

# Books

**THE RAPTORS OF ARIZONA.** Edited by Richard L. Glinski, 1998. University of Arizona Press, Tucson and Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix. 220 pp. \$75.00 U.S.

**The raptors of Arizona** is an attractive, well-made book that reviews all of the state's hawks, eagles, owls and vultures. There are brief introductory chapters on conservation, habitat, hawk and owl watching, and falconry, followed by single chapters on each of the 42 species that spend all or some part, small or large, of the year in the state. Even the California Condor, a species that has occurred only in the past, is included.

Richard Glinski, the editor, notes in the introduction that some species are excluded even though they are listed in other publications as occurring in Arizona. Glinski takes the conservative approach of requiring a specimen or photograph to support all species described in the book. Thus, Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, Snowy Owl, and Boreal Owl are omitted.

There are many familiar names in the list of authors: Steve Hoffman, Brian Millsap, Lynn Oliphant, Helen Snyder, Noel Snyder and others, all of whom know their raptors from the field. As Clayton White notes in his foreword, the smell of campfire smoke permeates the writing of this book. In many cases, affection for their subjects also permeates the writing.

The color plates by Richard Sloan commissioned for this book are done lovingly. These are all birds in their habitats, and I particularly liked the Burrowing and Flammulated owls, the Merlin and the Northern Goshawk hunched over—of all things—a Thick-billed Parrot.

Do not expect detailed notes on identification in the field or hand. Banding data are cited very infrequently in the book, although some accounts include information that may be of particular interest to banders. For example, juvenile Bald Eagles from Arizona nests were radio-tracked as they dispersed northward as far as 1214 miles [1953 km] to Manitoba in 10 days. Others went to British Columbia and Wyoming. They then moved

south and returned to Arizona by fall. Is this pattern of movement supported by banding results? To those of us unfamiliar with Arizona data, we do not know. Perhaps this book or some of the species accounts could have benefited from analysis of band recoveries.

The book is written well and edited tightly to keep each species account within the 3-to-5-pages range. Ornithological jargon has been mostly eliminated, making the book a pleasurable read; however, there are a few instances where more straightforward words could have replaced the likes of "relictual" and "urbicolous."

There are also enduring mental pictures from some of the authors. Gale Monson quotes J. T. Marshall on the aggressive nature of the Whiskered Screech-Owl: "A fully aroused male, his feathers puffed up and his wings dragging along the ground, struts like a Turkey toward the intruder. Generally he can be picked up; he continues to hoot as long as he is held right-side up." Noel and Helen Snyder on the Sharp-shinned Hawk: "From the perspective of its prey, the Sharp-shinned Hawk is far and away the most awesome retribution for inattentiveness that could be imagined."

Glinski makes a point in his chapter on conservation that is forgotten frequently. Human changes to the land have consequences that are not entirely negative for wildlife. For example, some species, such as Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks, thrive and increase in Arizona's farmland. We should never neglect the negatives of habitat change, but we should be aware of the positives as well.

He also reminds us of something that he once said to Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, and which should be said to every state governor, every legislator, and every representative of the people in North America: "Before an eagle will build a nest, things have to be just right. The important things here are in the habitat, not the nest. The habitat was here before the nest; it is never the other way around."

Although this is a lovely and informative book, it will not be useful in a banding station. Nevertheless, for those who enjoy or study birds, I recommend it as an excellent account of Arizona's raptors. I hope that other states and provinces will produce works of equal merit and attractiveness some day.

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Sharp-shinned Hawk by George West

**BIRDS OF THE WETLANDS.** James Hancock, 1999. Academic Press, London. \$29.95 U.S.; \$41.95 Can.

James Hancock has an enviable career, travelling about the world's dwindling wetlands, studying the long-legged waders (herons, egrets and ibises) on which he is the reigning world authority. His work spanning decades has also chronicled the demise of many wetland areas and the decline of his beloved species, along with many other denizens of their watery world. **WETLANDS** takes us on a tour of a dozen of the world's greatest wetland areas, preserves rich in avian species diversity. The common theme is that none of these areas is secure. Hancock is not shy about pointing out repeatedly that unbridled growth of the human population everywhere underlies the potential loss of all of these ecosystems. It is scant reassurance to read that similar fates befall these other great systems.

I have been privileged to visit half of the sites that Hancock describes. Like Hancock, I first visited the vast Chiba Bay wetlands in the mid-1960s. In June, the shores teemed with migrating shorebirds; herons and egrets were busy nesting, and a few late lingering waterfowl were present. But, everywhere around me the dredges were busy spewing up mud to be used for impoundments, and the shoreline was being converted rapidly to solid substrate. Hancock vividly describes the depressing scene that greeted his visit a decade later. He concludes with guarded optimism "...it is to be hoped that the threatened eradication of wetland habitats has finally been averted." Regarding the Indonesian wetland, however, he sees little optimism: "...it seems extremely doubtful if such sights as are witnessed on the densely packed, vigorously alive Pulau Dua heronry, can expect to be in existence in a generation or two from now." Between these extremes are the hopes expressed for broadened preservation and wise management to preserve these wetlands.

More than just a tour, the book describes important historical and ecological features of the sites. The brilliant photographs that adorn its pages are more than mere portraiture; many images reveal unique features of an avian personality or focus attention on age, seasonal or geographic variation of soft part coloration.

Hancock has been very interested in the systematics of the herons, particularly the Little Egret complex, and there are many discussions of the controversies regarding species limits in this and other groups. He is not shy about disagreeing with other pundits; for example, he does not believe that the Great Egret has close affinity with *Ardea*.

Although banding studies are mentioned occasionally, banders will find little relevant to banding techniques.

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