

BOOK REVIEWS

Hawks in Flight (2nd edition), by Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton. 2012. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston. 335 pp., numerous color photographs and pen-and-ink drawings. Clothbound, \$26.00. ISBN 978-0395709597.

This is the second edition of a previous work that I've always found useful under many conditions. This edition includes 11 new species and contains useful sketches, emphasizing important topographic traits, and exquisite photos, giving the reader an opportunity to see the raptor under a variety of realistic conditions. It is logically arranged, first by taxonomic group, covering all the raptors that breed in North America, and then calling out those with limited ranges in Florida, the Southwest, and Texas. It is a reference that can be useful in one's library or backpack. It has the kind of detail in which one can enjoyably get lost from the armchair, but its layout, graphics, and text also make it useful in the field. It's a book for both the experienced raptor biologist and the serious beginner. Although I've worked with raptors for almost 4 decades, I still found many interesting facts, revealing perspectives, and identification hints.

The stated aim of *Hawks in Flight* is to be a book that "integrates an array of carefully selected photographs, ... superb illustrations, and a clear, informative text and takes raptor identification to a higher level" and "places in the users' hands an identification skill set that would otherwise take years to master."

I liked this edition right from the beginning, as I read the first chapter, titled "The Flight Identification of Raptors: From the Shotgun to the Sublime." The book goes beyond simply telling the reader what to look for to distinguish one species from another and tells the reader *how to look* for those features and *how to process* that information. The basic format is (1) a description of each species, its range, migration, and behavior, (2) a detailed account of its identifying field marks, and (3) an interesting and useful summary section that compares/contrasts similar-looking species.

Chapter 2, "Buteos that Migrate," is long but, like other taxonomically clustered chapters, includes a section on "Migration," which is very informative. In looking to future publications/editions, the phenomenon of migration might enjoy a comfortable location if it were honored with its own chapter (although I liked the specificity of migration text as it relates to each species of raptor). I welcomed the guidance that the authors give the reader about not jumping to conclusions: "Buteo identification, like the identification of all birds in flight, relies on a number of hints and clues before a judgment is made." To this end, chapter 2 contains a particularly useful section on the subspecies and morphs of the Red-tailed Hawk.

Chapter 3, "Accipiters," is especially useful to beginners and experienced raptor-philis alike. I knew I was going to enjoy this chapter when I read the chapter subtitle "The Artful Dodgers." The description of how each accipiter responds to the buffeting of the wind brought to mind what I've observed but not really *seen* (thanks!). Much of the same can be said for chapters 4 (Falcons: Birds that Measure Distance by the Horizon), 5 (Pointed-winged Kites: The Wind-Given Form), 6 (Northern Harrier: The Great Fooler), 7 (Eagles and Vultures: Big Black Birds), 8 (Crested Caracara: A Chimera in Big Black Bird Clothing), and 9 (Osprey: The Fish Hawk). Following that sequence of taxonomy-based chapters is a treat for those hawk watchers who find themselves in the Southwest (chapter 10), Florida (chapter 11), or the Rio Grande and environs (chapter 12). The last chapter (13) is a brief introduction to "Other Birds that Soar." The bibliography is a welcome inclusion, and although there are very few citations more recent than 2000, most readers will find it valuable.

I liked the clever turns of phrases in descriptions of raptors and their habitat, whether it be accipiters called "short-range interceptors," the preferred habitat of the Golden Eagle described as "terrain that is at odds with the horizon," or a kite likened to a "sonnet... wrapped in feathers." In speaking about falcons, the authors rightly point out that "to discerning eyes, the way a falcon *signs its name* is how it flies." When

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comparing the Merlin with the American Kestrel, that signature “is not a matter of degree, it is quantum.”

The reader will appreciate the authors sharing facts that are obvious only if the observer has studied many raptor species over a wide spectrum of geography and conditions. For instance, in the chapter on *buteos*, they relate that “Red-tailed are capable of hover hunting in place, but over much of North America only Red-tailed and Ferruginous hawks are adept at kiting” (p. 24), and then they go on to clearly distinguish between *kiting* and *hovering*; terms which are often misused by even the experienced raptor biologist.

This book’s success is a function of four things: (1) the authors’ long history of observing and analyzing raptors in the field, (2) the recent advances in digital photography, (3) the clever and revealing sketches, and (4) thoughtful and careful organization of a meaningful text, punctuated by memorable metaphors. The outstanding level of accomplishment and educational value of this book would not have been possible had there not been the synergism of the recognizable expertise of Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton.

The many strengths of the book include a comprehensive list of North American raptor taxa, descriptions of flight styles and behavior, a detailed look at plumage variation within species (including effects of wear, fading, and molt), and a text that is extremely well written and user-friendly. No important weaknesses come to mind.

