Book Reviews

Edited by Jeffrey S. Marks

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Owls: A Guide to the Owls of the World. By Claus König, Friedhelm Weick, and Jan-Hendrick Becking. 1999. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 462 pp., 64 color plates, numerous maps and line drawings. ISBN 0-300-07920-6. Cloth, $50.—Claus König and his team have produced an excellent book on the owls of the world. Owing to new research findings, and to the fact that Professor König strongly believes that differences in vocalizations serve to separate even closely related taxa of owls, no other book has recognized so many species of owls. This book treats 212 species, versus, for instance, the 205 species treated in volume 5 of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo et al. 1999). Burton's (1973) *Owls of the World* recognized 134 species, and in that same year Eck and Busse proposed a new taxonomic revision of the world owls with only 108 species. So, in less than 30 years we have found or created 104 new species of owls on this planet. This is a remarkable taxonomic achievement for which Professor König and his team deserve special congratulations.

Although this book has named several new owls and reclassified many old taxa, I was disappointed that it did not attempt to harmonize English names. For example, for many years in Africa we have called *Glaucidium perlatum* the Pearl-spotted Owl and *G. capense* the Barred Owl. Now, König et al. have joined others (e.g., del Hoyo et al. 1999) in calling these species Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Barred Owlet, respectively. In the *Dictionary of Birds,* Campbell and Lack (1985) define "owlet" to stand for a young owl, so to my mind no species should be called "owlet." Especially strange is that we have owlets not only in *Glaucidium* (11 species), but in *Xenoglaux* (1) and *Athene* (2). This is very confusing, to say the least.

If in the genus *Otus* (as this book does correctly) we call the Old World species "scops-owls" (41) and the New World species "screech-owls" (19), can't we similarly rename all *Glaucidium* "pygmy-owls," all *Athene* "little-owls," and *Xenoglaux loweryi* (Long-whiskered Owlet) simply the Long-whiskered Owl? With the same logic, we should not call *Pyrroglaux podarginus* and the two species of *Ptilopsis* "scops-owls," but rather Palau Owl and white-faced owls (Northern and Southern), respectively. In the case of long tradition, and to respect the AOU's role in naming North American birds, we could make exceptions, for instance by using Burrowing Owl instead of Burrowing Little-Owl, and Pearl-spotted Owl could easily be called Pearl-spotted Pygmy-Owl. Similarly, *G. capense* should be called Barred Pygmy-Owl to distinguish it from the North American *Strix varia,* which also is well-known as the Barred Owl. My point is that a dire need exists for some entity, perhaps the Raptor Research Foundation, to organize a conference in which owl researchers could agree on the English names of owls, once and for all.

Illustrations in the book are detailed enough in line drawings, but the numerous color plates are very monotonous. The overall quality of the color plates does not help what is an otherwise largely enjoyable work. I am not sure whether the quality of the plates was dictated by the small page format, or whether the publisher was operating within a tight budget.

It is true that owls are not too colorful, but without question Great Gray Owls (*Strix nebulosa*) have very bright yellow eyes, and Milky Eagle-Owls (*Bubo lacteus*) have bright fleshy eyelids. Somehow, these two species (among several others) have lost their brightness, at least in the copy that I received. Maybe this was the fault of the color separation during printing.

Any book of this magnitude takes years to write, but still an author is bound to miss some information among the wealth of data from recent research on owls. Taxonomy and vocalizations are extremely well covered throughout, but distribution and ecology are not. Coming from northern Europe and living in Africa, it is readily apparent that the authors did not put adequate effort into get-

ting the distribution maps correct. Certainly Great Gray Owls in the north and Pharaoh Eagle-Owls (*Bubo ascalaphus*) in the south, again only as examples, occur much farther south than illustrated in the maps.

The latest research on the ecology of owls has been almost totally neglected. The most productive owl ecologist in recent years, Erkki Korpimäki, is mentioned only once in the text (under Tengmalm's Owl [*Aegolius funereus*]), but in the Bibliography none of his excellent works are listed. The converse is true in my case, in which the Bibliography lists some of my works, although the citations are not mentioned in the text; e.g., Mikkola (1986) on the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*). My paper on the Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) also is in the Bibliography but not in the text, and the year should be 1971 instead of 1973. The lack of information on ecology is partly understandable given that the authors concentrated on taxonomy and vocalizations, but the focus on the latter topics should have been mentioned somewhere in the book.

