

Book Review

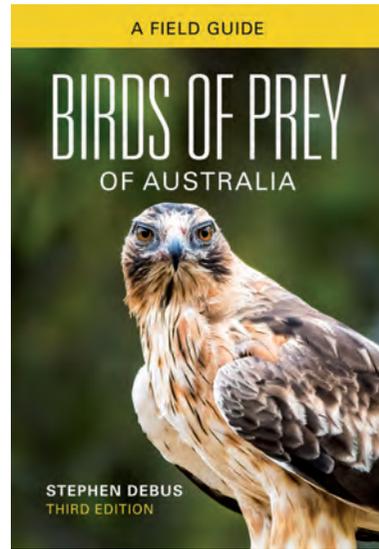
Birds of prey of Australia: a field guide Third edition

STEPHEN DEBUS, 2019

CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South, Vic. \$44.99

Paperback, 224 pages

Numerous illustrations and maps



The first thing I noticed when comparing this third edition with the previous one was the inclusion of many more distribution maps. They are now included for all species except Gurney's Eagle, *Aquila gurneyi*, a New Guinean species sometimes seen on northern Torres Strait islands.

This edition also reinstates the line drawings from the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB)*. These illustrate flight and other behaviours much more clearly than can be done with photos. As well there are now more and better photos of each species in flight, including different ages, sexes and morphs of some species.

The real reason for this new edition is the amount of new research published since the second edition came out in 2012. The author, Stephen Debus, has revised 'substantial chunks' and this really shows in the bibliography, comprising 23 pages, which lists only the most recent books and papers published since the first edition of the field guide.

As in the previous edition, there are two main parts, the field guide and the handbook. The field guide gives descriptions of adults, juveniles, chicks and similar species; a distribution map;

soaring/gliding profiles, and Jeff Davies' illustrations of birds perched and in flight. The handbook gives additional detail under the headings Characteristics; Distribution; Food and hunting; Behaviour; Breeding, and Threats and conservation.

In between these two parts is a section of illustrations of difficult species-pairs and the in-flight photos mentioned above. The split images of the difficult species-pairs are very useful for anyone who, like me, finds the identification of our raptors challenging. The images contrast and highlight the key differences between species by showing their different shapes and proportions.

The final chapter, 'Threats, conservation and the future', is sobering reading. Habitat loss, including a recent upsurge in clearing for open-cut mines, especially coal, and coal-seam gas operations, is a major factor in raptor decline. Pesticides are another big problem for our top-of-the-food-chain species. While Landcare and other operations are restoring habitat in some places, Debus concludes, '... we have a long way to go to guarantee a livable environment for our descendants. It will be decided on our watch.'

Merilyn Browne