This is a well-edited, practical, logical contribution to the raptor literature that takes the time to provide meaty, and often entertaining, text. It is a must-read reference book and field assistant. In my opinion, the book meets and exceeds its goals.

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The Crossley Guide: Raptors by Richard Crossley, Jerry Liguori, and Brian Sullivan. 2013. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 286 pp., numerous computer-assisted color photographs in typical habitats, some in the form of a quiz, and species accounts with range maps. Paperbound, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0691157405.

One of a new series of “ID Guides,” *The Crossley Guide: Raptors* addresses 34 species. The book is organized into three parts: the first provides computer-assisted images of the raptors, from several angles, in expected habitat/settings, with side-by-side comparisons of the sexes, ages, morphs, and similar species. The photos of each species cover two pages for scarce and localized species or four pages for more common or widespread species. These photos, generally, give the reader an opportunity to see the raptor under a variety of realistic conditions. Some of these plates are in the form of a quiz. The second part consists of species accounts, broken down by overview, flight style, size and structure, plumage, geographic variation, molt, similar species, status and distribution, migrations, and vocalizations. The third part provides the answers to the photo quizzes in the first part.

This is a reference and teaching tool that will be most usable from the armchair or in a unique classroom situation. It’s a book for the serious beginner, although I did find a few new “facts.” I put “facts” in quotes because there’s an awkward lack of citations and references, as if the authors didn’t rely on the considerable contributions of other raptor biologists and their previous publications. This omission often struck me as a bit egocentric, nonscientific, and shallow. For instance, the authors indicated that the *Falco peregrinus pealei* is “partly migratory, with some individuals wintering as far south as Mexico (p. 253),” contradicting the previous paragraph stating that “Peale’s is a *resident* [italics added] across the Pacific Northwest coast to the outer Aleutian Islands.”

The authors write that the book “is intended as a halfway house between reality and old school traditional guides. It takes you ‘out of the field’ where you can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors and bird from the armchair.” More on that later.

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I found the preface a bit off-putting in that it smacked of egocentricity in not giving the giants who came before the authors proper recognition and/or appreciation. The introduction is useful, along with the detailed “raptor topography,” although some of the lines connecting the topographic features and their names are hard to see.

The first part of the book, “Raptor Images,” is an interesting approach and may be useful to the beginner, but I felt like it was needlessly touted/oversold in more than one instance. In general, the book needed better editing. In many instances, the text editing was incomplete, if not haphazard. In some cases, it was difficult to match up the colors as described in the text with the colors in the photos. Other examples include typos, repeated sentences, sentences so shortened they are not understandable, facts repeated in the same section, half words, poor punctuation, etc. The use of the current 4-letter acronym is helpful, and I enjoyed the clever presentation of a variety of lighting conditions (black and white, looking into the sun, and sunrise lighting). Those should be helpful to the user.

I liked the way that the species accounts are organized. The unique first paragraph is commonly told from either the perspective of an uncomfortable raptor biologist/birder in the field or from the perspective of a hungry raptor—an approach that’s innovative and entertaining and should tend to keep the reader’s attention. The distinctions between the juvenile and adult plumages are, usually, made quite well. Discussions of what species might be confused with another were helpful and, in some cases, revealing; the instances of hybridization were interesting (but not confirmable without references). The species accounts, like the first part of the book, could have benefited from better editing (e.g., poor use of punctuation, apparent inconsistency between the text and the range map, apparently contradictory statements).

The inclusion of a glossary is a nice, and useful, touch. An index is usually a welcome addition to any book. But this book’s index essentially duplicated the table of contents in that it was limited to the species of raptors. If there is a future reprinting, the authors might consider either leaving the index out (and saving a page) or extending its coverage to include major topics.

As with most collaborations, I believe that the combined talents of each of the authors contributed positively to a better product than would have been possible without that collaboration.

Does the book meet its goals? It is an interesting, if not well-edited, book that will get the reader “out of the field.” It can accomplish that goal, but why would we want to do that? Given the need to get kids back into their environment, this seems like a goal that completely dismisses the “nature deficit disorder” that plagues the children of today, who will never be the environmental stewards of tomorrow if they continue to spend all their time in the armchair and not in the woods.

Although I would not recommend this book for the experienced raptor biologist/enthusiast, it can certainly be appreciated from one’s armchair, especially by those who are just beginning to get interested in raptors. It also has potential utility as a text for a class or workshop on raptors. One concern I have is the way the book is bound. The cover is glued to the pages adjacent to it in a way that makes me wonder if it will hold together. It may, but I have not seen this kind of construction in the past and, certainly, wouldn’t test its strength by taking it into the field, even if it stayed in my backpack.

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