

admirably. He first considers the evolution and phylogeny of birds, before moving on to topics such as feather and flight, migration and navigation, reproduction and foraging. In each of these chapters, subheadings are used to guide the reader through the material easily and there are numerous graphs, mainly taken directly from key peer-reviewed articles, annotated line drawings and maps to communicate important information visually. One really nice touch is the many 'key reference' boxes placed in the page margins. This ensures that concepts and ideas can be followed up through additional reading, while keeping the main text clear and concise, an approach further enhanced by boxes giving overviews of ornithological research techniques or case studies. The chapter on migration and navigation is worth particular mention, as Scott has provided, in just 20 pages, an overview of why birds migrate, how they navigate, the genetic and physiological basis of migratory behaviour, and how researchers study these phenomena, including an introduction to stable isotope analysis. Each chapter concludes with a concise summary and some questions for discussion.

While this book is not nearly as detailed as Frank Gill's *Ornithology* (1994) or Cornell's *Handbook of Bird Biology* (2004), it does a very good job of summarizing the most important aspects of bird biology, and indeed it is this very fact that makes it a perfect introductory text for undergraduates. However, there are some key omissions. For example, there is very little coverage of avian population dynamics, despite the plethora of important studies in this area, and there is seemingly nothing on avian parasites or diseases. Moreover, the excellent information on vocalizations is split between the reproduction and foraging chapters (song and calls, respectively) rather than being placed together in a dedicated chapter, as might seem more logical. It is also unfortunate that the colour plates are grouped together in the middle of the book (presumably a publishing constraint), rather than being placed in their respective sections.

Overall, *Essential Ornithology* is an excellent introductory text. It fills a gap in the market between non-scientific introductions to bird life and the more detailed textbooks noted above, along with specialized review-style books, such as those published over recent years by Ian Newton. Definitely one for university libraries and a good core text for ornithology-based modules, Scott's book could also be useful as a basic reference for postgraduates and researchers throughout the ornithological discipline.

Anne Goodenough

TINGAY, R.E. & KATZNER, T.E. (eds) **The Eagle Watchers – Observing and Conserving Raptors around the World.** 234 pages, 14 colour and 29

black-and-white photographs, 1 graph, 1 table. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. Hardback, US\$ 29.95, £18.95, ISBN: 978-0-8014-4873-7. Website: <http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu>.

*The Eagle Watchers* is a collection of field observations written by 29 eagle researchers covering 24 species on six continents. All royalties accrued from the sale of the book are being donated to the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, USA (the world's largest and oldest raptor conservation organization) and the National Bird of Prey Trust, UK (a charitable, grant-giving organization dedicated to the conservation of all raptor species and their habitats).

The opening chapter succinctly explores eagle diversity, ecology and conservation in 25 easily digestible pages. Currently, 75 eagle species are recognized, but at least 30 are of conservation concern and the populations of nearly all of them are declining. Research into the taxonomy of diurnal raptors has made major advances in recent years. Tingay and Katzner have kept abreast of the new findings and chose to depart from the criticized nomenclature, ordinal divisions, and species limits for the Falconiformes that have been presented in other well-known works. They favour instead a classification generally derived from Lerner and Mindell's nuclear and mitochondrial DNA studies (*Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 37: 327–346). The insightful and informative sections on eagle ecology and conservation cover diet and foraging behaviour, habitat requirements, breeding biology and current threats.

In the 24 chapters that follow, the reader is given a rare glimpse into the life and experiences of some of the world's foremost eagle biologists whose applied knowledge and experience of their respective subjects is unparalleled. As described by the Editors, 'eagle biologists are a wild, untamed lot ... single-minded in their devotion to their work and to their birds. ...sustained by their desire to do fieldwork and learn more about eagles'. Such single-mindedness and a passion for their subject is certainly evident in the stories contributed. After all, it surely it takes a passionate person to work in temperatures of  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  as Keisuke Saito of Hokkaido did whilst trapping Steller's Sea Eagles *Haliaeetus pelagicus* to obtain blood samples to assess shotgun slug fragments. Or take Hector C. Miranda Jr., who spent hours each day over several months in a tree hide 21 m above the ground watching a nest of the Critically Endangered Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* whilst a logging company felled trees around him.

