

BOOK REVIEWS

Raptors of the World, by James Ferguson-Lees and David A. Christie. 2005. Princeton University Press. 320 pages, 118 color plates. Paperback \$29.95 (ISBN 0-691-12684-4).

Whereas I loved Jerry Ligouri's book (reviewed above), which was written by someone knowledgeable and passionate about hawks, with something valuable to say, I find the present work has little to recommend it beyond an attractive cover painting. It is a condensed "field guide" version of the monumental book by the same title (and authors) published in 2001. Like so many books in this genre, however, the original *Raptors of the World* should have omitted New World species, with which the authors and artists lack familiarity. This condensed edition recognizes 338 species, an increase of 25 (one newly described, 24 split) over the 2001 edition, but is this National Geographic approach to publishing any justification for killing thousands of trees? Only the most myopic of birdwatchers will take on their travels a field guide limited to raptors, and regional field guides covering all species now exist for most parts of the world. Beyond being flawed in concept, the content and illustrations are weak at best when it comes to the New World, so this book is unlikely to help with identifications as challenging as those in the genera *Buteogallus* or *Accipiter*.

It doesn't take long to become disillusioned with *Raptors of the World*, although some introductory text (taken mostly from the 2001 version) is well written, interesting, and, commendably, referenced. But pick any New World raptor with which you're familiar, and look at the plates. It took only minutes to find the following problems, so you can guess how many more exist. Let's start with plate 4 (smaller New World vultures), where all the birds are disproportionately large-headed caricatures (a deficiency common to many paintings in the book) and shaped quite differently from the birds in life. The three distinct subspecies groups of the Turkey Vulture allegedly shown look essentially the same (in life there are obvious differences in the patterning of the head and upperwings), and the text unhelpfully skims over any differences. The head colors of the yellow-headed vultures are inaccurate as well as insipid, and the differences in primary pattern of Black Vulture subspecies look rather exaggerated. On plate 59, the northern subspecies of the Crane Hawk is far too dark. On plate 62, the wing/tail proportions of the perched Common Black Hawk are misleadingly similar to those of the Great Black Hawk (at least in the adult; the juveniles are not posed comparably and are no use for identification). On plate 78, the diagnostic white leading edge on the upperwing of the Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle is absent. On plate 114, the Prairie Falcon in flight is far too dark dorsally, and the flight shapes are grotesque. And so on.

How about the text? Well, as one might expect, it's too short to treat key features meaningfully for a group so fraught with identification problems—hence the book fails completely as a field guide, its stated purpose. The maps are too small to be more than a very general reference, although they still have errors; for example, the west Mexican range of the Double-toothed Kite is omitted. While the 2001 full-size version might be of some use, at least in the Old World, this spin-off should be condemned to perdition. Presumably, *Raptors* was produced with the hope of generating money rather than actually being of any use, a sad commentary on the world of bird-book publishing. Then, when such books fail to generate income, publishers will be wary of publishing books that are genuine contributions to the field, so everyone suffers from this short-term greed. *Raptors of the World* is in striking contrast to *Hawks from Every Angle*, which was conceived and executed well. These two books, remarkably from the same publisher, stand at almost opposite ends of the spectrum with respect to what bird identification guides should be. I will use and value *Hawks from Every Angle*, but I will recycle *Raptors of the World* as soon as this review is written.

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