

Birds of Prey, edited by Ian Newton and Penny Olsen, illustrated by Tony Pyrzakowski, Golden Press, Sydney, 1990. Hardcover, 32 x 25 cm, 240 pp., colour photographs and paintings throughout. RRP \$39.95, now remaindered at \$14.95.

The dust-jacket of this book is subtitled 'An illustrated encyclopedic survey by international experts', and it is certainly that: a popularised summary of knowledge and theory on raptors, in part a distillation of Ian Newton's *Population Ecology of Raptors* (1979, Poyser, Berkhamsted). It is an essential reference for the layperson or beginner interested in the subject. It is written by a team of the world's foremost raptor biologists, and includes a pleasing amount of Australian content (authors Penny & Jerry Olsen, liberal mention and photos of Australian species).

The book is divided into three major parts: Raptors of the World, Raptor Biology and Relations with Man. The first part lists the anatomical characters of the diurnal raptor order and families in great detail, and concludes with an overview of the kinds of raptors, with profiles of representative species. The second part covers How Raptors are Studied, Habitats and Populations, Feeding Habits, Social Behaviour,

Reproduction, Mortality, and Migration and Movements. These sections discuss the various aspects of raptors' lives and how they are studied. The final part covers Raptors and People (the role of raptors in human culture), Human Impacts on Raptors (a catalogue of negative effects on raptor populations), and Conservation and Management. Throughout are single-page 'boxes' of short essays illustrating or exemplifying material in the main text. The book concludes with a checklist of the Falconiformes, suggestions for further reading, and an index.

I noticed very few errors, mainly in the illustrations and captions. I did not like the paintings, some of them copies of published photos (including those elsewhere in the book!). The Black Kite (p. 39) has its primaries bending the wrong way. The supposed 'Barred Forest Falcon' (painting p. 50 and its photo model p. 193) is misidentified, not even a falconid but probably a *Buteo*. 'Flushing' and 'ambushing' labels are transposed on the diagram, p. 123. In the painting on p. 134 it looks like the larger female Sparrowhawk is dropping prey to the male (instead of vice versa). One can only conclude that Mr Pyrzakowski is not a raptor expert. Among the photos, those of wild birds are outstanding but a few are captive or injured birds 'staged' as supposedly genuine field photos, a fraudulent practice — such captives should be identified as such in captions, or the photos not used. The immature Brahminy Kite on p. 58 is captioned 'Whistling Kite'. Textual errors include an overstated weight of 4 kilos for large falcons (p. 30), and pure fantasy on Peregrine diving speed (p. 95: 320 kph, versus maximum reliably measured speeds of about 140 kph, still impressive enough!). The Madagascar Serpent-Eagle has been rediscovered (p. 88). Typographical errors include the caption on p. 30 ('fledgling' for 'fledging'). It is surprising that the Cuppers' *Hawks in Focus* was not listed under Further Reading.

At the original price, this book was far better value than its recent predecessors or competitors in similar vein. At the remaindered price it is an absolute steal, packed with far more information than any 'popular' raptor book of its kind. It is surprising that it was remaindered so soon, which suggests that it was not selling well — a great pity, if the efforts of so many people are reaching relatively few. Bird-watchers without any particular interest in raptors, and especially those who gripe about the amount of raptor material in *ABW*, should peruse this book even if they read nothing else on the subject. They may then appreciate the environmental importance of raptors, the need for the amount of research on them, and the benefits raptor conservation has for all wildlife.

Stephen Debus