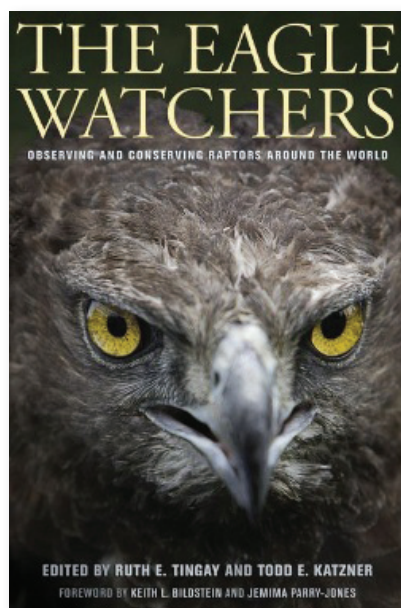


## Book Review



### The Eagle Watchers: Observing and Conserving Raptors around the World

Edited by Ruth E. Tingay and Todd E. Katzner. 2010. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, USA. Hardback, 234 pp. ISBN 9780801448737. RRP AU\$45.

This book is a compilation of essays about studying, or attempting to study, eagle species around the world, from well-studied species in Western countries to rare, barely accessible species in remote, rugged rainforests of Third World countries. Its rationale is to present human experiences of eagles by eagle biologists, as narratives of encounters with eagles in the wild. It is written for those who have not experienced eagles up close.

The book introduces eagles via some basic eagle biology, ecology and conservation issues as context, including: a taxonomic and morphological definition of eagles, their various groups and global distributions; aspects of eagle ecology (e.g. diet and foraging, the breeding cycle, migration); and threats. About 40% of the world's 75 species are threatened by direct and indirect human impacts and, being top predators and therefore sentinel and umbrella species, are important for biodiversity conservation.

The main body of the book consists of species accounts: a summary page giving that species' 'vital statistics' (description, size and weight, threats, distribution, movements, habitat, diet and notable facts); author's biography page with b/w photo (often too small/dark to distinguish the author's face!); and 3–6 pages (usually 4 or 5) of that author's experiences in studying his or her species. Twenty-four (mostly large) species are covered, in 29 accounts (a few receive two or even three accounts). Colour photos depict about half the species covered. An appendix lists, by level of threat (IUCN Red List), the world's eagle species, followed by a list of eagle monographs and websites.

The editors and contributors are professional raptor biologists, often with wide (including non-avian) wildlife research experience, and are generally the current experts on 'their' respective eagles. The narratives skillfully weave in much about the birds, as well as the trials of field work in difficult and dangerous circumstances, and the hows and whys of eagle research: from crucial data for conservation and management purposes, to reintroduction of extirpated populations, to answering fundamental questions in avian ecology. One also learns some history of the greats of eagle study last century. There is the human side, often emotional, sometimes humorous, of studying eagles, with insights into doing so amid tribal cultures or paranoid, suspicious secret police.

Particularly pleasing is the emphasis on the value of *watching* eagles, instead of just relying on telemetry, to know what eagles do as well as where they are. I was therefore bemused by Katzner's 'epiphany' upon watching an eagle's hunting sequence, and the book's claims that 'stories of watching eagles hunt... are relatively rare', or there are 'relatively few published observations of eagles' hunting behaviour', when for open-country or aquatic species one can simply watch long enough, far enough from an active nest, with a good view of the hunting grounds (e.g. *Australian Field Ornithology* **24**: 93–121, **25**: 165–193).

I also particularly liked Rob Simmons's rebuttal of Doug Mock, who had mockingly (pun intended) disparaged raptor ecologists as 'raptor bozos' because raptors supposedly can't tell us anything that more common species can't. Hence, Simmons set out to prove (convincingly) that studying raptors is a worthwhile scientific goal. Entries in similar vein include Rob Davies on Verreaux's Eagle, and Richard Watson on the Bateleur.

The book is avowedly a labour of love, admitting to slow progress over its five-year gestation. One hesitates to criticise, given its nature, purpose and target audience. However, the digital age allows easy updating of drafts. The editors briefly consider Learner and Mindell (2005, *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* **37**: 327–346) for their (editors') tentative and incomplete taxonomic updates, but other papers (Helbig *et al.* 2005, *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* **37**: 147–164; Barrowclough *et al.* 2007, *J. Avian Biology* **38**: 587–602; Haring *et al.* 2007, *J. Zoological, Systematic and Evolutionary Research* **45**: 353–365) provide independent DNA support for a more current taxonomic treatment.

Thus, in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1 (eagle groups I–VI, pp. 3–7), '*Ichthyophaga*' belongs within *Haliaeetus*; '*Dryotriorchis*' belongs within *Circaetus*, whereas *Eutriorchis* is indeed not a snake-eagle, but *Pitheophaga* is; the booted eagles (group III) should include group IV and most of group VI as well, i.e. all those with booted tarsi; and *Pitheophaga* is indeed not a harpy eagle. On the other hand, '*Harpyhaliaetus*' and '*Geranoaetus*' belong, respectively, in *Buteogallus* and *Buteo*, and thus don't deserve inclusion, although the book would be the poorer without Bill Clark's account of *Harpyhaliaetus* (I'm unaware

of a precedent for *Geranoaetus* being considered an eagle). Among booted eagles, DNA evidence says that *Hieraaetus kienerii* belongs in monotypic *Lophotriorchis*; *Aquila* (*sensu stricto*) takes in Bonelli's Eagle and African Hawk-Eagle (from *Hieraaetus*) and '*Spizaetus*' *africanus*, but the spotted eagles and *Lophaetus* belong within *Ictinaetus*; *Hieraaetus* (*sensu stricto*) is now more circumscribed; Asian *Spizaetus* should be *Nisaetus*; and *Spizaetus* (*sensu stricto*, Latin America) takes in *Oroaetus* and *Spizastur*.

