

BOOK REVIEWS

EDITED BY JEFFREY S. MARKS

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Flight-feather Molt Patterns and Age in North American Owls. By Peter Pyle. 1997. American Birding Association, *Monographs in Field Ornithology*, No. 2. 32 pp., 14 figures, 2 tables. ISBN 1-878788-36-1. Paper, \$9.95.—Relative to the situation in Europe, molt patterns in North American owls are poorly understood. Because the pattern of replacement of the remiges is important in age determination, an understanding of molt is crucial for workers who study owls in the hand. Here, Pyle presents the first in-depth treatment of molt in North American owls based on his examination of 2429 specimens of the 19 species that breed in the United States and Canada. Sample sizes range from 23 individuals for Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) to 285 for Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*).

Nine species showed evidence of incomplete primary and secondary molt in adults, and four species exhibited evidence of incomplete secondary molt only. The species that appeared to have a complete molt of the remiges each year are Eastern (*Otus asio*), Western (*O. kennicottii*) and Whiskered (*O. trichopsis*) Screech-owl; Northern (*Glaucidium gnoma*) and Ferruginous (*G. brasilianum*) pygmy-owl; Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*); and Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*). A single Western Screech-owl (of more than 200 adults examined) had undergone incomplete secondary molt, accounting for the fact that the above lists add to 20 rather than 19 species. For the species that have a complete annual molt, clues to aging are based on differences in feather wear, shape of the outer primaries and markings on the primary coverts and rectrices.

Normally, the ultimate measure by which a monograph of this type should be evaluated is how well it enables one to correctly determine the age of the species in question. However, our knowledge of age determination in North American owls is so incomplete that I do not think such an evaluation

is possible. Pyle is quick to point out that: (1) his inferences were drawn from owls of unknown age (i.e., the birds had not been banded as nestlings); (2) the ability of someone to correctly use the keys depends on experience; and (3) for many species, overlap in various characters makes precise age determination impossible. Indeed, he states that "Responsible ageing always includes the willingness to place a bird in a less-precise age group should any uncertainty exist." I agree with this statement, and I suspect that Pyle's monograph will go a long way toward stimulating additional work on aging owls using the techniques he describes.—**Jeff Marks, Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812 U.S.A.**

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Some Time with Eagles and Falcons. By Jerry Olsen. 1995. Hancock House Publishers, Blaine, WA. viii + 160 pp., 6 figures, 4 tables, 29 color photographs. ISBN 0-88839-375-X. Paper, \$24.95.—This relatively short book provides an overview of Jerry Olsen's experiences as a raptor biologist and conservationist. Written in a first person biographical format, the book presents a series of anecdotal remembrances of places visited, hawks seen and projects conducted. Reading this book, I felt as if I was swapping stories after a long day in the field, some about birds and people I knew, and some I didn't know. Because Olsen has spent most of his career in Australia, the majority of the book deals with that country and its raptors. As an American, I found the stories of White-tailed Sea-Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Wedge-tailed Eagles (*Aquila audax*) and Black Falcons (*Falco subniger*), to mention just a few, exotic and interesting.

Although the book is not scientific, some chapters deal with research projects involving Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) and eagles. The information is presented in the text and in a few tables. Unfortunately, the tables are one of the weaker parts of the book. Tabular data typically are presented with no sample sizes or explanations. Thus, the appearance of science is given, but without the rigor that allows others to interpret the data. Because this book clearly is not meant to be a scientific review, the tables are unnecessary, and, to me, distracting. The book ends with an appendix entitled "Handbook for rehabilitating orphaned and injured raptors." This very short (12 pages) summary of a variety of rehabilitation techniques, al-

though accurate, certainly is not sufficient to be called a handbook. One can only hope that the totally naive reader does not try to take on an injured raptor armed only with this information.

Some Time with Eagles and Falcons should interest most general readers who enjoy hawks and their habitats. Hopefully, by conveying some of the excitement and challenges of working with raptors, the book will inspire younger readers to pursue a career in conservation. If you work in the field, the book will introduce you to some new places and new birds and possibly will rekindle some old memories.—**Mark Martell, The Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota, 1920 Fitch Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108 U.S.A.**