

The Crossley ID Guide: Raptors

By Richard Crossley, Jerry Liguori, and Brian Sullivan. 2013. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 286 pages, 29.95 USD, Paper.

Richard Crossley and two foremost raptor experts, Jerry Liguori and Brian Sullivan, have produced a field guide on North America's 34 diurnal raptors that represents a paradigm shift in field guide production. Typically, wildlife field guides, especially those focusing on birds, show static side views of each species, with field marks highlighted. Crossley et al. have instead assembled double-paged field plates that show birds in action from various angles (2 pages for rare species and 4 pages for common species). The layout background shows the typical habitat the raptors occur and mixes adult birds with juveniles. Below each multi-page layout is text providing biological and ecological information for the raptors featured in the layout, including general dimensions, appearance, and the page where the general account can be found. Information about migration and behaviour is highlighted and is an easy read.

The authors have written in their Preface some suggestions on how to use their unique guide, such as study the plates before reading the text – try to figure

out what is going on in each plate and take your time – puzzle it out. The Preface and Introduction are must-read sections to fully understand the intentions of the authors and to get the most out of the guide.

The colour plates with the action shots are certainly the highlight of the guide. However, an important part of the *Crossley ID Guide* is the species accounts. These accounts are some of the best I've read. They are well written, informative, and packed with facts and figures – but not a boring or technical read. The opening paragraph is unlike anything I've read in a field guide: they are poetic at times or otherwise amazingly descriptive. For example, here is the opening for the Golden Eagle account: "Soaring high above a rim-rock canyon, a Golden Eagle has a commanding view of the surrounding terrain. Below, a roaring river snakes along the canyon bottom. Steep-sided cliffs offer ample substrate to build a nest, safe from any mammalian predator" (page 186). The accounts are worth reading for these creative narratives alone. The account header contains the common and Latin name of each covered species,

the four letter code (for example, GOEA for the Golden Eagle), and the page number for the colour plate layout.

Each account has labelled sub-sections that cover a specific aspect of the species; these include: Overview, Fight Style, Size and Shape, Plumage, Geographic Variation, Molt, Similar Species, Status and Distribution, Migration, and Vocalization. Each account has a colour distribution map which is helpful in determining the range of the species based on season (colour code key is on the very last page opposite the book cover and flap).

A bonus in helping beginning and advanced birders ID raptors are several mystery raptor plates. These mystery plates show several images of raptors in action and the reader is to figure out the correct ID based on what has been learned from the previous layouts. Answers are in the back of the book, but the reader should not look at the photo and then quickly see if they were correct! Doing this will not make you a better birder according to the authors – take your time – work out the image before checking the answer. Nothing is better than the real thing – looking at raptors in the field – but practising with this guide is the next best thing and will help enrich your experience in the field.

The *Crossley ID Guide: Raptors* does not cover nocturnal raptors, such as owls. At first I thought that the guide should have included them, but after some thought I can see why they were left out. The model

the guide uses is identifying raptors in flight (although perched photos are included). Owls typically do not fly around much during the day, unless they are flushed from their hiding spot (one exception is the Burrowing Owl, a diurnal species, but it doesn't really fly around much unless flushed or is foraging). The guide's success is teaching birders how to ID flying birds – birds that stay in flight long enough to make an ID or are high in the sky to allow prolonged observation. Owls do not soar like diurnal raptors and therefore another identification method will have to be developed to help in owl ID. I hope Crossley and others will produce an owl ID guide similar to this one. In addition, the authors include vultures and condors in their raptor guide, although they are not really raptors. They are included, I suppose, because they are raptor-like, that is, large diurnal birds that soar and often are mistaken for raptors. Including them in the guide will allow birders to compare and contrast them to raptors so firm identifications can be made in the field.

Overall, the guide offers a new way to study birds of prey and provides a renewed opportunity to enjoy our diurnal flying friends. The *Crossley ID Guide* series are a welcomed insight into the wonders of bird identification for seasoned birders and beginners alike.

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