From an Australasian perspective, one notes that one New Guinea Harpy Eagle author has produced a scientific paper from his work (Watson and Asoyama 2001, *J. Raptor Research* **35**: 235–239), but the other has not, perhaps because his short account in the book is all that resulted under difficult conditions. Also, that the Wedge-tailed Eagle author has not conducted a field study on that species, whereas Michael Brooker (an obvious choice) and others have. Perhaps for this species, author selection reflects that author's public profile (a short Wedge-tailed Eagle monograph, again not based on personal field study) rather than the editors' knowledge of Australian eagle research. Jason Wiersma was a good choice on White-bellied Sea-Eagle, though most of his work is yet to be published.

I'm unaware of any publication giving the Little Eagle's incubation period as 33 days. Scientific literature has long given it as 36–40 days (like authentic values for its close relatives), recently refined to 37–39 days (*Aust. Field Ornithology* **24**: 137–156). The editors' Northern Hemisphere bias is reflected in the statement, on breeding behaviour (Ch. 1), that eagles occupy and defend breeding territories starting in early spring, which doesn't necessarily apply in tropical or subtropical (or even austral temperate) zones. One can hardly overlook the occasional gaffe like 'elate' (for alate) termites, 'peaked' for peeked, or 'breach' for [firearm] breech.

The book is highly readable and entertaining, with wider appeal than just raptor or bird enthusiasts. It masterfully samples the whole gamut of recent eagle research and conservation, its practitioners, and the diverse problems eagles (and eagle-watchers) face, and it therefore should be a great inspiration to a new generation of would-be eagle students (and, one hopes, their graduate supervisors!). As such, it is highly recommended as a gift for aspiring eagle-watchers, and as a worthy addition to library shelves public, private and education-institutional.

Stephen Debus  
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## RECOVERY ROUND-UP

*This section is prepared with the co-operation of the Secretary, Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes, Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The recoveries are only a selection of the thousands received each year; they are not a complete list and should not be analysed in full or part without prior consent of the banders concerned. Longevity and distance records refer to the ABBBS unless otherwise stated. The distance is the shortest distance in kilometres along the direct line joining the place of banding and recovery; the compass direction refers to the same direct line. (There is no implication regarding the distance flown or the route followed by the bird). Where available ABBBS age codes have been included in the banding data.*

*Recovery or longevity items may be submitted directly to me whereupon their merits for inclusion will be considered.*

Hon. Editor

### Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*

BS29215\*. Nestling banded on Kerguelen Island, Terres Australes et Antarctiques, France (49°03'34"S 70°22'26"E) on 13 Oct. 2010. Recovered dead, beachwashed north of Diggers Camp Village near Wooli NSW (29°48'47"S 153°17'19"E) on 27 Feb. 2012. 7064 km ENE.

\*French Banding Scheme band

### Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*

CF39461\* (plus readable band: White 991). Adult (6+) banded on Kerguelen Islands, Terres Australes et Antarctiques, France (49°21'00"S 70°13'00"E) on 1 Nov. 2002. Readable band sighted

in field, band number inferred at sea off Portland, Vic. (38°45'45"S 141°23'38"E) on 14 Aug. 2011, over 8 years, 9 months after banding. 5591 km ENE.

\*French Banding Scheme band

### Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*

(a) 1068-05928\*. Nestling banded near North Palmer Station, Anverse Island, Antarctica (64°46'00"S 64°04'00"W) on 5 March 2010. Recovered injured, bird is in care at Cape Bridgewater, Vic. (38°22'12"S 141°24'24"E) on 23 Oct. 2011. 8332 km NW.

\*US Banding Scheme band

(b) V-28165\*. Nestling banded at Stinker Point, Elephant Island, Antarctica (61°07'31"S 55°19'26"W) on 4 March 2011. Band number read in field, bird not trapped at sea c.4 nautical miles off Bateau Bay, NSW (33°23'40"S 151°32'29"E) on 1 July 2011. 9226 km

\*Brazilian Banding Scheme band

(c) 132-33335. Nestling banded on Macquarie Island, Tas. (54°30'00"S 158°55'00"E) by R.P. Gale on 2 March 2011. Recovered dead at San Sebastian, Cartagena, Chile (33°31'43"S 71036'14"W) on 27 Oct. 2011. 9100 km ENE.

### Northern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes halli*

132-34046. Nestling banded by R.P. Gales on Macquarie Island, Tas. (54°30'00"S 158°55'00"E) on 14 Jan. 2011. Recovered dead at Jeffrey's Bay, South Africa (34°03'01"S 24°55'33"E) on 7 Feb. 2012. 9229 km WNW.