

Book Review

Hawks of North America. by William S. Clark and Brian K. Wheeler. 2001. Second Edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. Vinyl-bound, \$22.00. ISBN0-395-67067-5.

This book in the Peterson Field Guide series deals with all the diurnal raptors of North America, and is substantially revised from a first edition. At first glance, this book has true field guide dimensions, a tough, flexible cover, and excellent binding, and it should survive years of serious field use. Following a brief introduction, which includes a useful glossary, this book is divided into two main sections.

The first section comprises forty plates by Wheeler. These are generally excellent, dealing with an abundance of subspecies, morphs and ages, and the artist's knowledge of the subtleties of these individual plumages is palpable. The four plates that contain over 40 images of Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) subspecies may be worth the cost of the book alone, and surpass the treatment of these taxa by other recent guides. Regrettably, the color reproduction of some plates is anemic, and this especially detracts from those that illustrate the falcons. Wheeler has a tendency to paint some birds as bulkier than they usually appear in life (e.g., the flying Golden Eagles [*Aquila chrysaetos*] on Plate 32 look positively *Buteo*-like). Given the importance of structure and proportions in the flight identification of raptors this is unfortunate, but most plates are valuable nonetheless.

The second main section consists of the individual species accounts, which are clear and concise, and provide information that goes well beyond the mainstream field guides. Each account includes subsections giving detailed descriptions (further subdivided by morphs, ages, and unusual plumages), similar species, appearance in flight, molt, behavior, status and distribution (including detailed four-tone distribution maps), fine points, subspecies, etymology, and measurements. The accounts include a scattering of captioned colour photographs, which are superbly reproduced and augment the text considerably. Even more photos would have been useful, but the authors' other joint venture, the *Photographic Guide to North American Raptors* (Academic Press, 1995), is a useful companion to this book. Presumably in an attempt to save some space, the accounts for different species almost run into one another. Beginning each account on a new page, and using the minimal extra space generated for additional photographs, would have added few extra pages to the length of the book, but would certainly have made navigating the text easier. Although the distribution maps are accurate, it is a little disappointing that no attempt was made to map the discrete distributions of separate subspecies. On a related issue, the use of English names only for subspecies is unhelpful. Those who are unfamiliar with the English names for Red-tailed Hawk subspecies, for example, are left jumping back-and-forth from the subspecies section in order to

interpret some of the main text and the plate captions. If English names must be used for subspecies, then at least provide the scientific name alongside (the authors are inconsistent here, because they do use scientific names only for subspecies of Merlin [*Falco columbarius*]).

Despite some minor concerns, this excellent guide packs an immense amount of information into a small space, and should be invaluable to birders in the Central Valley and beyond. I strongly recommend it.

Jon R. King