

BOOK REVIEW

J Raptor Res. 38(1):103–104

© 2004 The Raptor Research Foundation, Inc.

Raptors of Eastern North America. By Brian K. Wheeler. 2003. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 456 pp., 559 color photographs, 37 maps. ISBN 0-691-11598-2. Cloth, \$45.00. **Raptors of Western North America.** By Brian K. Wheeler. 2003. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 560 pp., 622 color photographs, 56 maps. ISBN 0-691-11599-0. Cloth, \$49.50.—These companion guides are intended for the moderate-to-expert-level raptor enthusiast. The exquisite photos in the books clearly illustrate all of the confusing age, sex, and geographic variants for the 34 diurnal raptor species in North America. These books also contain an incredible amount of new natural history and conservation-related information.

The eastern guide provides detailed species accounts for 26 species (including the two vultures) that occur regularly east of the Mississippi River; the western guide treats a total of 33 species. Each account includes information on molt, plumage traits (by age, sex, color morph, and subspecies), habitat preferences, status and distribution, migration patterns and timing, feeding behavior, courtship and nesting, flight behavior, and conservation efforts. The range maps are accurate and exceptionally detailed and include subspecies where appropriate. Literature citations are listed at the end of each account.

I was immediately struck by the comprehensive research effort undertaken for the status and distribution accounts. When available, up-to-date continental population estimates are given, as well as statewide and regional numbers. For example, the western guide reveals that 600 pairs of the Peale's Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus pealei*) remain in Alaska, and the total world population of this subspecies is only 700 pairs. Wheeler frequently cites recent totals from the autumn migration counts in Veracruz, Mexico, to substantiate his continent-wide population estimates.

I especially enjoyed reading the section in each species account on conservation. I learned that Mexico plans a total ban on DDT use by 2006. I

read about efforts to restore Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) to the southeastern U.S.; indeed, Georgia hacked 117 eagles (mostly from Wyoming) from 1984 to 1992. I also found a complete list of the mortality factors that are affecting reintroduced populations of California Condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*).

Wheeler augments his discussion of migration for each species with the latest satellite telemetry data and results from various unpublished reports. For example, he mentions a Peregrine Falcon tracked by the Canadian Wildlife Service that migrated from Edmonton, Alberta, to Mazatlan, Mexico (a distance of 3500 km), in less than 12 days!

The stunning photographs are the backbone of these two guides. Every plumage variation for each species is abundantly illustrated. The treatment of the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is particularly exhaustive, with a total of 82 photos (including 28 for the Harlan's subspecies) and five range maps.

I detected no glaring inaccuracies in either book. I do have a couple of minor criticisms, however. First, some of the identification characteristics mentioned might work well for perched birds seen through a spotting scope (e.g., iris and bill color, facial markings), but identification of distant birds and birds in flight generally is not emphasized. Second, the photos and corresponding captions do not always point the reader immediately to those characters that might best be used to distinguish a particular age, sex, subspecies, or species. Finally, some key features for distinguishing similar species are mentioned only briefly or omitted altogether (this was especially true for members of the genus *Accipiter*).

For these reasons, I do not recommend these books as stand-alone field guides for North American raptors. They are outstanding adjuncts to your Clark and Wheeler (Peterson's *Hawks Guide*), Dunne et al. (*Hawks in Flight*), or Wheeler's own *Photographic Guide*, and they go far beyond these field guides by providing detailed status and distributional data, as well as fresh natural history and conservation information.

Although these two books may seem a bit pricey, when one appreciates the exceptional quality of

the photos and the tremendous volume of useful information contained in each species account, I believe the price is very reasonable (if not a bargain). Anyone interested in the identification, natural history, and conservation of North American

diurnal raptors will not want to be without these companion volumes in his/her library.—**Stephen W. Hoffman, Audubon Pennsylvania, 100 Wildwood Way, Harrisburg, PA 17110 U.S.A.**