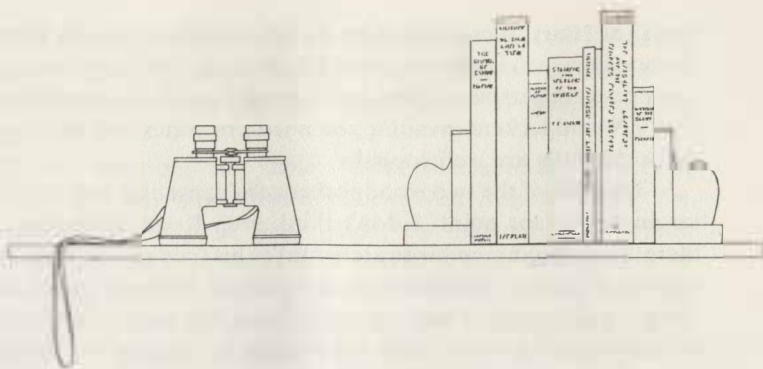


## Reviews

Edited by

EI.AINE COOK



**Birds of Prey of the World** — Friedhelm Weick, in collaboration with Dr. Leslie H. Brown. 1980. Hamburg, Germany: Paul Parey. 159 pp., 1144 col. figs., 160 line drawings. \$48.00.

Publisher's address:  
Paul Parey, Scientific Publishers  
P.O. Box 236  
New York, NY 10016

A REMARKABLE FEATURE of this survey of all the world's Falconiformes is its slimness. This is all the more surprising since the author has undertaken the illustration of all distinctive races, adult and immature plumages, and unusual color phases (amounting to 1144 color figures), and has added a bilingual text with German and English appearing side by side. Accomplishing all this in only 159 pages is possible because the figures are done field guide style on just 40 plates with up to 30 or more forms shown on a single plate, while the text, which consists largely of a review of the genera and an oddly unusable identification key, is written in telegraphic style.

As the author rightly emphasizes in his preface, the color plates are the book's showpiece. Weick's engaging illustrations feature delicate pen-and-ink outline drawings filled in with clear watercolors. Postures and facial expressions are lifelike, and special attention has been paid to accuracy in colors of the soft parts. Leslie Brown's association with this work consisted primarily of checking the accuracy of the illustrations, for which he vouches in his complementary foreword. All the birds are shown perched in three-quarter left profile, with wings and tail slightly spread; no flight patterns are illustrated.

The arrangement of genera and species follows Brown and Amadon's classic *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* (1968: McGraw-Hill, New York). Facing each plate is a brief tabulated legend, with Latin, English and German names, a brief identification note, range, and measurements. Although the depiction of so many individuals in identical postures on the same plate creates an initial dizzy sensation, the format does allow the comparison of similar forms at a glance and encourages the reader to notice general patterns of variation in closely related species.

The plates and their legends occupy about half the book, with the rest given over to a much less impressive text. The best part of the text is a systematic review of all genera, which briefly summarizes the external characters of each genus and is illustrated with carefully executed line drawings (usually head portraits) of representative species. The key to identification, however, is not a key at all, but a compendium of species descriptions arranged in arbitrary categories such as size (e.g. "very large," "large," or "rather large") and others equally confusing. The entire text is peppered with typographical errors, the most annoying of which is the omission on p. 14 of the size scales used for the various plates.

Weick's *Birds of Prey of the World* is an odd, almost eccentric book. One wonders exactly

who the audience for this book is supposed to be. Brown suggests that it can be used as a field guide anywhere in the world, but several drawbacks discourage this, including the systematic rather than regional presentation, the absence of underwing patterns, and the largish (8 x 12") format. This book will not replace either Brown and Amadon's *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* or Grossman and Hamlet's *Birds of Prey of the World* (1964: C. N. Potter, New York) as a general reference, because information on voice, behavior and life history is entirely lacking. Neither is this a "coffee table book" to be admired for its lavish bird art, because Weick's illustrations are more functional than decorative. Weick seems to have created a kind of condensed pictorial guide to the Falconiformes as a whole, rather than a field guide designed to solve identification problems on the spot.

This book does function usefully either as a quick pictorial guide to plumages for museum work and library reference, or as a tool for learning about the range of variation in the Falconiformes. But whether readers should shell out \$48.00 to join Weick's tour round the world in forty plates will depend, I fear, more on the size of their bankrolls than on the indispensability of the book. — *James R. Silliman*

**The Alaskan Bird Sketches of Olaus Murie, with excerpts from his field notes** — compiled and edited by Margaret E. Murie. 1979. Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company. v + 57 pp., 40 color illus., \$11.95 paperbound.

Publisher's address:  
Alaska Northwest Publishing Company  
Box 4-EEE  
Anchorage, Alaska 99509

OLAUS J. MURIE, the man who headed the Wilderness Society from 1946 until his death in 1963, was a naturalist with an inquisitive mind and a desire for adventure. As a young man, through years of field work in various parts of Alaska, he established himself as one of the outstanding field naturalists in North America. Now, in this slim book we have some forty-odd bird sketches by Murie reproduced in color with accompanying excerpts from his field notes. Most of the sketches were done in the 1920s and 1930s in the Hooper Bay area, the Alaska Peninsula or the Aleutians.

Although Murie had no formal training as an artist, he always carried his brushes and watercolors into the field with him, managing to paint the animals he observed or collected right on the spot. These sketches in the book, more often than not, are of the heads of birds, supplemented by some other details, such as feet or legs. Except for the passerines, rarely is the whole bird illustrated. Olaus Murie's wife, Mardy, chose the text to accompany the art work. These short comments, all from Olaus Murie's field notes, are not necessarily the ones made when the original sketches were done. For example, the Dunlin *Calidris alpina* was drawn in 1936 while the accompanying notes are from 1924. However, whatever scant notes are on the sketches are just as Olaus Murie made them. But even these few original notations drop off after the owls in taxonomic order. This is unfortunate, since some of these notes give the reader an immediate insight into Murie's observations. For example, for the Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile* done on July 14, 1925, Murie wrote:

Many birds not so bright in color, with light parts of mandibles whiter,  
not so yellowish. Orange lumps at margin of gular sac not so pronounced,  
usually, and sometimes extend on to the blue a little as tiny orange spots.

Some of his illustrations are better than others, with the passerines at the end of the book appearing almost wooden. Yet this collection of Murie's sketches should not be judged simply on artistic terms. It is, perhaps, more artifact than art, a reminder of the life and times of recent pioneer natural history in Alaska, when that area was not simply our "last frontier" but literally a wilderness. The collection serves as a glimpse into the past and should be appreciated as such.

— *Paul J. Baicich*