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RAPTORS OF THE WORLD

By James Ferguson-Lees and David Christie.

Illustrated by Kim Franklin, Davis Mead and Philip Burton 2001. Christopher Helm. London. 992 pp., 112 colour plates, many figures and distribution maps. Comprehensive bibliography and index. Hardcover. A\$170.

This volume, 20 years in the making, was primarily intended as a field guide and starts with a comprehensive listing of the 313 worldwide raptor species, grouped by order and family, listed with common and scientific name and cross-referenced to information detailing biology, ecology and associated colour plates. The proportionally larger number of species within the Accipitridae, Herpetotheriidae and Falconidae are further subdivided by commonly applied artificial groupings (e.g. bazas, honey-buzzards, atypical kites; fish-eagles and fishing eagles) to aid in finding species quickly and easily.

Although preceded by many quality publications, either on groups or individual species, the authors argue strongly that *Raptors of the World* is the first to function as an identification guide illustrating major plumages and races, both perched and in flight, for all species. Regardless of their original intention, the book's high-quality reproduction, size, weight and expansive coverage is likely to preclude its use in a field situation.

The authors have taken great care to consult and include information from some of the most prominent raptor researchers worldwide, and claim that the text on each species gives a 'comprehensive summary that should provide everything necessary for a basic understanding of its identification, including extensive information on how it may be distinguished from similar species that are likely to occur within the same areas'.

All but one of the species has been represented in beautiful colour plates, faithfully reproduced from skins.

By their own admittance, nothing has been included with respect to raptor evolution, flight mechanics or falconry, but as this book is foremost an identification guide, this does not seem amiss. Noteworthy, however, is the absence of references to current molecular work at both the inter- and intraspecific level, of which there is an ever-increasing body.

A number of supplementary chapters have been included, by virtue of their direct link with positive field identification, dealing with reversed sexual dimorphism, moult, aging and migration, as well as taxonomy and nomenclature.

They have cleverly provided three summary plates prior to the main body, with representatives of the total 78 genera. These are grouped both by size and New and Old World status. Each plate includes silhouette examples of Swainson's Hawk, *Buteo swainsoni*, and the Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*, so the reader can realistically estimate or compare relative size differences between species. Similarly, their zoogeographic distribution is listed as well as the plates on which their summary information is found.

The main species plates show adult and juvenile plumages (perched and in flight). Recognised subspecies are depicted along with differences between sexes where relevant. Colour distribution maps are provided for almost all species, showing resident, breeding and/or regular visitor status. These are reproduced in grey-scale in the detailed species texts. Both versions include a categorical number indicating an approximate worldwide population size. While indicative only, it is useful in allowing the reader to make some estimate of relative density in relation to distribution, and for comparative purposes between species. More detailed notes on population status are provided in the detailed texts.

The summary data with each plate are concise, with information on measurement, male size relative to female size, basic physical description, flight wing position, feeding and social behaviour and (for some species) voice. A very useful addition is a list of reference numbers for birds with which each species may be confused.

The main text is then organised under the set subheadings: distribution, movements, habitat, field characteristics, confusion species, voice, food, sociosexual behaviour, breeding, population, geographic variation, measurements and references. Some of the reference material is current only until the middle and late 1990s, while the majority, specifically for endangered species, draws on the most recently available research. Lists of key reference materials are provided where relevant, and all references, regardless of the section in which they appear, are listed in a comprehensive final bibliography.

For researchers this is an excellent tool in the identification of areas for future research. However, enthusiasts and scientists alike will find their bookshelves greatly enhanced by *Raptors of the World*. It is definitely money well spent.

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