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Birds of Prey in the Collection of the
American Museum of Natural History

by

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The study collection of birds in The American Museum of Natural History, New York, numbers about one million specimens. Raptores are proportionately represented. The vast material gathered in South America under the supervision of F. M. Chapman, the wonderful collections from the East Indies amassed by Lord Rothschild, and the splendid African specimens obtained by the late James P. Chapin and others, are among the more important components of the New York collection. After purchase of the Rothschild Collection in the 30's our species representation of the Falconiformes and Strigiformes was perhaps 90 per cent complete. Then, over the past 10 years, we have made a special effort to acquire missing species of birds in general and raptores in particular. As a result of generous exchanges from other museums we now lack only one species in the entire order Falconiformes, and this a dubious one, namely Falco kryenborgi (see Streseman and Amadon, Ibis, 1963, 105, pp. 400-402). Of the elusive owls we are not quite so well off, lacking six species; namely, Otus ireneae Ripley, recently described from East Africa; Otus beccarii of Biak Island, Papua; Mimizuku gurnevi of the Philippines; Bubo shelleyi of West Africa (of which we are promised, on its demise, an individual now in the New York Zoo); Scotopelia ussheri of West Africa, and Phodilus prigoginei, the African Bay Owl, still known from but one specimen.

This does not, of course, mean that some of the forms in our collection are adequately represented. Of Accipiter collaris, for example, we have only one, an immature; the Field Museum in Chicago, with its rich neotropical collections, happen to have 6 or 8 specimens of this bird.

The British Museum (Natural History) has the only other collection of birds, including raptors, at all comparable in size and completeness with that of The American Museum of Natural History.

I have not attempted to make an estimate of the total number of specimens of raptors in our collection. It would not mean much, since we have enormous series of some of the eastern migrants, shot by a flyway gunner of 50 years ago, who salved his conscience by having the birds he shot, or some hundreds of them, skinned out. Yet, it may give an indication of the size of the collection to indicate our approximate holdings of a few species:

Mississippi Kite	25 ±
Bald Eagle	50 ±
Prairie Falcon	35 ±

Of subspecies, of course, there are an appreciable number lacking, though we have most of them.

The justification for this or any other collection is the amount of use made of it. We always welcome visiting students of birds of prey, and can sometimes help with their expenses through the Frank M. Chapman Memorial Fund. Within reason, we are willing to identify specimens or to loan material to other institutions. The library of the museum contains most books and journal articles on birds of prey, except for items dealing solely with falconry. Even of the latter subject we have some outstanding items such as the great folio work by Schlegel and Wulverhorst. We also have two splendid paintings of gyrfalcons by Joseph Wolf, commissioned by D. G. Elliot for one of his monographs, and several field sketches and portraits of birds of prey by L. A. Fuertes and other artists.

Species represented by separate habitat groups in our Hall of North American Birds are the California Condor, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Great Horned Owl. Other habitat exhibits, though not restricted to single species, contain various birds of prey--e.g., an Andean Group featuring a South American Condor in flight.

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