

REVIEW

Birds of Prey of Australia: A Field Guide by Frank T. Morris Lansdowne Edition, Melbourne, 1976. 124 pp. Price \$20.

This volume is a condensed version of its predecessor, *Birds of Prey of Australia* (1973) which was a limited edition. It is designed for use as a field guide. The book is divided into three sections. The first section contains general information on flight patterns, plumage, moult, distribution and movements, habitat, diet, nests, calls and non-breeding behaviour. It is illustrated with seven black and white plates. The 48 colour plates in the second section depict each species as well as showing underwing flight patterns and flight poses. Supplementary data on each species is provided in the third section. This includes taxonomic classification, measurements, status, habits, global distribution and Australian distribution maps for each species. The endpapers of the book carry silhouettes of each species in flight and are intended to be used as a guide to rapid identification.

The format of the book is inadequate for a field guide. The most obvious criticism is the book's size (270 mm x 195 mm) which makes it cumbersome to transport in the field. This is unnecessary as there is considerable wasted space in the arrangement of the colour plates. The silhouettes on the endpapers fail to be of use in species identification for a number of reasons. Many of the silhouettes appear simply to be replications of a standard outline in different sizes. Examples of this include the falcons, goshawks, harriers and small kites. The species silhouettes are drawn to scale, but this is of little value in identification as size in the field is a function of the distance between the observer and the bird. The underwing flight patterns shown in the second section of the book are far more informative than a simple silhouette.

Much of the data in the introductory section is poorly presented and some of it is wrongly included in a field guide. The flight pattern for each species is briefly described here but its placement in the text makes subsequent location of the information difficult. In many cases important flight characteristics are omitted, e.g. White-breasted Sea Eagle—broad upswept wings; Whistling Kite—bowed wings; Little Eagle—flat wings. The plates in this section have no accompanying explanation in the text or in their captions, which makes them of limited value. The plate depicting examples of an eagle, falcon and goshawk skull could have been accompanied by a comparative analysis of structure and function. The plate showing castings for a number of species is of little use in its present form, whereas an analysis of the castings contents could have been integrated into the discussion on diet. The plate showing the relative sizes of a primary feather of a Wedge-tailed Eagle, Collared Sparrowhawk and a Budgerigar and that showing prey remains found beneath nests of three species offer very little additional information and would have been better omitted. The list of prey taken by each species again is poorly placed and should have been incorporated into the final section of the book.

The illustrations in the second section of the book appear to be arranged artistically rather than as an aid to field identification. In many instances the colour rendition is not good, e.g. Little Falcon, Brahminy Kite, Crested Hawk and Collared Sparrowhawk. Unfortunately many of the illustrations are incorrect or misleading. For example, the juvenile Brahminy Kite shown is more

characteristic of an immature Whistling Kite and the juvenile Black-shouldered Kite and the juvenile Letter-winged Kite are almost identical in the field, yet the latter is depicted as having much more rufous over its body. The juvenile Brown Goshawk and Collared Sparrowhawk are shown with rufous thighs which indicates an advanced immature or sub-adult bird rather than a juvenile. The author has often incorrectly referred to young birds as juveniles when immature plumage is illustrated. In no instance has he used the term "immature". The captions to the illustrations are also confusing. The plate may depict "male adult" and "female juvenile" or the male of one colour phase and the female of another, depending upon the sex of the specimen that was the subject. However the presentation implies that the female juvenile or adult is necessarily different from the male. The brief resume of species habits and the drawings of flight and hunting postures presented are definite advantages in this section. However each species is on a separate page making comparisons difficult. Most field guides show related or confusing species on the one plate to aid in identification.

The final section of the book contains information that is not always available in a field guide. These include local status, distribution of Australian subspecies, habits, nests and eggs. Inclusion of the following measurements—length, wingspan or wing length and weight, is to be commended but once again full advantage has not been made of the data. The number of specimens used to obtain the measurements should have been indicated. In species where the female and male vary markedly in size and weight, e.g. the White Goshawk, the size range for each sex could have been given. In some instances the data is corrected to whole numbers while in others it is given to one or two decimal places, the accuracy of which must be questioned. Often the data for various measurements is missing yet is presumably available. The Australian distribution maps are clearly represented but are unnecessarily large. The placing of the author's personally recorded sightings and sightings referenced as 'pers. comm.' on these maps is not justified when they fall within the known distribution, especially when they are only random sightings and not detailed distribution surveys. Records of sightings falling outside the accepted distribution are valuable, but here accompanying data would be beneficial.

In summary, the author has attempted to produce a treatise on the Order: Falconiformes that will surpass other available field guides. However one feels that the book may have been hurriedly compiled and without consideration of the limitations imposed by a field guide.

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