

Hawks at My Wingtip. Bill Welch. North Country Press, Thorndike, Maine, 1987. 148 pages. Photos, maps. \$7.95 paperback.

Whenever I review a book, my first question is, "For whom is it written?" In this case the answer is, "Anyone to whom 'hawk' means more than a tick on a checklist." In short, Bill Welch's recollections of aerial encounters with hawks while flying a motorglider make for fascinating reading. He has seen and done things that you and I will most likely never do: he has flown *with* the birds and checked out their behavior and flight characteristics -- at close, even intimate, range.

Bill Welch, an aeronautical engineer, joined the New England Hawk Migration Study to combine hawkwatching with the field of aeronautics for a unique view of birds in flight. Bill followed the hawks on their east coast migrations, riding the same thermals as the raptors, in a Sperber motorglider.

Yet, *Hawks at My Wingtip* will be remembered as a brilliant or as just another so-so production, depending on the knowledge, taste, and sympathy of the reader. At times, it is a very frustrating book, for some chapters are loaded with jargon, albeit perfunctorily defined in a glossary. At other times it soars, as when Welch recalls his now-famous September 18, 1974 chase of thousands of Broad-wings from central Massachusetts to southwestern Connecticut.

While reading, I often found the text lacking, whenever I had special knowledge. Welch tends to omit information necessary for critically assessing the data he presents. Some of that is really interesting, e.g., the maximum altitude at which he found Broad-wings flying or the maximum range at which one of these birds can be seen. And every savvy student of hawks and their migration will have some problems with Welch's gospel. I was amazed not to find any mention of Colin Pennycuick, an ornithologist and glider pilot who, from his studies of raptors in Africa, established the game Welch played.

This book would have benefited greatly from a good editor. Also, the maps would have been vastly more meaningful had place names been included on them.

Is this a bad book? Absolutely not! It gives thought-provoking data and superb descriptions of hawk behavior in flight. And, it gives methods, albeit open to argument, for computing aerodynamic profiles of hawks and for determining the probability of spotting these birds.

I could not put the book down, but then, I am nutty about hawks. But I'll bet you won't be able to either, especially when you hit Chapter 6 -- "The River of Hawks."

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