A single-page synopsis including IUCN conservation status, description, biometrics, distribution, threats and ecology is provided for each species. There is also a brief biography of each contributing author. I found the field observations compelling, enlightening as well as entertaining, especially Bernd-U. Meyburg's observa-

tions on Lesser Spotted Eagles *Aquila pomarina* in Czechoslovakia and Germany during the height of the cold war. He was suspected of being a military spy for 10 years, but a 900-page file compiled by the Stasi (the former German Democratic Republic's secret intelligence service) finally concluded he was an ornithologist. More importantly, I found these field observations were a useful platform to raise awareness of some of the world's rarest and poorly understood eagles. Among them is the Critically Endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*, a polyandrous and polygamous species endemic to Madagascar, where a small population (c. 222 individuals) occurs only on the western seaboard and is threatened by persecution and habitat loss. Endemic to Java (Indonesia), the Endangered and declining Javan Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi* is threatened by habitat loss, illegal trapping and selling and it is estimated that some 600–900 individuals remain in the wild.

Fourteen beautiful colour images of eagles, including the stunning Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* and little-known Montane Solitary Eagle *Harpyhaliaetus solitarius*, are presented over eight pages between Chapters 8 and 9. An appendix lists the 2009 IUCN conservation status for all 75 recognized eagle species, of which 12 species are evaluated as Vulnerable, three as Endangered and three as Critically Endangered. There is a very useful final section on further reading.

I found *The Eagle Watchers* an enjoyable and profitable read, far exceeding my expectations and am sure it will be well received by the audience for works of general and popular science at which it is aimed. In addition, as an apprentice eagle biologist researching and monitoring White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, I would recommend it as an important resource to any aspiring raptor biologist.

**Stephen Bentall**

VAN PERLO, B. **A Field Guide to the Birds of Brazil.** *xii + 465 pages, 187 colour plates, many maps, a few black-and-white illustrations.* New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009. Hardback, US\$149.00, £95.00, ISBN 978-0-19-530154-0; paperback, US\$39.95, £27.50, ISBN 978-0-19-530155-7. Website: <http://www.oup.com>.

This English-language field guide illustrates and describes all of Brazil's more than 1800 bird species, an impressive achievement for a single author. It is a bit larger than A5 in size and with fewer than 500 pages is light enough to carry easily throughout a long day in the field. Eighteen pages of introductory text cover topics such as climatic zones, geomorphology, natural vegetation, the layout of the book and a short descrip-

tion of many of Brazil's key bird groups and families. This text is certainly useful for first-time visitors, but lacks a depth that would make it interesting for more seasoned observers. The bulk of the book is devoted to the 187 colour plates with facing text and species maps. This now standard layout works well, providing all the identification information at a single glance. The maps are small but useful for determining which species are within range. Species names are given in English and Portuguese, and the text includes length, a very brief description highlighting one or two important identification features, altitudinal range, habitat and a very short description of voice. Even for this type of layout the text is disappointingly brief, which I find puzzling as there is considerable unused space at the bottom of most pages.

There are around 10 species per plate, with male and female plumages and in many cases different subspecies illustrated as well. The range of plumages shown is excellent but illustrations are often small on the page and there is also rather a lot of white space on many of the plates: examples include the ovenbirds (Furnariidae) on Plates 90 to 100, greenlets (Vireonidae) on Plate 155, and wrens (Troglodytidae) on Plates 158 and 159. Many of the raptor, wader, tern and gull (Laridae), and antbird (Thamnophilidae) plates make better use of the available space and I would have preferred to see this practice followed throughout, with somewhat larger illustrations for many of the passerine species where details are so important for identification. The illustrations themselves are generally good enough to allow correct identification of species and subspecies in the field, which is important, given the brevity of the text. However, they may not be sufficient on their own for some of the more difficult groups of, for example, tyrant flycatchers (Tyrannidae). Additionally, some of the illustrations, such as the cuckoos (Cuculidae) on Plate 56, the Many-coloured Rush-tyrant *Tachuris rubrigastra* on Plate 137 and the thrushes (Turdidae) on Plate 161, appear flat and lacking life. Despite these negatives, taking the book as a whole, it is a good field guide and it is the one I will take birding with me in Brazil. If what you want is a lightweight field guide that covers the whole country, I'd recommend it for you, too.

**Ross MacLeod**

#### Also received

ARMITAGE, S. & DEE, T. **The Poetry of Birds.** *xxiii + 353 pages.* London: Viking (Penguin Books), 2009. Hardback, £25.00, ISBN 978-0-670-91641-2. Website: <http://www.penguin.com>.

Reviewers of anthologies must always act in the same way: they search first for their own favourites and only