

REVIEWS

Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia, David Hollands, 1984, Nelson, Melbourne, 212 pp., Col. P11, 64, \$49.95.

Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia is a beautifully designed book of colour photographs of Australia's 24 diurnal raptors: six falcons, three eagles, two harriers, seven kites, three goshawks, one sparrowhawk, one baza and the osprey. The book is a celebration of the senses and emotions aroused in the author by these birds of prey. Dr Hollands uses much imagery with his objective information to create powerful impressions of each species rather than mere outlines. He also uses anthropomorphisms (engendering animals with human feelings and intentions) and other subjective approaches to achieve this effect.

The book contains a Foreward by Graham Pizzey, Acknowledgements, a Preface, a locality map showing places mentioned in the text, a chapter for each of the 24 species, a table showing comparative sizes of the species in the field, a Field Guide summarizing information about each species, a Glossary, References and an Index. The Field Guide covers: others names, field characteristics, voice, food and hunting, breeding, habitat, distribution in Australia and distribution abroad.

I found the artistry in this book most appealing. Dr Hollands has a good eye and his photographs show balance and sensitivity. Many in-flight and action shots (some prey catching) are included, ten of which were done with trained captive birds. His verbal artistry also is effective. Almost poignant account is given of Letter-winger Kites dying at Werribee in Victoria. "Sick and apathetic, they were on the ground beneath the trees, many of them squatting back on their haunches, too weak to perch or even to stand at all. Their plumage was dull and the feathers of the breast and belly were stained brown from contact with the ground. When they flew they looked weak and could scarcely make headway against the light breeze, most going only a short distance before coming back to ground while those that did land in trees looked clumsy and uncertain. Two birds collided on take-off, one of them falling back on to a bank before getting up again". The author knows how to move people, specially those who know and love birds of prey.

Though the subject is approached as art, Dr Hollands still includes much observation, speculation and information that will be repeated as fact in the literature. Many of these points deserve discussion. He speaks of the young hybrid Brown X Grey Goshawks as unable to tear up food at a late stage in development. This comment has been made by other writers about other species, for example, Jack and Lindsay Cupper (*Hawks in Focus*) about Black Falcons. Young Black Falcons may not tear up food until quite old when parents are present, but can do so readily. I expect the same is true for the hybrid. Speculating about intention in an animal's behaviour is dicey at the best of times. A

breeding peregrine launches himself at a kookaburra "out of pure mischief". Perhaps, but the peregrine had young: kookaburras are predators and we will never know the real reason behind the peregrine's stoop.

Much misinformation has been published in the past about Black Falcons but Dr Hollands has done the bird justice with his treatment. He gives each species in the book a reason for being special and correctly portrays this falcon as an audacious aerial hunter. However, they do overlap the peregrines range in many places (like the Flinders Ranges) though Dr Holland suggests they do not. Young are not glossy black and though they are always darker than their parents, some young with extremely light parents are, themselves, very light. (*Canberra Bird Notes*, April 1974, Volume 3, No. 2).

The author has been influenced by falconry or falconers and the jargon he uses can make reading more difficult, particularly because some of it, for example, "falcon" (female of the genus *Falco*) is not used by modern falconers. "Eyass" (nestling hawk) and "tiercel" (male of the genus *Falco*) are also falling out of fashion and are unlikely to enter modern ornithological English. This influence of falconry may show up in other ways. Goshawks are called "shortwings" by falconers but Brown Goshawks are shaped rather differently to their northern hemisphere counterparts. He gives a wing span of 1000 mm for Brown Goshawks, 900-950 mm for Brown Falcons, 1000 mm for Black Falcons and 900 mm for peregrines (known by falconers as "longwings"). Yet, he says they soar well "despite their short wings" and in the Field Guide that they have "short round wings". They are not short at all compared to their body weight. The peregrine is described as hunting typically by soaring and watching, often at considerable height, then taking prey by an electrifying stoop. Falconers have kept this myth alive for centuries because they hunt their falcons by flushing quarry under them as the falcons "wait on". Peregrines often hunt from a perch and use the "waiting on stoop" much less frequently. Anyone who has been around prey species with a peregrine circling above knows there is no way the prey will fly with the falcon in that position. In spite of several studies to the contrary, this myth with persist for some time to come.

