

BOOK REVIEWS

Compiled and Reviewed by Chris Siddle

Hawks in Flight (Second edition) by Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton. 2012. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Company, Boston, NY. 335 pages. Hard cover with wrappers. \$33.00 Can. 16 x 24 cms. Approximately 350 colour photographs. Numerous black-and-white sketches. Bibliography. Index.



Hard-core birders worthy of the name are already familiar with the first edition (1988) of *Hawks in Flight*. When it was published 24 years ago, Pete Dunne was already well known, especially in the East, and David Sibley was building his reputation as an illustrator, writer and author of birders guide. They restricted their first edition to widespread eagles, osprey, accipiters, buteos, harrier and vultures of the eastern United States, and boldly introduced the holistic approach to raptor identification, a group for which the approach seems tailor made. Developed by hawk-watchers at sites like Cape May and Hawk Mountain, these identification markers were based upon the size, shape, general appearance, and behaviour of birds. *Hawks in Flight*, first edition, became indispensable to birders, going far beyond the static, perched-bird approach of field guides available at the time by addressing the general impression of flying raptors.

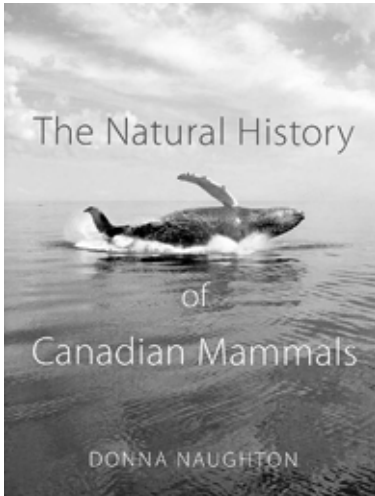
The new edition has been expanded to cover 34 hawks, kites, eagles, hawks, falcons, and vultures occurring regularly north of the Mexican border. The only species omitted are the White-tailed Eagle and Steller's Sea-eagle, semi-regular along the Alaskan coast, and a few Central American species, like Roadside Hawk that occasionally strays over the Mexican border. (For these extremely peripheral species, your best bet may still be Clark and Wheeler's 2001 *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America*, second edition, Peterson Field Guide Series). For 33 of the 34 species there is an average of eight colour photos each illustrating different age and sex classes. There are 29 photos for the various races, ages, and morphs of the complex Red-tailed Hawk. Numerous other photos, some full page, and dozens of sketches that illustrate key behaviour, silhouettes, etc. accompany virtually every species' account. The quality of the photos is the extremely high standard one would expect in such an important work.

A section varying in length from one to several pages introduces each group of raptors, covering migration, identification and similarities shared by the various species. This is followed by a species account filled with similar material, but presented in greater depth. The great joy of *Hawks in Flight*, second edition, is that it remains just as readable as the first edition. There are no coma-inducing paragraphs on prealternate molt or tediously long feather-by-feather descriptions. Open the book anywhere and you'll be treated to informative, yet entertaining prose that captures the essence of the species in question time after time.

The widespread species are arranged in group chapters – accipiters, buteos, etc. – but range-restricted species are placed in chapters based upon geographical area. Thus, if you're planning a trip to Florida and want to brush up on the behaviour and identification of the Short-tailed Hawk you'll find it covered with Snail Kite in "Florida Specialties: The Aerialist and the Specialist".

Hawks in Flight is a must-have field guide for the raptor enthusiast. Highly recommended.

The Natural History of Canadian Mammals by Donna Naughton. 2012. Colour art by Paul Geraghty, Julius Csotonyi, and Brenda Carter. Canadian Museum of Nature and University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON. www.utppublishing.com 22 x 28 cms. Hardcover with wrappers. \$69.96 Can. special section on tracks and skulls of domestic animals. Two appendices on shrew and rodent skulls. Glossary. Bibliography (52 pages). Index. 784 pages. Index of common French names.



This publication is the new national handbook of wild mammals of Canada. It replaces A.W. Banfield's long out-of-date *The Mammals of Canada* (1974) as well as van Zyll de Jong's unfinished handbook series of which only two small volumes were published.

Donna Naughton, a biologist at the Canadian Museum of Nature, has produced a magnificent encyclopedia of Canadian mammals. Each account contains the species' alternate English names, its Latin name, its most common French name, a detailed description, a section on similar species, size, range, abundance, ecology, diet, reproduction, behaviour, vocalizations, signs (e.g., tracks, burrows, clippings, etc.), and references. To give you an idea of the rich level of detail of the text, most species have at least three large pages of information and even the account of the extinct Sea Mink, which was wiped out in the 1800s before scientists were able to know it or describe

it, runs to a few hundred words, whereas the account of the Northern Raccoon is well over 4,000 words, about triple the length of the raccoon account in *The Smithsonian Book of North American Mammals* (Don E. Wilson and Sue Ruff, 1999).

