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William S. Clark and N. John Schmitt.**

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BOOK REVIEWS

RAPTORS OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA.

William S. Clark and N. John Schmitt. 2017. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 272 pages. \$39.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0691116495.

Whether a raptor is cryptically perched in the shadows or is viewed only as a silhouette soaring in the clouds below the glaring midday sun, raptor identification can be challenging. If you are observing raptors in the North Temperate Zone, several guides (e.g., Clark and Wheeler 2001 Dunne et al. 2012) will aid you with such identifications, but few resources exist for visitors south of this zone. So, if you are interested in identifying the 69 species of diurnal raptors found in Mexico and Central America, the recently released *Raptors of Mexico and Central America* by William S. Clark and N. John Schmitt is certainly a book you should add to your library. Although this book is referred to as a field guide, the book's size (18×25.5-cm; 1.5 kg) will likely preclude you from stashing it in your backpack and taking it into the field, unless you are one of the most devoted of 'raptorophiles.' Nonetheless, this guide certainly is a resource you will want to keep in your car or back at your office, hotel room, or home. With 32 color plates and hundreds of color photographs, *Raptors of Mexico and Central America* is the singular best source for identifying the region's raptors, especially considering the variations in plumage of individuals, morphs, ages, and regions.

The book is organized into three sections: introduction, plates, and species accounts. The introduction follows a flattering foreword by Lloyd Kiff, creator of the Global Raptor Information Network (GRIN). Brief commentaries are provided on various aspects of the book, including color plates, plate captions, taxonomy, common names, and species accounts. After listing some helpful facts for field identification, one finds a raptor glossary including labeled drawings of the upperparts, underparts, parts of the primary feather, parts of the bird (side view), and parts of the head. It should be noted that taxonomy follows that of the American Ornithological Society (AOS; formerly the American Ornithologists' Union) and recently published papers not yet incorporated into the AOS Checklist. Molt terminology follows Clark and Pyle (2015), and Spanish common names follow Seipke et al. (2007).

The plates occur after the introductory material. Each plate references the page where the species account can be located. The number of color drawings varies for each species, depending on the number of plumage stages, postures, and

positions. For example, the Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) is illustrated with six drawings, including flying head-on, ventral view of flying adult, dorsal view of flying adult, young adult head and shoulder, juvenile head and shoulder, and side view of standing adult. In contrast, the King Vulture, (*Sarcoramphus papa*) occurs on the same page and has 10 drawings. These include three ventral views of flying birds of various ages, two dorsal views of flying birds, and five side views of birds, illustrating juvenile, juvenile-second plumage, older immature, oldest immature, and adult birds.

Species accounts include a small range map illustrating the general distribution of each species. The accounts include 15 topical areas including: species headings (common and scientific names), identification summary, measurements, taxonomy and geographical variation, similar species, status and distribution, habitat, behavior, molt, description (of each age class, including sex differences and color morphs), fine points (on field identification), unusual plumages, hybrids, etymology, and references. The section on molt includes the most detailed text. Adult (both sexes) and juvenile plumages are covered in detail. Additional illustrations depict numerous basic molts and their resulting plumages. Molt in raptors is not complex, generally requiring only a discussion of preformative and prebasic molts. The species accounts are illustrated with numerous photographs. Some accounts include references but most do not.

As a reference to the identification of the 69 species of diurnal raptors inhabiting Mexico and Central America, this book is superb. However, it is not without some shortcomings. Although the senior author is considered an accomplished photographer, the reproduced images are of varying quality. Some of this is likely due to the excessive enlargement of images that resulted in poor resolution. For example, the photograph of the Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) on page 150 likely would have been a stunning image if it had not been enlarged to a full page. Other photographs, such as the Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*; p. 208), Barred Forest-Falcon (*Micrastur ruficollis*; p. 260) and the Crested Eagle (*Morphnus guianensis*; p. 241) are just plain out of focus. Having to accept such poor-quality images for endangered species may be unavoidable, but having such poor quality photos for relatively common species is less acceptable. Although the senior author is a recognized authority on raptors, some factual errors have slipped in the species accounts (e.g., King Vultures lay a single egg rather than two), and more references to significant literature on species molt would have been appropriate. These should

include Cade (1955), Palmer (1988*a,b*), McCollough (1989), Tucker (1991), Schmultz (1992), and Eitniewar (1996), to mention a few. Clearly, 32 references hardly give the reader a taste for the rich literature on raptor molt.

General birders traveling in the region will likely prefer to carry the more compact and comprehensive *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America* (Fagan and Komar 2016) or *Aves de México: Guía de Campo* (the Spanish version of Peterson and Chalif [2008]). For those hard to identify birds of prey, birders will likely consult *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America* (Howell and Webb 1995) in combination with Clark and Schmitt's *Raptors of Mexico and Central America*. For those who are somewhat rusty on the topic of avian molt, I also recommend perusing *Peterson Field Guide to Molt in North American Birds* (Howell 2010). If your primary interest is to identify diurnal raptors, a note pad and pencil, in addition to a good pair of binoculars and this book, should suffice.—*Jack Clinton Eitniewar, Director, Center for the Study of Tropical Birds, Incorporated, 218 Conway Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78209, USA.*

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