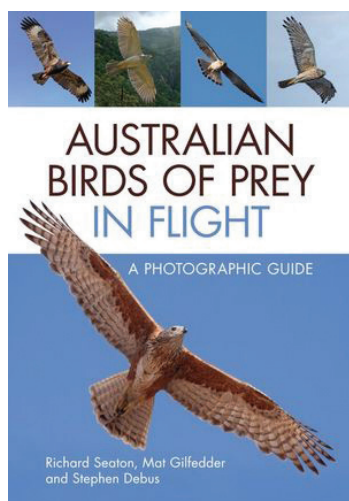


Book Review



Australian Birds of Prey in Flight, a photographic guide. Richard Seaton, Mat Gilfedder and Stephen Debus. 2019. CSIRO Publishing. Paperback, 256 pp. ISBN 9781486308668. RRP AU\$39.99.

When Richard Seaton and Stephen Debus told me of their idea to publish a book of photographs of Australian birds of prey in flight, I was most interested. As a raptor enthusiast and member

of the Australasian Raptor Association, I frequently meet people who struggle to identify these amazing birds. Some raptors can even be difficult to identify when viewed in good light while perching, but when in flight many can be most challenging to identify. Field guides are of some assistance, but can only illustrate the 'typical' poses, and something more is required. This 'something more' is this book, which illustrates, with several of photos of each species, the twenty-four raptors native to Australia and the two vagrants recorded here. With the echoes of Paul Kelly's song 'From little things big things grow' ringing in my ears, I consider the resulting book to be much more than I expected when first mooted. I expected that a small number of raptor enthusiasts and photographers would have contributed images, but the list of contributors is impressive. As an ecologist with a camera, I also submitted a few photos, but in retrospect they were nothing like the quality of those in the finished product.

There is a quick reference plate at the beginning of the book which shows a single photo of each species with the relevant species profile page number. Then there is a forward by Hugh

Possingham, the Chief Scientist of the Nature Conservancy and Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow at the University of Queensland, followed by acknowledgements and an introduction which includes tips on using the book and discusses GISS (General Impression of Size and Shape). The individual species' profiles follow; these include six photos of each species in flight, with supporting text concentrating on identification characters, and a distribution map.

A particularly valuable feature is the comparison with other species that can be confused with the one being described. Details here reminded me of my own experience with very pale Brown Falcons *Falco berigora* that were at first thought to be Grey Falcons *F. hypoleucos*. Luckily someone photographed them and the experts could then correctly identify them. Nankeen Kestrels *F. cenchroides* soaring at a great height can also look a little like Grey Falcons. Species such as Brown Falcons and Nankeen Kestrels can look quite different in the arid zone where they are much paler. Of interest also, are the sections on identifying age and sex. Young raptors can appear very different to adults, particularly in colouration and sometimes markings. Towards the back of the book is a section on species comparisons, where black and white photographs are used to directly compare species that are easily confused.

With this guide to raptors in flight with them, birdwatchers can now have a good chance of identifying those often hard-to-identify raptors gliding, hovering or soaring overhead. I recommend this attractive little book with its great photographs to anyone who is interested in birds, as to lump raptors in the 'too hard basket' along with 'little brown birds' and shorebirds is to miss out on a whole world of remarkable, beautiful and powerful, but delicate, birds. I commend this book to anyone with even the slightest interest in birds and it is a must for those keen to sort out the raptors of Australia.

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