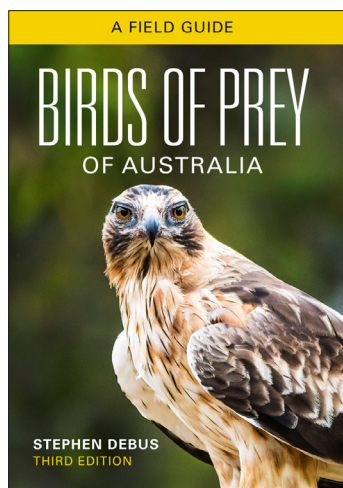


## Book Review

### Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide, third edition

by Stephen Debus

CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, 2019. Paperback, 224 pages, including 299 colour and 65 black-and-white illustrations. RRP AU\$44.99.



The third edition of *Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide* is a warranted update to the previous edition, published in 2012. Produced by one of the nation's foremost raptor experts, Stephen Debus, the book has incorporated a spate of recent research on previously understudied species and also contains updated diagnostic photographs and distribution maps. The publication aims to compliment the recently

released *Australian Birds of Prey in Flight: A Photographic Guide* by Richard Seaton, Mat Gilfedder and Stephen Debus, and between them these guides leave few excuses for raptor misidentification.

The book retains the same format as the second edition, with the first part providing a concise field guide and the second part providing a detailed description of the biology of each of Australia's 24 species of resident diurnal birds of prey. The introduction and the final chapter (Threats, Conservation and the Future) offer a fascinating and succinct summary of the natural history of Australian raptors and the issues pertinent to their ongoing survival.

The species descriptions of Part 1 remain largely the same as in the second edition, with the exception that distribution maps are provided for all resident and vagrant raptor species, after previously being provided for only some species. Illustrations are provided of underwing patterns, displaying easily confused species side by side to highlight distinguishing features. The photographs of birds in flight have been updated with improved and additional photographs, helpfully including photographs of juvenile, immature and adult-plumaged birds, as well as different colour morphs.

Part 2 is where most of the new material is found. Raptors are separated into nine groups of related genera, encompassing the latest DNA studies to justify groupings.

The introduction section for each group describes taxonomic relationships between different birds within the group and their relationship to raptor species throughout the world. This section will appeal to raptor researchers, with the most substantial updates being made to the *Accipiter* and Red Goshawk groups. The biology of each species is described with updated information included for Black-breasted Buzzard, Pacific Baza, Brahminy Kite and Grey and Black Falcons.

New to the third edition is a series of illustrations that demonstrate unique, species-specific behaviours, such as displaying flight patterns and foraging techniques, as well as comparative silhouettes that further differentiate similar-looking species. Every effort has been made to aid raptor identification.

The final chapter of this guide expertly summarises contemporary threats to Australian raptors and means of mitigating these threats. This section has been expanded from the second edition to include descriptions of threats to prey and habitats, providing a holistic perspective to a niche field and revealing the role of raptors within the wider ecosystem. There is a slightly depressing tone as familiar themes emerge, such as repetition of mistakes, resistance to change and watering down of environmental legislation. Thankfully, some realistic solutions are proffered.

The latest edition of *Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide* provides a comprehensive summary of all available raptor information. For those looking for a field guide purely to aid raptor identification, the latest edition provides a modest improvement on the previous one. The new material will appeal to people with an interest in raptor ecology, taxonomy and conservation. The third edition of the field guide is an essential acquisition for any ecologist or naturalist with a fascination for Australian raptors.

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