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PREFACE

CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY OF RAPTORS IN THE TROPICS

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Tropical ecosystems contain the most biologically diverse habitats on earth (Wilson 1988). Over 75% of the world's endemic species occur in tropical regions (Bibby et al. 1992) and over 25% of the world's ecoregions are in the tropics (Bailey 1996). One such ecoregion, tropical rainforest, covers less than 10% of the earth's land surface yet contains more than half of the species on earth. This is alarming because tropical ecosystems are disappearing faster than all other habitats around the world (Whitmore 1997). Their loss has profound implications for the conservation of the world's biological diversity (Wilson 1988). The loss of tropical forests is the most conspicuous threat, but the conversion of savanna areas to intensive agriculture is also a threat by reducing available habitat to nonforest species.

With an estimated 90% of all species of raptors occurring, wholly or in part, in the tropics (Kennedy 1986), and 45% of all raptor species found in tropical rainforests (Thiollay 1994), the loss of tropical ecosystems is especially alarming for these birds. As top-order predators with low population densities, raptors are particularly sensitive to habitat loss. In addition to this sensitivity, their high visibility and general allure, make them ideal species for conserving critically-endangered habitats. Nevertheless, the distribution and status of many raptors are poorly known because many are secretive, forest-dwelling species (Meyburg and van Balen 1994, Thiollay 1994, van Balen 1994).

Because of the need for more information on the current status of tropical raptors and threats that jeopardize their future survival, I organized this symposium as part of the 1996 joint meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation and American

Ornithologists' Union held in Boise, Idaho. Its purpose was to bring together currently active researchers from each of the tropical biogeographical regions of the world to give first-hand accounts of the status of raptors in their region. Together, these papers represent a complete synthesis of the current state of knowledge and conservation status of the world's raptors in the tropics. They provide information on distributions and population densities, taxonomy, breeding behavior, habitat requirements, and sensitivity to habitat modification that can be used to influence the future of raptor research and conservation in many of the world's tropical areas.

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