

Raptors of Eastern North America

By B. Wheeler. 2002. Princeton University Press, 41 Williams Street, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. xv + 439 pages, U.S.\$45.00 Cloth

Let me begin by saying this is a wonderful book. It gives a very detailed account of all the 26 full species of hawks, eagles and falcons occurring in eastern North America. It is profusely illustrated with extremely good, frame-filling, crisply focused photographs. These range from nine photographs for the Short-tailed Hawk to an incredible 82 of the Red-tailed Hawk. The text, despite its somewhat clipped English, is very informative. All of the known and recognizable sub-species are included, both in the text and, where valid, in the photographs. The level of detail given in the plumage descriptions is far greater than in any other book I have read. The range maps are sized as appropriate to the species they cover. For widespread birds the map depicts all of eastern North America. However, larger scale maps are used for such localized birds as Florida's Snail Kite.

This is easily the best photographic-style guide I have seen and is a real testament to the author's dedication. Thus it is the most thorough guide to this group of North American birds you can purchase. The full-color, superb photographs alone are worth the price of the book. The author has included all the plumages, races, and colour variations possible. They cover a bewildering range of plumages for species that can be annoyingly difficult to identify in the field. This makes it an almost essential book for serious bird-watchers and ornithologists and a great resource for beginners trying to grapple with the plumage variability. I do not consider this book to be a portable field guide, but a reference work. It is a little too large and

Turtles and Tortoises

By Vincenzo Ferri. 2002. Firefly Books Ltd., 3680 Victoria Park Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M2H 3K1 Canada. 255 pages. \$24.95

This compact little book is a translation of the 1999 Italian publication, *Tutto Tartarughe e Testuggini*. It can best be thought of as a photographic guide to 152 species of turtles – roughly half of the species alive today.

The book opens with an introduction covering the biology, evolution, classification and conservation of turtles. The bulk of the book is occupied by species accounts. The species accounts are grouped geographically into oceans (sea turtles) and six terrestrial areas: Palearctic, Afrotropical, Oriental, Nearctic, Neotropical and Australian regions. There are 152 numbered species accounts and additional unnumbered accounts sprinkled throughout the book. It is unclear why some species accounts are not numbered, although the unnumbered accounts do not have a colour photo (they

heavy (due to the thick, high-quality paper). More important, this would be too precious a book to risk damaging in the field.

I searched through for errors and did not notice any. In fact, I was impressed by the thoroughness of the coverage. For example, the author has correctly included the spotty northern locations for Osprey in Labrador.

However, I do have one major problem with this volume. It is a companion volume to *Raptors of Western North America*, a slightly larger book covering 33 species. Thus, there are 23 species common to each book. The species accounts and photograph are almost identical, except that the range maps are different. This means there is a good deal of unnecessary repetition. I can only assume that some marketing guru felt that two versions would sell better than one. Combining into one book would increase the size from 544 to about 600 pages to allow for the text for two additional species and the eastern range maps for all species (plus a little added to the index.). This would presumably increase the price to around U.S.\$60. Each book is a worthwhile purchase on its own. If you buy the western book you will miss the accounts for Snail Kite only. If you buy the eastern guide you will lose the accounts for nine western raptors. If you buy both you will get more than 75% repetition, in essence wasting U.S.\$30, to get the coverage of one extra species plus the relevant range maps. If you can afford only one book, buy the western guide.

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do have a colour illustration) or map. The species accounts are brief (some less than 100 words), with most ranging from half a page to a full page in length. Each account has standardized subheadings: Family, Distribution and habitat, and Characteristics. Some of the accounts also have a "Situation" subheading describing conservation issues.

Perhaps because it is a translation, this book is plagued with errors. Translation-type errors include some unusual common names. For example, the Bog Turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*; now *Glyptemys muhlenbergii*) is called Muhlenberg's Turtle. That may well be the English equivalent of the Italian common name, but that term is not used in North America. Similarly, the Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is referred to as the Painted Tortoise. In addition, the genus is misspelled "Chrysemis." Errors in content also abound. The author asserts that *Eumotosaurus* is the earliest known ancestor of turtles, yet this theory is no longer

widely accepted. It is also stated that some turtles can hibernate for 2-3 months, a gross understatement of the 6+ months that some turtles spend in hibernation.