One of the great benefits of such a long-awaited reference work is that it contains so much "new" information that had been generally restricted to scholarly publications not easily available to the public. Pertinent references are listed at the end of each account.

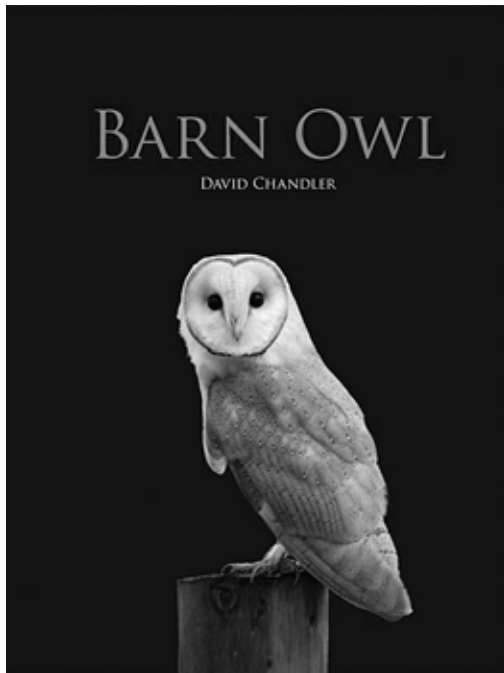
The text is written in a simple, readable style without jargon. Open the text at random to discover interesting details of our wild mammals' lives. For example: "Wallowing pits created by breeding males [Moose] are shallow depressions with the vegetation scraped away by the front hooves. They vary in size but typically measure up to 3 m in length, 40-82 cm in width, and 9-15 cm in depth. If a bull has recently urinated into the pit, the odor will certainly be detectable, possibly from even 100 m away." (p. 545).

One of the most useful aspects of this book is that the author did not restrict herself to strictly Canadian matters. Following the tradition started by Banfield, the maps for each species show not only the Canadian distribution but the species' global distribution as well. This is particularly informative for species like the Northern Fur Seal that can be found in Canadian Pacific waters but breeds at five colonies, all of them outside of Canada. For Arctic species like the Polar Bear, one can see at a glance how important the Canadian high arctic is to their continued survival.

Each species is illustrated in a full colour figure. Some species, such as deer, are shown separately in summer and winter pelage. As a bonus all the colour illustrations are shown again on full page plates at the same scale for each group. Individual species are cross-referenced with page numbers that take the reader to the species account. The art work is of a consistent very high standard, making this handbook also the best field guide to most North American mammals, albeit a slightly heavy and large one.

Anyone with a serious interest in Canadian mammals must have this beautiful and valuable publication. Highly recommended.

Barn Owl by David Chandler. 2011. 125 pages. 18.5 X 25 cms. 79 colour photographs. 2 charts. Bibliography and list of online sites. Firefly Books Ltd., Richmond Hill, ON. Hard cover. \$24.95 Can.



Barn Owl is a good general summary of biology of the species. It begins with an introduction to the world's Barn Owls (Tytonidae), including 15 species of *Tyto* and three species of *Phodilus* (bay owls). Taxonomy and English names follow those of the IOC world bird names except that the author refers to the main subject of his book as the “Western” Barn Owl, his grouping of subspecies of Barn Owls of Europe and North America.

The book proper begins at Chapter 2, “Introducing the Western Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*),” with sections on European and North American distribution, differences between dark-breasted and white breasted Barn owls, sexual and age differences, moult, vocalizations, conservation status, mobbing, and relations with Common Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*).

Chapter 3 covers habitat and movements, including dispersal of young Barn Owls from the parental home, as well as mysterious phenomenon known as the “wanderjahre” when more Barn Owls than usual are on the move.

Chapter 4 is about the diet of western Barn Owls, the seasonality of diet differences, natural population cycles of prey, especially voles, a fascinating subsection titled “Different Eras, Different Diets,” which explains how the diet of Barn Owls in Britain has changed during recent decades, the amount a Barn owl eats, and physical characteristics that enable the Barn Owl to be an effective vole predator, hunting techniques, including hunting techniques called quarter and drop, perch and plunge, and bush-wacking.

Chapters 5 – “Home and Family” – and Chapter 6 – “From Egg to Adult” – follow the Barn Owl’s life cycle from the establishing of home ranges and tolerance of other Barn Owls, roosting, selecting nest sites, mating, laying eggs, multi-brooding, cannibalizing, incubating, hatching, caring for the chicks, leaving the nest and dispersal.

The final chapter, 7 – “Life and Death” – examines what kills Barn Owls.

The text is illustrated with large colour photographs throughout. The author refers to a wide selection of Barn Owl literature, including research based in North America, Ireland, and various counties of Great Britain, Holland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Malaysia. However, in the Resources section he only lists 22 books and papers, 11 online sites, one DVD, and one newsletter. Recommended for raptor/owl enthusiasts.