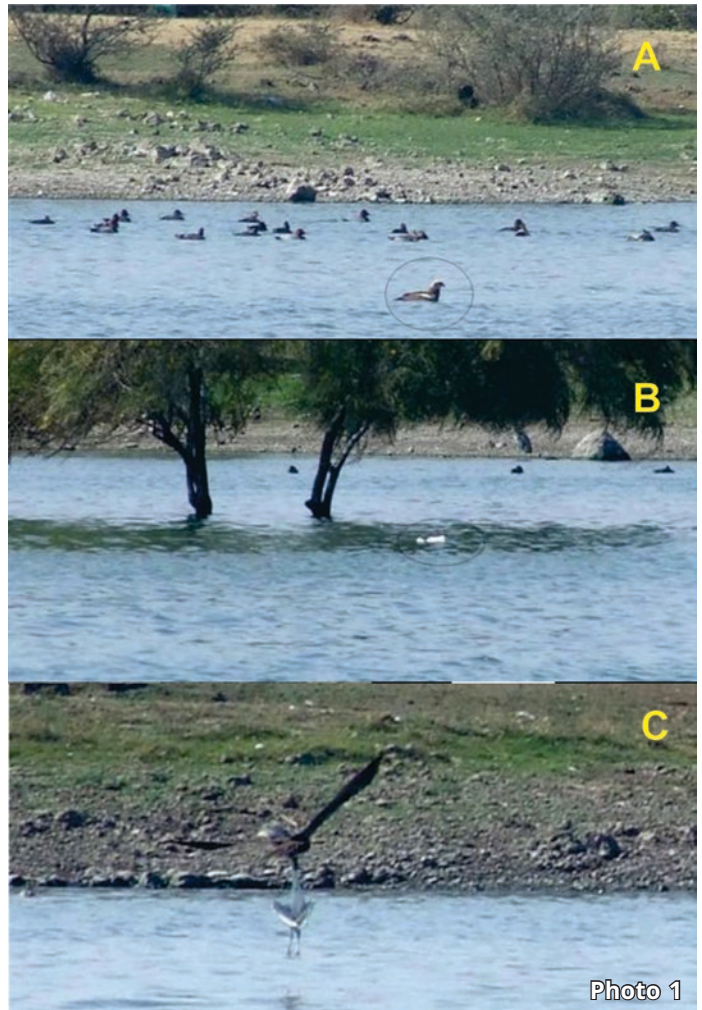


Photo 1

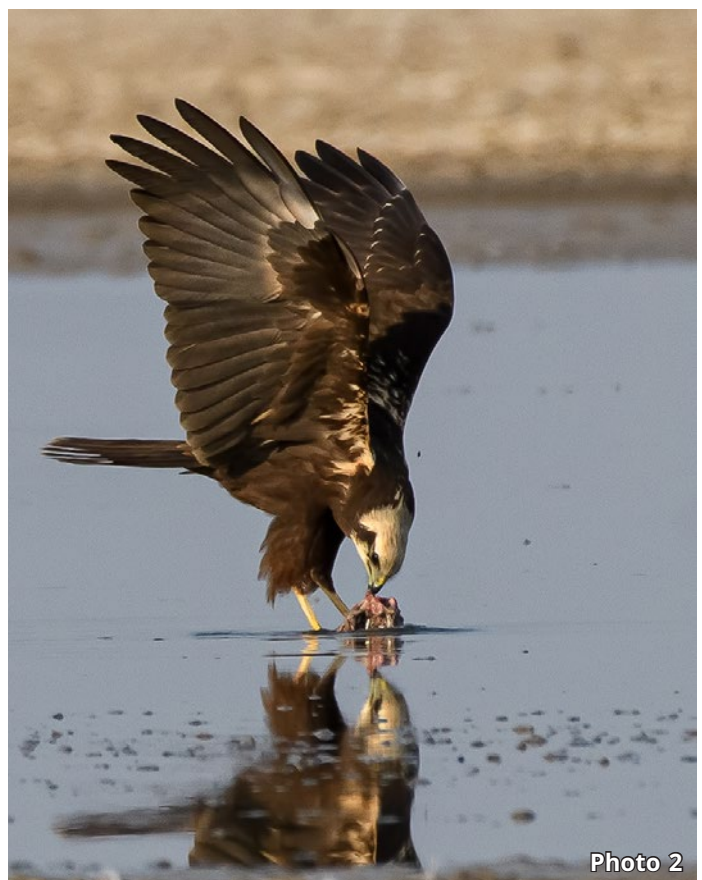


Photo 2