



## Book Review

### Australian falcons: ecology, behaviour and conservation

S. Debus  
2022, CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South  
230 pp.,  
Price AUD \$49.99, ISBN 9781486315765

Dr Stephen Debus is an Adjunct Lecturer of the School of Environmental and Rural Science, at The University of New England. He is a prolific author with over 100 refereed papers, books and book chapters. Prior to this book, he has authored *The Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide* in 1998 with a second edition in 2012, *The Owls of Australia: A Field Guide to Australian Night Birds* in 2009 and wrote numerous species accounts for the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB) and *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Beyond his bountiful writing he was the Editor-in-Chief of the avian journal *Australian Field Ornithology* (formerly *Australian Bird Watcher*) for 21 years. A great preponderance of his research has been among diurnal raptors and owls. He is the best positioned person that I am aware of to author this book on falcons.

This is a book about Australian falcons *Falco* spp., their taxonomic positions within the world, their ecology, behaviour and conservation. Its aim is to extend the knowledge known from HANZAB, in fact to act as a supplement to the 1993 HANZAB Volume 2 and not as a comprehensive replacement; the author advises that both can be read together. The book is organised to match HANZAB with its headings and subheadings generally followed. The species are given in phylogenetic order. The structure is typical with: a foreword, contents, preface and introduction followed by lengthy species accounts, which make up 73% of the book and cover eight sections or chapters focused on the six Australian *Falco* species and the Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus axillaris* – one section is devoted to falcon breeding cycles, which is well supported by photography. Each of the species section contains subsections on field identification, habitat, distribution and population, movements, food, social organisation, social behaviour, voice, breeding, measurements, weights and commentary. There is an epilogue following the main section, which as you might guess delves into ongoing threats

and finally a bibliography divided into the eight main sections/chapters.

The audience addressed appears to be raptor biologists, birdwatchers and other professionals that work with these raptors. I also imagine it would be an invaluable resource for good libraries.

The greatest strength of this book lies in that it is written by Stephen Debus, the foremost authority on Australian birds of prey and owls. The text is rich, up-to-date and authoritative. The illustrations or photographs by David Whelan are another strength of this book, although I feel they are dwarfed by the knowledge presented in the text. No doubt the text will be invaluable to research and management alike, even more so when read alongside with HANZAB. The objective was to give a 30-year update to HANZAB and it has achieved this admirably. I am convinced this will become a sought after text on the Falconiformes in Australia. Those with most to benefit are probably researchers and managers, one might hope administrators might read it too. I can see high-schoolers and undergraduates drawing upon it to complement their studies.

The text is organised into clear sections or chapters, mostly by species, and each of these sections is appropriately subdivided as described above. This makes the text quick to search for the information required. The level of research is expert and pertinent. It is meant to supplement HANZAB so this was a given.

The style of writing is technical, only verbose in some of the front material. Stephen Debus manages to communicate in an engaging way drawing on the work of others with a deep understanding that only comes from a lifetime of shared research. The obvious supplementary material are David Whelan's photographs, which are numerous, apposite and all high quality – some beautiful.

I would recommend this book to everyone wanting to expand and update their knowledge on HANZAB, which was published 30 years ago. I would recommend it to all those who work with or study raptors. I expect the numerous high-quality photos must also reach an audience of birdwatchers.

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**Conflicts of interest.** The author declare no conflicts of interest.