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Live Northern Harrier Entrapped in Ice

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On 16 January 1982, at 1400 in Calhoun County, Illinois, we found a live, second-year female Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) with its right foot firmly entrapped in ice. The leg was covered with ice to 1.5 cm above the toes on the tarsometatarsus. The harrier was located approximately 1 m. below level ground on the bank of a drainage ditch next to a small secondary road. We carefully removed the bird and took it to Western Illinois University in Macomb for observation.

The right tarsometatarsal region was inflamed, probably due to the bird's repeated attempts to free itself from the ice. After 1 week the foot appeared normal and the harrier did not noticeably favor its leg. On 9 February 1982 we released the bird.

A likely explanation for this incident was the combination of weather conditions the previous evening that included 1.5 cm of rain, high winds gusting to 32 km per hour, and a drop in temperature from 0C to -23C. On the evening of 15 January the harrier probably roosted on the bank of the drainage ditch to escape the severe wind and rain. At first the rain melted the existing snow cover and then the rapid drop in temperature froze the slush and entrapped the bird.

We were unable to find any literature pertaining to similar occurrences for this species, and found very little literature pertaining to similar occurrences for other terrestrial birds. However, there have been numerous reports of aquatic birds in such a predicament. As far as we can determine, this is the first recorded instance of a live Northern Harrier entrapped in ice.

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