Despite my negative remarks, I warmly recommend this unique taxonomic work to anyone interested in knowing more about diversification of owls on our planet. This book is a must for serious "owlers" and academic owl researchers from throughout the world. The book also points out issues for further study, such as the serious need for additional research on vocalizations of different owls, the lack of DNA samples for many taxa, and the paucity of data on the ecology of many species. Only after more studies have been conducted and synthesized can one hope to produce a truly comprehensive work on the owls of the world.—**Heimo Mikkola, Institute of Applied Biotechnology, University of Kuopio, P.O. Box 1627, FIN-70211 Kuopio, Finland.**

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First Symposium on Steller's and White-tailed Sea-Eagles in East Asia. Edited by Mutsuyuki Ueta and Michael J. McGrady. 2000. Wild Bird Society of Japan, Tokyo, Japan. 127 pp., numerous figures and tables. Paper, $20.00.—The current offering is a proceedings of a workshop organized by the Wild Bird Society of Japan, Shiretoko Museum, and the Lead Poisoning Network of Eagles, that was held in Tokyo and Hokkaido, Japan, from 9 to 15 February 1999. Participants included specialists from Japan, Russia, and the United States. Despite its title, the proceedings focuses clearly on the Steller's Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*), the largest and one of the least-studied of the world's eight *Haliaeetus* eagles. The species, described by Pallas in 1811, was named in honor of its collector, arctic naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller, who considered it to be "bold," "cunning," and of "savage disposition." The Steller's Sea-Eagle's massive nature, unmistakable plumage, and oversized yellow bill have long attracted the admiration of raptor biologists. Until recently, however, the species' rugged and remote breeding grounds in easternmost Russia have made it difficult to study the bird in the field. Not surprisingly, then, this proceedings offers much in the way of new information.

The work includes 11 journal-style chapters, nine of which concern Steller's Sea-Eagles, and two of which deal with lead poisoning and chlorinated hydrocarbon contamination in White-tailed Eagles (*H. albicilla*) and Steller's Sea-Eagles. Papers focusing only on the Steller's Sea-Eagle include treatments of bill structure, molt, diet, migration, postnatal development, distribution and abundance in the Magadan and Khabarovsk districts and on Sakhalin Island, and habitat use in Northern Okhotia, as well as information on population trend analysis and techniques for determining sex and

age. A 95-entry reference section on Steller's Sea-Eagles is included as an appendix.

Proceedings can be notoriously uneven in places, and although this is the case here, it is so only because substantial differences in the state of our knowledge regarding various aspects of the biology of Steller's Sea-Eagles have made it necessary. Indeed, and in spite of several minor lapses, the editors are to be congratulated on a job well done, as well as on a job most rapidly done. In addition to the work's judicious editing, Michiko Shigehara's artwork conveys a welcome sense of place for the birds whose biology is described.

Alexander Ladyguin's chapter on bill structure in Steller's Sea-Eagles is particularly enlightening and well written. Having described the species' oversized bill in detail, Ladyguin goes on to discuss the function of its massive and powerful nature, arguing persuasively that both owe their origins not only to the exceptional toughness of fishes' skin, but also to the rapidity with which the species—like Old World vultures—devours its prey while feeding within groups of a dozen or more aggressive conspecifics. Thus, the Steller's Sea-Eagle is capable of consuming 900 g of fish in 3–4 min, whereas the White-tailed Eagle takes almost 18 min to accomplish this task. The complexities of molt in Steller's Sea-Eagles—the species replaces one-half to one-third of all feathers, and one-fourth to one-third of all *flight* feathers annually—are capably described by Teruaki Morioka. Vladimir Masterov's offering reveals that nestlings hatched early in the season grow more slowly than those that hatch later, and that nestling males reach adult size 7–10 days earlier than nestling females. In two exceptionally well-written papers, Potapov et al. suggest that Steller's Sea-Eagles breed almost entirely within a 100-km wide strip along the coastline of the Sea of Okhotsk, that those breeding in regions with low sloping coastlines and broad littoral zones are more tolerant of human disturbance than those breeding along more steeply sloped coastlines, and that diets of nesting pairs differ depending on coastline structure. In yet another excellent paper by the same authors, Utekhina et al. document seasonal shifts in diet, with carrion being particularly important in spring, and fish and colonial-nesting waterbirds being more important in summer. McGrady et al.'s satellite telemetry studies of movements in the species detail fledgling dispersal to premigratory summering sites, as well as eventual migratory journeys to the south, the latter at rates of approximately 50 km per day. Most eagles from Amur and Magadan migrate down the western shorelines of the Sea of Okhotsk, whereas individuals from Kamchatka move south through the Kuril Islands. One exceptional bird undertook a minimal overwater crossing of 730 km from Magadan southeast to southern Kamchatka. Finally, and on a more poignant note, Iwata et al. detail the extent of chlorinated hydrocarbon contamination and lead poisoning in both species of eagles. Lead poisoning, in particular, appears problematic, with pellets in deer shot in wintering areas in Hokkaido, Japan, playing a major role.

Overall, the work provides a thorough and remarkably up-to-date summary of state-of-the-art knowledge of the biology of Steller's Sea-Eagles. The symposium's organizers and proceedings' editors are to be congratulated on their efforts, which should serve the region's conservation biologists and the world's sea-eagle specialists for some time. This slim volume belongs on the shelves of all raptorphiles.—**Keith L. Bildstein, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, 1700 Hawk Mountain Road, Kempton, PA 19529 U.S.A.**