

BOOK REVIEW

Harkness, R., and C. Murdoch. 1971. *Birds of Prey in the Field*. London: H. F. & G. Witherby, Ltd. 208 pp. 8½"x5½". 243 sketches and 60 photos. Price: 2.25 English pounds.

This is a field guide to the diurnal birds of prey of Europe which has almost no use in North America and little scientific merit in general. *Birds of Prey in the Field* presents useful field observation techniques for the least experienced amateur bird watcher, but it is based on the incorrect premise that the greater one's experience at identifying raptors, the more he appreciates the problems. To the contrary, the problems disappear with experience and one wonders what the difficulty was originally.

Harkness and Murdoch spend a great deal of time actually telling the reader what the book is *not*. The illustrations are *not* accurate portraits of the species; no artistic merit is claimed. The drawings are *not* to scale, because the authors stress shape, pattern and flight attitudes. The authors do *not* attempt to describe plumages in detail, their objective being to emphasize only field characters. The book does *not* include range maps because, for one thing, "The status of many raptors is changing so fast that unless one has up to the minute local information from *all* range extremities for *all* species, there is a serious possibility of the maps being misleading" (p. 57).

On the whole, these negative aspects shadow any usefulness the book might have. Overemphasis of field characters distorts the shapes, patterns and attitudes depicted to the point of their being unrealistic. The suggestion of extensive use of field notes and sketches is a good one, but most amateurs will not, and professionals need not, go into that detail. Perhaps the best part of the book is a three page essay on why birds of prey are difficult to identify, but even this should be obvious to most amateurs. *Richard R. Olendorff*.