Raptors: a field guide to survey and monitoring. By J. Hardy, H. Crick, C. Wernham, H. Riley, B. Etheridge, and D. Thompson. 2006. Stationary Office Edinburgh, U.K. Xii + 300 pp., 42 figs., 6 tables. ISBN 0-11-497321-0. Hardback, $30.00.—This 300-page “how-to” book should be bought and read by all new and not-so-new practitioners in the field. Designed to “encourage the systematic recording of field observations,” the work will be especially useful to graduate students, and indeed, anyone with an interest in studying, surveying, and monitoring birds of prey. Dedicated to archetypal raptor naturalist and surveyor, Derek Ratcliffe, the book is written in an easily-read, flowing style, and is not so much a manual of raptor-study techniques to be used only as an occasional reference, but rather a series of engaging “reads” that provide broad overviews of the whys and wherefores of raptor field biology, as well as the specific details of fieldwork involving several dozen species of diurnal birds of prey and owls. With input from more than a hundred of the most experienced raptor field biologists currently working in and around Great Britain and Ireland, the book is genuinely authoritative.

The first 60 pages of introductory materials includes useful distinguishing definitions of “survey,” “surveillance,” and “monitoring,” as well as a brief overview of raptor monitoring in Great Britain and Ireland. Although the latter, like all of the book, is clearly aimed at fostering increased monitoring in Ireland and Great Britain, I was struck by the parallel roles that enlightened nonprofessional raptor-monitoring schemes played on both sides of the Atlantic, first in detecting, and then in tracking the impact that organochlorine pesticide misuse had on raptor populations in middle of the last century. Even more striking is the recent coincidental development of two strategic monitoring programs, the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme and its functional North American equivalent, the Raptor Population Index, both of which sprang to life within the current decade. Leaders of both of these efforts would benefit greatly by recognizing and playing off of each other’s approaches. The short history of raptor monitoring in Ireland and Great Britain also refers to the important impacts that land-use change and direct persecution have had and continue to have on raptor populations.

The remainder of the introduction includes brief summaries of survey methods, including road surveys and call playbacks among others, as well as several pages on breeding season parameters (nest sites, occupancy, breeding success, etc.), and a section on additional study techniques that touches upon banding, marking, remote tracking, and the use of nestboxes, among other study methods. There also is information on identifying raptor signs, good practices for fieldwork—including minimizing disturbance to the birds themselves—record keeping, handling and measuring young and adults, detecting wildlife crime, and personal health and safety in the field.

The rest of the work is a series of 4- to 10-page species accounts, each of which is divided into a brief ecological overview of the species in question, survey techniques within and outside of the breeding season, measuring and ageing young, and, in some instances, measuring egg densities. The species descriptions of Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus) and Common Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus), two species whose ecological equivalents I have studied in the field in North America, both are well done. The other descriptions, too, seem to cover most, if not all, the important bases. A CD of raptor calls supplements the species accounts. There are four appendices, one each on the status and trends of raptors in Britain and Ireland, contact organizations, survey data sheets, and scientific names of species mentioned in the text.

A book designed to serve as a reference should have a good index. And Raptors: a field guide... appears to have one that works. The entry “clothing for observers,” for example, is indexed three times: once to recommend that workers making observations from a distance wear neutral-colored clothing to reduce potential disturbance, once to recommend that bright and conspicuously colored clothing be worn when working along roadways, and once to suggest that pants be tucked into socks to