

Hawks from Every Angle: How to Identify Raptors in Flight

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BOOK REVIEW

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Hawks from Every Angle: How to Identify Raptors in Flight. By Jerry Liguori. 2005. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ U.S.A.. xi + 132 pp., 339 color photos, 32 black and white photos, 2 maps. ISBN 0-691-11825-6. Paper, \$19.95.—Jerry Liguori has provided hawk watchers with a very comprehensive and useful resource to assist in the species identification of 22 hawks. The author's 20 years of experience observing and photographing hawks is made evident by the beautiful, detailed, photographs and the wealth of field-oriented information that he includes.

The introduction chapter summarizes the purpose of the book, how it should be used by readers, as well as the general effects of light conditions, molt, and aberrant plumages on species identification. In this chapter Liguori also provides a glossary of terms used throughout the book, suggestions for the best optics to be used for raptor observation, and approximately six pages focusing on hawk migration and hawk migration sites. The subsequent five chapters include more specific information on: accipiters, Northern Harrier, buteos, falcons, vultures, Osprey, and eagles. Taxonomically-focused chapters typically include an overview of the group's general identification and migration patterns followed by information on plumage variations (by age, gender, geographic location, etc.), flight style, similar species, and potential pitfalls of correct identification. Special attention is given to the various angles from which hawks may be observed (e.g., soaring, head-on, etc.). Each chapter includes high-quality photographs highlighting the characteristics that Liguori mentions in the text. He frequently places images adjacent to one another to facilitate direct comparisons among species, age classes, and plumages. This excellent presentation technique is culminated in the end of each chapter via black and white photos arranged in a table format. In these sections Liguori eliminates the size differences among species and instead compares the species from the same angles and positions.

The utility of the black and white photos is further enhanced by arrows and notes highlighting the important features to consider.

Throughout the book Liguori shares the challenges that he has experienced during his many years of hawk watching. His clear, detailed writing style suggests that of a knowledgeable teacher whom you have the benefit of sitting next to on a ridge top during a great day of hawk migration. His beautiful photos help complete that aura. Unfortunately, the reader is not sitting next to Liguori in that setting; therefore, the details in the text were occasionally overwhelming and slightly difficult to visualize while reading. I found myself frequently searching through the photos attempting to see the details that he described in the text. Specific photo references embedded in the text and arrows drawing the reader's eyes to specific characteristics (similar to the black and white photos) would have made this process easier and further enhanced the utility of the book. I do feel that Liguori was successful in his stated attempts to make the photos instructional and useful independent of the text. Although significantly more details were included in the text, the photo legends provide the reader with a great starting point for hawk identification. It is difficult to imagine the number of photos that were taken in order to have accumulated such an incredible collection of high-quality, useful images.

Consistent with the book's title, the information presented is definitely field and flight oriented. Liguori's detailed treatment of the issues of light conditions, distance to the hawk, and different angles of observation is very useful for species identification in the field. It is evident by Liguori's emphasis on raptor migration throughout the book that much of his field experience has been in this context. For those of us whose work has focused more on raptor identification in their breeding and foraging habitats, the migration-based information was occasionally less useful. The same issue could be raised by the recreational birder attempting to use the book during nonmigration periods. There was some mention of the flight behaviors observed during foraging and courtship; however, I would have benefited from more of this type of information. A similar emphasis on migration is made evident by his lim-

ited inclusion of only those species "... that most commonly occur at migration sites throughout the United States and Canada." Despite the wealth of information on 22 species, individuals attempting to use this book in portions of western North America may be disappointed by the number of species not included in the book. Many readers would also benefit from a more complete bibliography section or even the citation of literature throughout the text. Given the high level of raptor identification detail provided in the text, it is probable that experienced birders and researchers will be using this book. This is the same audience that may be interested in learning more specific information on molt patterns, etc. that were mentioned in the text.

Liguori's wealth of field experience and passion for raptor observation is evident throughout the book. Any birder or experienced field biologist can understand and appreciate Liguori's statement that with time a species can be identified "... in the same way one recognizes a friend's silhouette or manner of walking." Sometimes seasoned observers just know what species they are looking at, but are unable to explain to others why they are certain of their accuracy. Overall, Liguori does an excellent job sharing his experience so that we might all recognize that silhouette more quickly and accurately.—**Joelle L. Gehring, Zoology Program Leader, Michigan Natural Features Inventory, Michigan State University, Stevens T. Mason Building, P.O. Box 30444, Lansing, MI 48909-7944 U.S.A.**