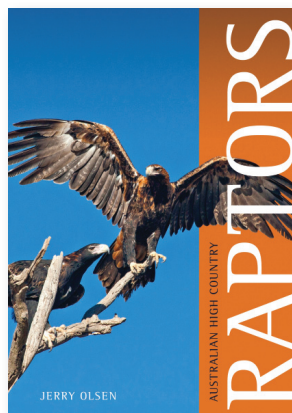


## Book Review



### Australian High Country Raptors

Jerry Olsen. 2014. CSIRO Publishing. Paperback. Numerous black and white photos, colour plates and illustrations. 336 pp. ISBN 9780643109162 RRP \$69.95.

The notes on the back cover of this book state “Australian High Country Raptors covers raptor species that regularly breed in the high country above 600 metres, from Goulburn in New South Wales down to the hills outside Melbourne”. If the reader is expecting to read hundreds of pages dedicated only to these high country raptors they would be mistaken. These species are discussed in the context of the Australian raptor avifauna in general and many examples of overseas raptors and their behaviours and adaptations are discussed and compared with the local species. The fourteen chapters cover the high country itself, comparing Australian raptors to their northern hemisphere counterparts, raptor habitats in the high country, basics of raptor identification, watching raptors, finding raptors, designs for survival, food and hunting, eagles in the high country, Peregrines in the high country, breeding and behaviour, why female raptors are bigger than males, conserving high country raptors and care of raptors. Appendix 1 includes profiles of each diurnal species and appendix 2 contains advice on sick and injured raptors.

I want to say upfront that I enjoyed reading this book – it was interesting and one could feel Jerry’s passion in the pages. I am a little biased as I have been a member of the Australasian Raptor Association for many years and have carried out research on the Eastern Osprey and have banded a number of Nankeen Kestrels, Black-shouldered Kites, Brown Falcons and Brown Goshawks. I also appreciated the great collection of black and white photographs and colour plates in this book. The section on anatomy and physiology was a good refresher of what I had learnt at university.

Disappointingly there are a number of minor errors such as including finches with nectar-feeding birds (page 27). Finches are granivorous and will often take insects but nectar, if ever taken, would be very unusual, although introduced finch species are known to take nectar occasionally. The word ‘clunky’ is used but probably should have been ‘chunky’ (page 118). The odd comma is missing and the word ‘Australia’ is repeated

unnecessarily in the sentence ‘Australia lost two Boobook species in Australia...’ (page 238). There is an error in the example given in the text below Table 11.2 (page 208). In the table it shows the aging formula for the Southern Boobook as  $(\text{Wing length} + 1.52)/0.52$ . In the example in the text it substitutes the 1.52 with 5.2. The caption (% biomass) is missing on the x axis for the second part of the graph in Figure A1.1 (page 249). The reference to Brown Goshawks not breeding in the juvenile plumage should more correctly state immature plumage as the Goshawk has an immature plumage, unlike the related Collared Sparrowhawk. The statement that the Powerful Owl nests and roosts in mature hollow trees is incorrect (page 242). They do, indeed, nest in mature hollow trees but usually roost away from the nest tree, other than when incubating or brooding. Thickly foliated rainforest trees and wattles are favoured. It is surprising that these errors weren’t detected during the draft review stage of production. Hopefully they can be corrected if a future edition is published.

Additional information could have been included such as describing the insect-like call of the Sooty Owl, which is as common as the ‘falling-bomb’ call, which is described (page 60). The juvenile Nankeen Kestrel is described as ‘similar to the female’ but the addition of ‘but more heavily marked with black or brown bars and spots’ would have clarified the situation better (page 274), however I understand that some of these problems are the result of the author having to trim the original text to meet the publisher’s word limits.

The author also raises a number of contentious issues such as the claim that the breeding success of Wedge-tailed Eagles is linked to rabbit numbers. He successfully raises doubts about the claim showing virtually no evidence for it. He also claims that the Southern Boobook has a facial disc. While there is a partial disc it is far removed from the distinctive heart shaped facial discs that characterise the masked owls (genus *Tyto*) and this claim may confuse novice readers.

I found myself agreeing with many of the views expressed in the book particularly about the need to conserve habitat and the misleading idea of using trade-offs or off-sets during developments which result in the net loss of habitat anyway, no matter how it is dressed up. The fact that raptors that are monogamous may sometimes ‘divorce’ is something that I have witnessed myself in the Eastern Osprey. If a male doesn’t provide adequate food for the female and young he can find himself replaced by a male that can. The similarity of one of the Collared Sparrowhawk’s calls to that of the alarm call of the White-plumed Honeyeater is something that I have known for some time.

In summary I commend this book to anyone with an interest in birds, especially those who have a thirst for more knowledge about our fascinating diurnal and nocturnal avian predators.

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