J. Raptor Res. 25(3):99–100

News and Reviews

Birds of prey in Virginia: a history of specimen records from 1853 to 1988 by David W. Johnston and William J. Ehmann. Virginia Avifauna No. 4, Virginia Society of Ornithology, Lynchburg, 1990, vi + 58 pp. Paper $9.00 U.S.

Public and private natural history collections contain a wealth of data and biological materials. The objective of Johnston and Ehmann's monograph is to provide a comprehensive inventory of raptor specimens collected in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Specimens taken and preserved during the last 137 years in Virginia provide "snapshots" to reconstruct the biological and environmental history for geographic regions. The specimens and associated data allow a diverse set of questions to be addressed.

Traditionally, systematists have used collections as repositories for vouchering species and faunal descriptions. Maintaining the collection permits other scientists to re-examine the materials. The advent of techniques for DNA sequencing of museum specimens is an unprecedented asset for taxonomic classifications. In addition, population geneticists and conservation biologists can now identify which subspecies occurred in an area and characterize the genetics of the population. Environmental toxicologists can use historical specimens to identify background levels of contaminants prior to widespread distribution of the chemical. The impact of pesticides on egg shell thinning could not have been assessed without the availability of historic egg collections. Specimens and their data have been useful to ecologists in describing the natural history of raptors (e.g., range, molting, food habits and habitat). For extinct species, specimens are one of the few avenues left to reconstruct their ecology. Application of computer technology for information capture, retrieval, and visualization is improving the availability and utility of collections.

The authors provide a good description of the methods used in locating the specimens/records and compiling the inventory. In particular, they do an excellent job of explaining the difficulty in extracting precise information from historical records associated with specimens. Early specimens often contain vague descriptions of geographic locality, or have incomplete data (e.g., no date). Data were annotated accordingly if imprecise from the source.

The monograph contains two figures that support the text, and several pen-and-ink illustrations of raptors. The first figure is a map of Virginia with counties, cities, physiographic provinces, and miscellaneous features. Although the map is essential in interpreting the geographic descriptors used later in the text, it is difficult to use. The eastern part of the state is cluttered with names. Other features (refuges, parks, rivers, etc.) may be useful as references but only contribute to the difficulty in reading the map. The other figure is a histogram of the number of specimens taken each year between 1873 and 1988. It is easy to read and provides an interesting perspective on growth of collections. Large numbers of specimens were deposited in collections during the 1890s, 1910s, 1930s, and during the last 20 years. The first three pulses are thought to be birds taken specifically for building the collections, and the most recent period from bird-vehicle collisions.

The largest portion of the monograph is a table that lists all raptor specimens, organized by species and date. The data include (same order as the table): date collected, county or city of capture, age, sex, collection number, additional location information or reference, and disposition. Codes are used for the county/city, age, sex, collection, and disposition categories.

A small adjustment in the order of categories and the organization of information within categories would have made the table easier to use. The county/city column represents mixed spatial resolution and could have been split into two fields. County codes should be provided for all records where that information is available (city and county were exclusive in representation). Positionally, county/city codes should be adjacent to the location/reference field to provide a more logical flow of information. Although a geographic reference is provided when available, it is difficult to visualize the geographic distribution of specimens without drawing a map for each species. A small map of Virginia could have been easily prepared for each species with dots depicting specimen records. Citations throughout the monograph follow two different styles, which is quite distracting. Specimen type or disposition include eggs, skin, mounted, alcohol, or skeleton. An inventory of frozen tissue or blood from Virginian birds of prey would be a logical extension of the listing and consistent with current research efforts.

A discussion of the specimen inventory follows the table of specimens. Here, Johnston and Ehmann point out observable patterns and unusual occurrences from the specimens. Supplemental records that were discovered in the specimen search are also listed in this section. A summary after the discussion tallies the total number of specimens and supplemental records at nearly 2000 for Virginia. The literature cited section, which follows the summary, does not include all of the citations from the specimen and additional record listings. Two appendices end the monograph.

The first identifies the abbreviations for counties and cities, while the second lists collection abbreviations, curators, and collection addresses.

Compiling all of the specimens and records for a taxonomic group in a geographic area requires a tremendous amount of work. Johnston and Ehmann have provided the scientific community a valuable service in publishing their inventory, which is well worth the price. Not only does it greatly simplify locating necessary specimens in Virginia, but small collections that may have been lost or are at risk of deterioration and abandonment are back in the public arena. Historic specimens are irreplaceable and warrant a great deal of protection.—**Paul F. Steblein**

The **National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association** announces its small grants program. This program makes available two $1,000 research grants in the field of wildlife rehabilitation. Each may be applied to one large project or several smaller research projects each totaling less than $1,000.00. Applicants must demonstrate financial need and submit a typewritten proposal that includes: name(s) and resume of personnel involved, objectives of the project, a brief description of how the project will be carried out, a brief literature review and an itemized budget.

An annual report on progress is required. It is expected that those receiving NWRA support will present the results of their projects at an NWRA national meeting within 2 years of receipt of the grant.

The deadline for submitting proposals for research grants is *December 15* of each year. Recipients will be announced at the NWRA annual meeting in February and in writing.

The National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association also invites nominations for two awards. The **Lifetime Achievement Award** is given to an individual whose primary identification is with rehabilitation of wildlife and who has contributed to this field in a major way for many years. The **Significant Achievement Award** is for a person who has made a major contribution to the field within the last two years. Examples of such contributions would be the presentation of a research finding, or organization of a program, with a major theme in wildlife rehabilitation.

Each award consists of plaque, $100, and free registration at the NWRA conference where the award will be presented. The deadline for submitting nominations for the awards is *December 15* of each year. Proposals and nominations should be sent to: **Mark Pokras, DVM, Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, Wildlife Clinic, 200 Westboro Road, North Grafton, MA 01536.**

Burrowing Owls have been banded and colormarked in Minnesota and South Dakota with standard U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands and green or yellow leg bands. Osprey and Peregrine Falcons have been banded in various midwestern states with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands and a black leg band with a silver alpha-numeric code. Anyone sighting any of these birds please report the date, location, leg with color band and alpha-numeric code to the Bird Banding Lab, Laurel, MD 20708 and to **Mark Martell, The Raptor Center-University of Minnesota, 1920 Fitch Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108.**

The **1991 Raptor Research Foundation, Inc. elections** gave rise to two new and two re-elected directors. Our new directors are Tom Nicholls in the Central U.S. Region and Paul Steblein as Director at Large. Tom is with the U.S. Forest Service Lab at the University of Minnesota, and Paul is a scientist with the Biological Survey of the New York State Museum. Re-elected directors were Paul James as Canadian Director and Robert Kenward as Director at Large. Paul is Curator of Ornithology at the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History in Regina. Robert Kenward is a researcher at the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology in Dorset, England. We extend our congratulations to these individuals.

Nearly 200 members voted which is an excellent response. Many thanks to them. Gary Duke, Chair, Nominating Committee.