Some general comments invite discussion. If Grey Falcon pairs stay together year round because they are rare and may have difficulty locating a mate, why do other falcons, like peregrines, remain together year round also? If the Grey Falcon is the "true desert falcon" why is it most commonly found on lightly timbered flood plains and not in true desert areas where, for example, Brown Falcons are more common? If the Black-breasted Buzzard is the third largest raptor, why is the Osprey given the same measurements in the book? How does he know that Marsh Harriers prefer small creatures as carrion and why are they commonly

seen eating large road kills in places like Tasmania? If Brown Falcons breed in any month why does none of the breeding data collected by the researchers bear this out? It certainly is not true that only female Australian Kestrels have a barred tail or that Brown Falcons lack the bloom on the feathers that bird killing species have. It is less evident in breeding (moulting) or poorly kept captive Brown Falcons but is very much in evidence in healthy birds after the moult.

These comments are in no way meant to denigrate the book or the power of Dr Hollands as an observer. There is much for all of us to learn from the book. Since the Cuppers wrote a superficially similar book using the same towers and many of the same nests as Dr Hollands, a comparison is in order. In short, Dr Hollands spent much more time observing and has collated far more information than did the Cuppers. He has certainly seen more kills made by more species of wild raptors than anyone I know and his descriptions are magnificent. The Cuppers were very taken with the excitement of the challenge and this takes up much of their writing; Dr Hollands' is consumed by the magic of the birds. I would hope that no-one who has the Cuppers' book ignores Dr Hollands' book because they assume them to cover similar ground. They do not, and Dr Hollands goes into far more depth and captures the essence of each species as no-one before him has done. This is a fine book indeed and if I quibble, it is only because I wish some of these authors would pay more attention to the existing literature. They would be surprised at how much is already written down about Australian raptors. Hopefully this will be done for their second editions.

Jerry Olsen. Sutton. N.S.W.

Bird Banding by Elliott McClure, 1984. Pacific Grove, CA. The Boxwood Press. Pp x and 341, 7maps, numerous b & w pl and copious line drawings. \$US15.00 (\$Au19.50)*

In 1964, Dr Elliott McClure published *An Asian Bird-Banders Manual* to help new banders in South-east Asia with the techniques of handling, trapping, collection of parasites, recording and similar topics. An updated version was produced in 1966. A number of banders in Australia benefited from the information contained in these manuals.

During the period of his association with the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey (MAPS) in Asia, Elliott McClure made a number of visits to this country and participated in field work with many Australian banders. I am sure that all of them benefited greatly from the association. His enthusiasm, dedication to banding and his love of birds was very evident to all who met him.

Following his retirement some 15 years ago he was asked by many of his bander friends in the USA to revise the Asian Manual for the benefit of others. The present book is the result and the author has had a wealth of banding experience to make him well qualified to write on this subject. He has personally banded more than 60 000 birds of over 500 species.

The 13 chapters cover a wide range of subjects. Following the Preface, there is a page titled "A Bird

Bander's Ethics", adapted from those set out by Dr Paul H. Fluck, President, Eastern Bird-Banding Association, 1959. While written specifically for banders in the USA, most are also valid for banders in this country. The chapter heading follow: Introduction, Geological Background of Migration Routes, The Bird and the Bander, The Bird and its Banding Idiosyncrasies, Traps and Trapping, Snares, Nets and Netting, Banding Nestlings, Bats, Equipment for Banders, Field Equipment, Activities Other than Simple Banding, and The Art of Keeping Records. There is a Bibliography covering more than four pages with 110 references, and an index.

Any bander in this country would benefit in some way from reading this book and many could readily improve their expertise as banders. There is a wealth of banding experience behind the information contained throughout the book. Elliott McClure's love of birds and the need for care in their trapping and handling is evident. Some banders in this country have, at times, been less than careful with their methods and handling of birds with resultant casualties. All should benefit for reading the relevant sections, particularly the chapter "The Bird and the Bander" and appropriate sections of "The Bird and its Banding Idiosyncrasies".

Any bander interested in particular trapping techniques will find that the chapters "Traps & Trapping", "Snares" and "Nets & Netting" provide many useful hints or ideas.

There are some items of detail concerning methods and handling with which I would disagree but these are really personal preferences; they are quite minor in relation to the value contained for improving banders' skills and techniques. The book is a "must" for all existing banders. Also, I would like to see every new bander obtain a copy as a prerequisite to being given a banding authority. The cost to the bander (\$US15.00; \$Au19.50) is small in relation to the potential for improved banding standards and the need for every bander to continually aim at improving his/her techniques and skills.

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* Available from Australian Bird Study Association, Secretary Mist Net Service.

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