The species accounts are also fraught with errors or misleading information. For some North American species, the author lists individual U.S. states where the species is present, yet the list is rarely complete. The Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) account omits any mention in the text or the map of the Nova Scotia population. The author accepts the Mississippi Map Turtle (*Graptemys pseudogeographica kohni*) as a species (*G. kohni*), even though the species account

suggests it is a subspecies. There are also some curious omissions. There are six species accounts for members of the genus *Graptemys* yet the most wide-ranging species, the Northern Map Turtle (*G. geographica*) is not included. Overall, one has the sense that the text was assembled quickly, or by using outdated reference materials, and that it was not reviewed by a scientific expert. Enjoy the photos but don't believe everything you read.

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What Good are Bugs? Insects in the Web of Life

By Gilbert Waldbauer. 2003. Harvard University Press, 79 Garden Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. 384 pages. U.S.\$29.95

Waldbauer has written several other popular books about insects, and these have been met with high acclaim; I have not read those tomes, and so see his most recent work with unbiased eyes.

What good are bugs? focuses on the interactions insects have with other animals and plants, both living and dead. Several chapters in each category illustrate the myriad ways in which insects, wittingly or unwittingly, are key to earth's ecosystems as we know them today. Topics range from seed dispersal to recycling dead animals and the control of animal and plant populations. Truly, the scope of this book is close to all-encompassing, and is written in a style that will not be condescending to the informed naturalist or biologist, but will be readily consumable by the budding naturalist, too.

There are a few factual problems, as well as some opinions that are more typical of the entomophobic

component of the public, that were surprising and disappointing to see in a book which promotes insects. Several times Waldbauer has insects "attacking" plants, when he really means "feeding on" plants. No one would ever say that deer or rabbit attack plants, it's no different with insects; they are just feeding on the plants, a point that naturalists, biologists, and surely this author should understand. "Attacking plants" is an expression used by certain people or industries to incite action, to justify eradication, to gain sympathy from the uninformed, and should itself be eradicated from our vocabulary.

The book ends with a chapter-by-chapter listing of selected readings. I like this method of listing references since the reader can readily choose among works only in the topic of interest. Overall, this is a book well worth having.

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Belugas in the North Atlantic and the Russian Arctic

Edited by M.P. Heide-Jørgensen, Ø.Wiig, and D. G. Pike. 2002. NAMMCO Science Publication 4, The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, Polar Continental Centre, N-9296, Tromsø, Norway NOK 150. 270 pages.

The greater part of this symposium is devoted to those beluga whales that migrate through Baffin Bay and Davis Strait between the eastern part of the Canadian Arctic and West Greenland, and are difficult to follow across the deep water (and impossible in the dark season). Moreover, it is a difficult publication to review because it represents "work in progress", the results of which are not yet fully understood by the authors themselves. Three main techniques of study were (1) mitochondrial molecular genetics from tissue sampling of restrained or dead animals; (2) aerial photographic surveys; (3) tracking individuals by means of satellite radio tags attached to implants in the dorsal ridge of temporarily trapped belugas. The results are

too tentative to summarize easily. Many groups of belugas observed in summer in arctic estuaries are essentially matrilineal, that is, adult females with young animals of both sexes, while most adult males may move independently in different ways. There is also the practical concern that catches of belugas at southwest Greenland, where there is most open water and the largest catching boats, appear to exceed recruitment. The exact area from which these animals come is unknown.

After this it is a pleasure to move on to simpler studies! An overall survey of Russian and Siberian arctic waters from the mainland was carried out in the course of ice studies for belugas, narwhals and Greenland or Bowhead whales, plus the few Grey whales that enter the Arctic Ocean. There is now little hunting for them in this half of the Arctic.

Lastly, a summary is given of up-to-date knowledge of the numerical status of belugas that inhabit, year-round, the less than 200 linear km of the St. Lawrence