

BIRDERS' BOOKSHELF

A Field Guide to Hawks of North America

William S. Clark and Brian K. Wheeler. 1987. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, MA. xii + 198 pp., 24 color plates, 2 black-and-white plates, 240 (42 pages) black & white photographs, 32 maps. \$13.95 paperbound.

and

Hawks in Flight

Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton. 1988. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, MA. xvii + 254 pp., 173 (92 pages) black-and-white drawings, 145 (78 pages) black-and-white photographs. \$17.95 clothbound.

ACCOLADES TO THE AUTHORS AND Artists of these two books, for singly and in tandem they constitute quantum leaps forward in the art of hawk watching. No books to date have really dealt with the identification of these difficult species in sufficient detail. I chose to comment on these two volumes together because they are designed to help birders at all levels and both contain amazingly up-to-date and accurate information. The authors have performed Herculean tasks in compiling two marvelous works and I'll yield here to the now standard "no serious birder should be without them."

Although Dunne, Clark, *et al.* carry off big challenges with admirable results and will surely take their audience by storm, they are at opposite poles in approach, style, philosophy, and mood. They have different slants,

considerable latitude in topics covered, and neither is error-free.

In reality, the trick of mastering the art of hawk watching is untranslatable and nontransferable. It comes only after several hundred hours of looking carefully at buteos and falcons. There is no short cut. Years of absorbing certain sensory data covering the enormous diversity of these birds cannot be sidestepped. Careful scrutiny, it cannot be denied, plays the most critical role in getting to be really wonderful at discriminating extremely subtle visual cues.

Clark and Wheeler is well-researched with each of the 39 species of diurnal raptors found north of Mexico illustrated in color, often with several drawings. These illustrations emphasize plumage characters, especially wing patterns, and there are black-and-white photos to further point up and highlight important features. There are some odd omissions and inconceivable errors (*e.g.*, on pages 6, 7, and 8 and the back endpapers the wingtips and tails are more wrong than right and I wonder why the eagle silhouette is so small? Many of the field marks purported obvious in the photographs aren't. I'd have preferred fewer but larger photographs.). The Wheeler paintings are very helpful but seem stiff and in some instances have a rather labored quality. Clark knows what he's talking about but sometimes I don't and I'm a very careful reader. His prose is too often contorted—a great defect when tackling so monumental and curiously elusive a subject.

The bottom line is however, "take this one in the field with you" but don't expect to be able to identify every flying or perched raptor. Be disciplined enough to let some go unspecified.

Dunne, Sibley, and Sutton have turned out a literate, highly idiosyncratic, immensely readable book—full of facts and judgements and sure to be controversial. Jizz, particularly of some raptor species, is often the "clincher," and having started to make more people aware of it, *Hawks in Flight* has used it effectively here. Tireless browsing in the fields of ambiguity often does not exhaust its

treasures. This book has much well-presented, fascinating information which will, we hope, encourage birders to concentrate more on this challenging aspect of field identification. If at first it doesn't seem to work for you, remember that magic is in the hat of the magician. Go home, read the book again and next time you are watching hawks in passage, concentrate more on the visceral impact of the birds, not on their field characters. The jizz of hawks, ambiguous in their implications, have the power to evoke enthusiasm and offer pleasure at all levels. Perhaps this is the take-home message of *Hawks in Flight*.

The illustrations by David Sibley are hugely satisfying. He is not merely good, he is *wickedly* good. He continues to demonstrate remarkable talent. Study his drawings if you crave concrete evidence that jizz can be captured. If you need an excuse to buy this book, Sibley's illustrations do just fine.

The photos of Clay Sutton have suffered very little in the printing process and are solid additions to the effort.

Get these books and use them with relish. Each of them deserves superior treatment.—Susan Roney Drennan

Birding By Ear: A guide to Bird-song identification (Eastern and Central North America)

Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson. 1989. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, MA. Three double-sided cassettes and a 64 page booklet. \$35.00.

