

## BOOK REVIEW

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**North American Owls: Biology and Natural History, Second Edition.** By Paul A. Johnsgard. 2002. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC. xiii + 298 pp., 42 color plates, 12 tables, 76 text figures, 3 appendices. ISBN 1-56098-939-4. Cloth, \$49.95.—The first edition of this book, published in 1988, was widely acclaimed as one of the finest books on North American owls. I described it as a well-balanced coverage of the biology and natural history of the North American species (*Wilson Bull.* 102:192–193, 1990). Now, 14 years later, we see a revised edition, and I will focus primarily on how the new book differs from the first edition.

The new edition is essentially the same size as the first and only three pages longer despite adding coverage of 12 Mexican species, 24 new figures, 12 new color plates, about 15% more text, and some Internet sources on owls. Packing all this new information in without increasing the size of the book was accomplished by eliminating detailed plumage descriptions and making some changes in the format: double-column format versus single column, smaller font size, and reducing the size of figures and tables. Johnsgard also nearly doubled the number of references, but admits that some of the new references are not cited in the text, a mistake in my opinion because important new information has not been integrated into the book.

Organization of the second edition, like the first, consists of two parts. Part one is a general review of owl evolution and systematics, ecology, morphology, physiology, behavior, reproduction, and folklore, and part two contains detailed natural histories of the 31 species.

How well did Johnsgard pull off this revision? Unevenly, I think, is the best word to describe it. On the one hand, large sections in the first part are unaltered other than some minor editing. For example, the sections on vocalizations and mythology are essentially unchanged. On the other hand, the section on morphological characteristics has several new figures and a whole new paragraph on leg and foot musculature, but its source is not cit-

ed. I am left wondering if the asymmetrical updating was based on the relative amounts of new material in the literature or some other criterion.

The same imbalance of revision applies to the species accounts. The Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis*) account contains much new material, reflecting the intense research on it since the first edition came out. The Eastern Screech-Owl (*Otus asio*) account is also heavily updated with information from many new sources, but the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) account is not. Only a few new sources are cited adding very little new information. The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), the species I am most familiar with, was updated primarily from Taylor's *Barn Owls: Predator-Prey Relations and Conservation* (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, UK, 1994); although an excellent book, it is concerned mostly with European birds. I was disappointed to find that several of my recent publications on Barn Owl reproduction, mate choice, and morphology (*Auk* 107:246–254, 1990; *Condor* 96:468–484, 1994; *Auk* 114:581–592, 1997) were not even listed in the reference section; others were listed but not cited in text.

The selection process for the color images remains as elusive as it was in the first edition. Of the 31 species covered in the book, 26 are represented by either a painting or color photograph (all good to excellent in quality) or both, but eight species are represented by both a painting and a photograph. Five species, all Mexican, are not illustrated in color, and, unfortunately, the Barn, Snowy (*Nyctea scandiaca*), and Burrowing (*Athene cunicularia*) owls are shown only in Fuertes paintings. In my opinion, Fuertes paintings are not the best to represent a species in a scientific book. Finally, why did Johnsgard use three photos of a Western Screech-Owl (*Otus kennicottii*) and two each of six other species?

We have come to expect a lot from Johnsgard's books. Unfortunately, this one does not quite live up to those expectations. Although it is still one of the best sources of information on North American owls, especially with the addition of the Mexican species, it could have been so much more. Did Johnsgard, perhaps, anticipate this view? Why else did he pen the second sentence of the Preface:

“Raptoriphiles, and especially strigiphiles, are so attached to their subjects that few books escape the wrath of reviewers who feel that their particular species or subject area has been slighted or badly dealt with.”

Who should buy this book? Libraries need a copy and those individuals interested in owls, who

do not own a copy of the first edition, will surely want one. People who have the first edition have a harder problem—does the second edition have enough new information? The answer to that will have to be a personal one.—**Carl D. Marti, Raptor Research Center, Boise State University, Boise, ID 83725 U.S.A.**