

## Conversations with an Eagle

By Brenda Cox. 2002. Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre Publishing Group, 2323 Quebec Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5T 4S7. 261 pages, paperback.

This is a story of dedication to an eagle rather than conversations with one. Brenda Cox was a volunteer worker at a raptor rehabilitation centre south of Vancouver (Orphaned Wild Life – OWL), and became enthralled with raptors of all kinds. Her special interest was a Bald Eagle, which was three months old when it arrived at the Centre, and her book describes the trials and tribulations of her efforts to train Ichabod so that she could be used in the OWL education programme.

In the course of the story there are passages describing the methods used to rehabilitate owls, hawks and eagles. When the eagle was still young its behaviour was typically fearful, but the bird became more and more aggressive towards Cox, such that she had to stand against a pillar armed with a household mop to protect herself if she was attacked. In spite of the danger, she persisted in training the bird to come to her gloved arm, and eventually it obeyed three commands: Up, Wait and Off. But it was always uncertain whether the bird would cooperate or not on any given day. She enlisted the help of expert falconers in the Vancouver area. They were doubtful whether a Bald Eagle could be reliably trained, though they helped and advised her. Bald Eagles have seldom been trained successfully, while Golden Eagles have been used by falconers in many parts of the world. Cox was able to train the eagle such that she could take her from her cage to a perch in a field, using jesses

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owls and nearly doubled the number of references (although, contrary to convention, many of the recent references are not mentioned by name in the text!). Extremely few changes have been made to the excellent introductory chapters, but this leaves them less up-to-date than the individual species accounts. Often he cites the authors of the *Birds of North America* account, rather than the original observers who merit the credit; an example is Gottfred and Gottfred's new information concerning courtship and copulation of the Great Horned Owl, published in *Blue Jay* in 1996.

The strengths of the first edition have been maintained: the introductory chapters and species accounts are neatly arranged; maps of each species' range are detailed; Johnsgard's pen-and-ink sketches of aspects of behaviour are delightful; the colour plates and photographs are superb. Johnsgard writes well, but in a few occasions new material has been interjected clumsily, marring the previous smooth flow of information in the first edition.

and a stout leash attached to her waist, but there were increasing dangerous attacks which inflicted talon wounds on Cox's head, arms and feet.

After several years, the OWL management decided that they would never be able to use the bird in their programme and asked Cox to remove it from the facility. In its new quarters, shortly afterwards the bird developed a lung disease and was euthanized. Cox's dedication to her volunteer job is remarkable since, in the course of the seven years, she did not have steady employment or reliable housing or transportation. Since Ichabod's death, she has now found a steady career: as a conductor with British Columbia Rail, and watches the wild raptors along the railway lines. Her story would appeal to someone interested in raptor rehabilitation methods and the lore of falconry.

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## North American Owls, Biology and Natural History, Second Edition

Paul A. Johnsgard. 2002. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington. 298 pages, 42 colour plates, 69 multi-figured black-and-white maps and sketches, 10 tables, 2 graphs. \$46.25 Canadian, hardcover. US\$27.95.

Although Dr. Johnsgard's long history of producing books about birds is well known, his entry to the "owl-lover's camp" is more recent. The first edition of this book came out in 1988 and immediately became the standard reference book for owls of the United

States and Canada. For the second edition, 14 years later, Johnsgard has added twelve species of Mexican

Some compromises were necessary. To make room for the twelve Mexican species, detailed descriptions of plumage have been omitted in this second edition. This does not excuse three sloppy errors. Johnsgard tells of the Pygmy Owl range extending altitudinally to 37 000 meters in Mexico, whereas the quoted source gave a credible 3700 m. A paper by Jack Holt on Great Horned Owls in the Cincinnati region is credited to Denver Holt. Thirdly, when Johnsgard withdrew his overdrawn sketch of the "false eye-spots" on the back of the Northern Pygmy Owl's head from the first edition and substituted a more realistic sketch of the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl in the second edition, he failed to change the figure numbers in the text to comply with this change.

These minor caveats aside, this masterful second edition will be welcomed by owl enthusiasts around the world, and should be purchased even by those owning the first edition. It is written more for the scientist than the amateur, but, by identifying deficiencies in our current knowledge, this book should offer possi-