

HARRIER PURSUING MINK

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I observed through binoculars, at a distance of approximately 30m, a female or immature Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) pursuing and apparently attempting to catch a mink (*Mustela vison*) along the main dike of the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, Wisconsin, on 8 October 1977 at 13:30. The mink was running along the dike, with the harrier alternately soaring and hovering 2 to 3m overhead. The harrier dropped within a few cm of the mink and grasped at it with its talons, although it did not actually touch the mink. Each time the harrier dropped, the mink stopped, twisted its head over its shoulder at the harrier, and bared its teeth. The harrier then quickly rose 1 or 2m in the air, and the mink resumed running down the dike. These confrontations were repeated 4 times during a pursuit that covered approximately 100m and lasted approximately 3 min. After the fourth confrontation the harrier rose to a height of about 5m and flew away from the dike into the interior of the marsh. The mink continued running down the dike for approximately another 20m, then ran into the vegetation and disappeared.

The harrier, a comparatively light-bodied raptor, has long been known to feed almost exclusively on small mammals and small birds (McAttee 1935, Errington and Breckenridge 1936, Hecht 1951, Sherrod 1978). Harriers have been observed to follow predatory mammals, including red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) (Bandy and Bandy 1978) and house cat (*Felis domesticus*) (Berger 1956). However, in neither of these cases did the harrier appear to be seriously attempting to catch the predator, nor did the predators show any aggressive behavior toward the harriers. Bandy and Bandy (op cit.) stated that the interaction which they observed with the fox may have been an example of cooperative hunting behavior.

It is likely that I observed the inquisitive behavior of an inexperienced young harrier toward a mink, or an innate following response in the harrier. However, the apparent aggressive behavior between the harrier and the mink suggests the possibility that the hawk was attempting to catch and kill the mink.

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