

Book Reviews

Raptors of Eastern North America. 2003. By *Brian K. Wheeler*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Hardcover, 16 x 23 cm, 439 pages, 559 colour photos, 37 maps. \$45.00 U.S. ISBN 0-691-11598-2.

Raptors of Western North America. 2003. By *Brian K. Wheeler*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Hardcover, 16 x 23 cm, 544 pages, 622 colour photos, 56 maps. \$49.50 U.S. ISBN 0-691-11599-0.

Worldwide interest in watching and studying hawks has expanded greatly in recent years. *Raptors of Eastern North America* and *Raptors of Western North America* are two of the latest specialty books on a group of related birds. Note that raptor, meaning a bird of prey (hawks and relatives and owls), is not a taxonomic term. These two books treat the diurnal raptors in the order Falconiformes such as hawks, falcons, caracara, kites, eagles, harrier and osprey. Also included are the New World vultures and condors, which were formerly in Falconiformes, but are now in the order Ciconiiformes, which includes herons and storks. It is wise to keep vultures and condors as raptors because of their hawk-like appearance, flight styles, habits and history as raptors. However, these books do not treat owls, which are true raptors.

This review deals mainly with the eastern book, but most comments also apply to the western book. In fact, the two books should have been combined as one volume. Both are specialized hand-

books for advanced hawkwatchers. They contain many new photos with detailed captions describing juveniles, subadults, and adults. For example, the eastern book has 82 photos of Red-tailed Hawks in flight and perched. Each species, subspecies and morph is given a detailed description. The text includes considerable information on identification, similar species, abnormal plumages, voice, behaviour, status, distribution, populations, summer and winter ranges, migration, courtship, nesting, habitat, food, mortality and conservation. Each species and subspecies is given a big 1/2 or 3/4 page range map. For example, there are three maps for the Red-shouldered Hawk in the eastern book, showing the ranges of the Eastern, Southern, and South Florida subspecies. The large maps show provincial and state boundaries and key cities, making them clear and easy to use.

These handbooks also contain five extensive glossaries: a general glossary; a plumage, molt and age glossary; an anatomy and feather glossary; a flying and perching dis-

plays glossary; and a perching and flying attitudes (with photos) glossary. Both books are printed on

quality paper. I highly recommend these two superb references for the serious hawkwatcher.

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Grebes of Our World. 2001. By *André Konter*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. Hardcover, 187 pages, 85 colour photos, many black-and-white sketches. \$27.00 U.S. ISBN 84-87334-33-4.

Anyone who has ever watched a grebe can't help but be fascinated by their behaviour and mastery of the water. They glide effortlessly through the roughest lakes and sink almost magically below the surface with barely a ripple. Their often elaborate courtship displays leave us amused and, at the same time, spellbound.

A small group as bird families go, only twenty-two species are known worldwide. Mr. Konter shares his extensive experience, knowledge and admiration for these birds through a combination of words and pictures.

A nice foreword speaks concisely and informatively about grebes on such subjects as origins and subdivisions into genera, appearance, locomotion and diet. Included in this section are some great facts that would fascinate even a non-birder. Did you know that a grebe opens its eyes periodically even when asleep, presumably to subconsciously assess dangers in the vicinity? Facial stripes help offset the disadvantages of laterally situat-

ed eyes and help the grebes better focus on prey. Bill size and shape are quite different between species and reflect the preferred prey: fish, insects or other invertebrates.

Each of the six genera and all of the twenty-two species are described individually. Each account speaks to geographical distribution, measurements, appearance, habitat, nesting, food, subspecies and behaviour. One to several photographs and/or drawings support each account, and the author injects his own personal observations and theories throughout the text. This greatly enhances the readability and believability of the work. The book finishes with a detailed bibliography and a definitions section, as authors who write about grebes seem to have their own vocabulary.

If I had to find fault with the book, it would perhaps be with the quality of some of the photographs. Many of them seem to be added as fillers and often the purpose of the photo is unclear, at least to me.

If you are looking for a book that will tell you everything there is to know about grebes, a monograph so to speak, your search continues. If you're looking for a book that will introduce you to the wonders of grebes and give you insights into

the lives of each of the world's species, and if you want to share the enthusiasm of one who obviously loves and understands these archaic birds, this will fill the bill. It is both informative and readable.

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