

BOOK REVIEW**BIRDS OF PREY IN EUROPE**

Maarten Bijleveld. New York: Macmillan Press, 1974.
263 pp., 2 plates.

In recent years there has been a plethora of books on birds of prey. However, this new publication by Maarten Bijleveld is a brilliantly researched history of the decline of European raptors, not a glossy-papered coffee-table saga.

The first chapter, devoted to an account of the persecution of avian predators during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, makes frightening reading. For example, in one small area in Germany no less than 624,087 raptors were destroyed between 1705 and 1800. This needless slaughter continued unabated into the nineteenth century. The aristocracy firmly believed that all birds with hooked beaks were vermin and had to be eliminated to protect pheasants raised for shooting. During the two world wars, when gamekeepers were called up, a significant increase in the local populations of birds of prey on estates was apparent.

Most European ornithologists are aware and ashamed of the relentless persecutions of the past but believe that toxic chemicals and their residues are the chief causes of the decline of predators during the latter half of this century. The author is a realist and points out that toxic chemicals are by no means the sole threat to our birds of prey. Falconers, egg thieves, gamekeepers, and pigeon fanciers all exact a toll on the survivors despite the conservation laws. The lesson we must all learn from this book is that the massacre continues and must be halted if raptors are not to be completely exterminated. Legislation is often openly flouted, and birds are shot on the slightest pretext. We cannot afford any further inroads into the remaining stocks of these superb birds.

Bijleveld deals with the thirty-seven species of diurnal European birds of prey individually, showing their status in each of the major countries of Europe. Only the Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), considered by some an Asiatic species, is omitted. A further chapter is devoted to conservation legislation in the various countries and how well or badly it is enforced. The weakest chapter is one on the future of birds of prey, bleak as it may be. Not enough credit is given to research efforts in breeding avian predators in captivity. The new techniques ably pioneered at Cornell University, in Canada, and elsewhere will soon be tried in Europe and should prove beneficial.

The layout and format of this book are faultless although it is expensive by English standards. Mention must be made of the bibliography, which runs to 37 pages of small print. In general, the book is an important contribution to the history of ornithology, worthy to take its place beside such excellent recent works as J. J. Hickey's *Peregrine Falcon Populations* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).