BIRDERS' SENSIBILITIES HAVE BECOME attuned to different types of field aids and because of the current profusion, birders have been revising their notion of what it is that makes a useful piece of equipment. We are in a position to evaluate, compare, and choose discriminately from the almost boundless new available gear. This set of three cassettes of recordings of bird-songs and calls provide novice birders with an imaginative, welcome, and needed new system for learning bird vocalizations. Walton and Lawson



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have elegantly demonstrated that the correlation between perceptual variables can be specified in highly precise fashions. The detailed commentary, provided throughout the tapes, is exact and conversational with a tone of technical confidence and an admirable concern for texture. The numerous and varied bits of the eighty-five common species' songs and calls are broken into their fundamental components for examination and then reassembled into a coherently framed whole. At all points the narrative retains a sound perspective and is never threatening or confusing. The creators of this system are to be congratulated for imaginatively moving into new territory. Certainly anyone who uses these tapes to practice new learning skills cannot fail to come away with a very big jump on birds' auditory cues.—Susan Roney Drennan

Bird Finding in New England

Richard K. Walton. Foreword by Davis W. Finch. Illustrator Barry Van Dusen. 1988. David R. Godine Publisher, Inc., Boston, MA. xx + 328 pp., 8 black-and-white drawings, 31 maps. \$14.95 softcover (flexibound).

WHEN I THINK OF BLOCK ISLAND, Rhode Island, I am barefoot with binoculars in recollection, and my naked soles feel warm sand at the North End (Sandy Point) and the Great Salt Pond. I drag my tripod over shrubby dunes and down Dickens Road. When I'm sneakered, I can feel the flinty surface of the town roads. In birding New Hampshire and Massachusetts, I drive past Doric-columned churches, clapboard saltboxes and small-town common greens. In Maine, I breathe the air of freedom and sit in moldy smelling summer furniture. On Mount Desert Island, I look for pitcher plants and orchids and nesting White-throated Sparrows in summer and huge rafts of Oldsquaws off the Loop Road in the park and along both shores of Somes Sound in winter. In Connecticut, at Milford Point, I exchange a few friendly remarks with a woolen capped, white-side-burned birder. I check Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven, for migrating hawks and falcons and walk along a bumpy path bordered by white-spiked vagabond

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Second Tour 2-25 August

INDONESIA
Sumatra, Java, Bali
Kalimantan
27 July-19 August

grass. In the White Mountains of New Hampshire and Green Mountains of Vermont, I let ambitious, goal-oriented climbers pass me on well-worn trails while I ruminate in the woodlands looking for nesting Cape May Warblers and Boreal Chickadees.

Dick Walton brings it all together for me and it really works. I recognize the settings. He's written a remarkably inviting collection of forty of the very finest birding sites in New England. A dedicated birder, veteran traveler, and skilled and engaging writer, Walton has a keen knowledge of each of the places in this collection and describes them in a well-considered, nimble manner.

Do not expect every prime birding site in New England to be included in a book of this size, but *do* expect to be able to take it on trips, just as I have, and be able to find great birds in a wide variety of habitats. The site maps are well executed and helpful. You will, however, still need detailed state road maps.

Walton invited an old salt, irrepresible birder, and mentor to many, Wayne Petersen, to write a chapter

which is entitled "Pelagic Birding in New England." This is a smooth, sure-flowing section written with all of the gusto and energy Petersen typically brings to his endeavors. It contains quite a lot of real information while titillating the curiosity and enthusiasm of novice and experienced birders. The foreword by Davis Finch is a root affirmation of Walton's work and sets exactly the right tone for the chapters to follow.

The fullest use of this book would be as a travel companion, its pages laid open on the front seat while its precious subjects are approached mile after rolling mile and discovered within their favored settings.

I suggest that birders roaming New England get it. It is a bonafide "keeper."—Susan Roney Drennan

