

## HAWK WATCHING AND BIRDS OF PREY: TWO REVIEWS

by Alden Clayton, Concord

A Guide to Hawk Watching in North America, Donald S. Heintzelman, University Park, Keystone Books, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979, 284 pp., illus. \$6.95.

Hawks and Owls of North America, Donald S. Heintzelman, New York. Universe Books, 1979, 195 pp., illus. \$18.50.

Throughout history birds of prey have fascinated mankind. In the ancient world raptors were symbols of divinity or earthly power - Horus, the falcon god of the Egyptians; the Owl of Athena, Goddess of Wisdom; the Golden Eagle borne aloft by the marching legions of Rome. During the Middle Ages the sport of falconry was enjoyed by all classes; but power determined ownership: Peregrines belonged to nobility, and Gyrfalcons were reserved for kings and emperors.

Now, in the late 20th century, an entirely new relationship between hawks and man is emerging - based on the organized study of hawks in their natural environment. Hawk watching is consistent with a new ethic which recognizes the coexistence of wild predators and mankind. It is a fast-growing spectator sport, has a strong element of direct participation, and interjects a serious note of scientific study.

The spectacle of fall hawk migration from a mountain lookout is indeed memorable. With the grand autumn setting as a backdrop, kettles of hundreds - even thousands - of hawks may soar overhead, or individuals may fly swiftly by within a few feet of the observer. But the full satisfaction of hawk watching is gained by learning to identify the birds under varying conditions of light, distance, flight angles, and speed. The unexpected and rare sighting provides the thrill needed for all enduring forms of sport. But hawk watching also has a serious purpose - the organized observation and reporting of information on the species and numbers of migrating hawks contribute significantly to the study of bird populations. The growing popularity of hawk watching may be a result of this unusual combination of satisfactions.

The history of hawk watching in the United States is amazingly brief. It began on Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania, where the first counts were conducted by Maurice Broun in the 1930's. During the following decades hawk watching spread to a few other local areas, but the watershed for hawk watching on a national scale occurred only 8 years ago. In 1972 the United States and Mexico signed a long-overdue treaty that provided full legal protection for birds of prey and ended a shameful era of gunning. In that same year Don Heintzelman privately published A Guide to Northeastern Hawk Watching; four years later he published A Guide to Eastern Hawk Watching. Interest in hawk watching flourished, and in 1974 the Hawk Migration Association of North America was founded - hawk watching became truly national.

The 1979 Heintzelman guide covers all of North America in a substantially expanded version of his earlier regional publications. The new guide contains, in concise size and format, an enormous amount of information about hawks and their behavior, brief but adequate descriptions of 35 species,

and sections on hawk identification and study, types of hawk watching, field equipment, the migration seasons, and the mechanics of hawk flight. Approximately 100 pages of photographs and drawings show each hawk species, perched and in flight, as well as the variety of plumages and flight angles.

For the hawk watcher interested in the geographical distribution of observation sites, the final section is rich with descriptive material. From Cape Canaveral and Santa Ana to northern wilderness points in Alaska, sites are ranked (where information is available) in terms of the number of sightings during fall and spring migration. Habitat and outlooks are described, and instructions about access are provided. The rankings are based on reports from local birders as well as Heintzelman's own experience.

Much information about hawk watching is new, some not even yet disseminated. Mt. Wachusett, not noted in previous Heintzelman guides and only recently recognized even in Massachusetts as a major observation post for fall migration, is included in the current guide. Also mentioned is Pt. Diablo at the Golden Gate of San Francisco Bay which has only been "discovered" within the past two years, and is just being recognized as probably the single best location on the Pacific coast for autumn hawk watching. (For an Eastern birder it has a special appeal - Cooper's hawks are ranked as common. This reviewer was present on September 19, 1979, when, during a three-hour period, 80 Cooper's and 120 Sharp-shins flew overhead--most at close range!) In the category of yet-to-be-discovered (by Heintzelman) is Napatree Point at the southwest corner of Rhode Island. To indicate its importance - on October 8 and 14, 1979, the following two-day totals were reported: American Kestrel (1,045), Sharp-shinned (885), Merlin (60), Cooper's (11), Osprey (10), Northern Harrier (9), and Peregrine (4).

As an inexpensive, easy-to-read compendium, this excellent guidebook is recommended for both the raptor enthusiast and the neophyte.

Hawks and Owls of North America is intended "for students, birders, ecologists, conservationists, and raptor enthusiasts at less than professional level." In both text and pictures this volume makes little impact in competition with the many excellent books already available on birds of prey. Descriptions of individual species are necessarily brief, since hawk and owl ecology, migrations, endangered species, and conservation are also discussed. The result is a general and rather superficial overview of all topics. The book is overpriced in relation to its content, interest, and uniqueness for knowledgeable birders and raptor enthusiasts.

#### References:

"Fall Migration of Diurnal Raptors at Pt. Diablo, California," Laurence C. Binford, Western Birds, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1979.

Rhode Island Audubon Society Field Notes, October, 1979, Charles Wood, Editor.