

BOOK REVIEWS

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Field Guide to Owls of California and the West. By Hans Peeters with illustrations and photos by the author. University of California Press, Berkeley, 340 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-24741-3 (hardback) \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-520-25280-6. (paperback) \$21.95. -Written primarily for nonprofessionals, this little field guide is a treasure trove of published and unpublished information on the natural history and distribution of owls in the western United States. It covers just about everything you could want to know about owls, from why they take dust baths, to facultative zygodactyly. The first half of the book is a series of chapters that describe the general ecology of owls. Chapter 1 provides a brief taxonomic history of owls and describes the general features that distinguish owls from other birds. Chapter 2 describes the unique anatomical, physiological, and behavioral attributes of owls, including sections on vision, hearing, touch, vocalization, skeleton, feathers, flight, thermoregulation, hygiene, parasites, and digestion. The author makes generous use of simple analogies (e.g., the eye as a camera) to explain how owls see, hear, and fly. Chapter 3 describes the general ecology of owls, including sections on predators and predator abundance, foraging behavior, reproduction, territorial behavior, dispersal, and migration. Chapter 4 describes when and where to look for owls, including tips on how to tell owls apart, how to find nests, and how to photograph owls. Chapter 5 provides a history of the unique relationships between owls and humans, including prehistoric cultures, Native Americans, and modern society. It also has a detailed section on the status and conservation issues for each of the six owl species that are currently thought to be in trouble in California. Chapter 6 also provides helpful hints on how to build nest boxes for owls, and concludes with some comments regarding rehabilitation of injured owls. I found myself nodding my head in agreement when Peeters concludes that the rehabilitation of injured birds has little effect on bird populations, but does

play an important role in educating the public about wildlife.

The last half of the book is divided into detailed species accounts for each of the nineteen species of owls that occur in the western United States, including full-page color plates of adults and juveniles of each species, and numerous color pictures and sketches illustrating the behavior, habitat, and life-history attributes of each species. The species accounts are surprisingly thorough, including detailed descriptions of identifying features, vocalizations, flight characteristics, daily activity patterns, reproduction, distribution, similar species, status, and general remarks about each species. Each species account includes numerous literature citations, and some accounts include information on dispersal distances (inexplicably, some accounts do not describe dispersal, even when there is extensive information available).

Probably the most remarkable thing about this book, other than the wealth of information on owl ecology, is the excellent color plates of owls and the numerous color sketches depicting owl behavior, all by the author. Numerous color pictures are also used to illustrate various aspects of owl ecology, behavior, and conservation. My only complaints were that the literature citations tend to lean a bit heavily toward summary papers, as opposed to the original research (perhaps excusable in a book for the lay public), and that a few of the color photographs were a bit dark (e.g., the Barn Owl [*Tytoalba*] on page 77). I also think it would have been helpful to include a table that allowed readers to compare some basic attributes of each species (weights, measurements, laying dates, incubation period, nestling period, age at dispersal, etc.). These data are scattered through the species accounts, but it would have been nice to have them summarized in a simple table with citations so the reader could easily compare among species and know where the numbers came from. Maybe this is too much to ask for in a field guide, but it is the kind of thing that I often find useful.

In summary, I think this book is an excellent buy for the money. It is unusual for a field guide in that it includes much detail for each species, and provides extensive literature citations for digging deeper into the ecology and natural history of owls. The artwork is wonderful, and the numerous anecdotes about owl

behavior will be of interest even to old owlers who think they have heard it all. For the neophyte birder who is interested in owls I can't think of a better general reference book with which to start out.-Eric D.

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