

## Owls of the World: A Photographic Guide

By Heimo Mikkola. 2012. Firefly Books Ltd., 66 Leek Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ontario L4B 1H1 Canada. 512 pages. 49.95 CAD. Cloth.

Heimo Mikkola's first book, *Owls of Europe*, in 1983, shared his extensive knowledge, immediately recognized as a classic, one still available electronically after printed copies sold out. By nature benevolent and altruistic, Heimo then shared his other expertise, in zoology and agriculture. He joined FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations "that leads international efforts to defeat hunger" and moved to Africa to assist struggling farmers improve their methodology.

After Heimo retired from FAO, Jim Martin from Bloomsbury Publishing approached Heimo and suggested he write a new book on the world's owls. This new book, *Owls of the World*, is the first comprehensive guide to the world's owls. It contains the finest collection of owl photographs I have seen in one book, up to eight for each of the 249 species. Legends for each colour photograph point out clues for recognition of each species and some subspecies. There are up-to-date maps of each species' distribution. Literature cited continues through the end of 2011, proof that the content is up-to-date.

To me, additional pleasure was derived from reading Heimo's insightful chapters. Under "What makes an owl?" the specialized and unique vision, especially night vision, hearing, silent flight, bill and claws are succinctly explained. Under "The nature of owls," similar attention is given to: shape and size, calls, colour variation and ageing, abnormalities in plumage, moult, food and hunting, habitat, behaviour, interspecific aggression, breeding strategies, longevity records, and movements. Shorter selections explain the evolution, distribution, taxonomy, DNA-sequencing, and conservation of owls. Altogether it provides an entire minencyclopedia for enjoyable reading and subsequent

ready access. Prior to reading it, I had failed to appreciate that 68 per cent of owl species live in the Southern Hemisphere! The remaining 32 percent are found in the Northern Hemisphere.

Heimo helps readers to better understand why they are so attracted to owls, as follows:

"With very few exceptions, owls look like nothing other than owls. They are soft-plumaged, short-tailed, big-headed birds, with large eyes surrounded, usually, by a broad facial disc. Owls probably have the most frontally situated eyes of all birds. This, together with their ability to blink with the upper eyelids, gives them a semi-human appearance, in which surely lies much of their appeal to man."

No book is perfect. The index is restricted to species and an occasional subspecies, but omits other topics. Sadly, Mikkola erroneously follows König in accepting the term *wapacuthu* for the northernmost subspecies of Great Horned Owl (Pennant had given the name to a Snowy Owl!, long ago discredited by Browning and Banks in 1990 and Houston et al. in 2003).

Every student of owls should buy this book. If hesitant, borrow a library copy, admire the photographs, read the first 70 pages, which cover the general topics mentioned above – and I promise you will then buy it.

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### References

- Browning, M. R., and R. C. Banks.** 1990. The identity of Pennant's "Wapacuthu Owl" and the subspecific name of the population of *Bubo virginianus* from west of Hudson Bay. *Journal of Raptor Research* 24: 80–83.
- Houston, C. S., T. Ball, and M. Houston.** 2003. *Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay*. McGill–Queen's University Press, Montreal, page 167.