

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

The Prairie Naturalist

Great Plains Natural Science Society

---

11-2019

**Review of *Birds of prey of the East: A Field Guide* by Brian K. Wheeler**

Janet W. Ng

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tpn>



Part of the [Biodiversity Commons](#), [Botany Commons](#), [Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Commons](#), [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), [Systems Biology Commons](#), and the [Weed Science Commons](#)

---

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Natural Science Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Naturalist by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**BIRDS OF PREY OF THE EAST: A FIELD GUIDE.**

Brian K. Wheeler. 2018. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 296 pages. \$27.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-691-11706-5.

Brian Wheeler's new field guide, *Birds of Prey of the East*, is a well-researched, comprehensive field guide to birds of prey found in eastern Canada and United States. This 13-year labor of love reflects a life spent studying the nuances of North American birds of prey, as well as partnerships with fellow enthusiasts who provided detailed range maps and other valuable inputs. *Birds of Prey of the East* features 72 color plates of 27 species, including 14 plates for the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), which can be one of the most challenging species to identify in North America. This compact, sturdy guide can be dropped into a backpack or kept in a vehicle's glove box and can be used by beginner to advanced birders.

The color plates are a comprehensive visual guide. For most species, there are side-by-side comparisons of perched birds, flying birds (top-side and bottom views), tails, and even individual feathers types. High plumage variation within raptor species emphasizes the importance of providing readers with the most common plumage and then a few less-common variations. Wheeler gives extra attention to tails because the tail is often the last view of a flying raptor that a birder observes, and tails often can be hugely helpful for raptor identification. Many raptors can be aged by plumage and molt variations, which also are described in the plates and text.

The range maps are a valuable asset to this field guide. Wheeler partnered with John M. Economidy, who researched and created range maps that show breeding, year-round, and wintering ranges. These range maps include incidental sightings or uncommon breeding records, which can be helpful to birders when a bird is encountered outside of its expected range. Also, because this field guide focuses on eastern North America, the range maps are more detailed than the larger, more generalized range maps in field guides that cover the entire continent.

Each species account is accompanied by a color plate and text that describes plumage and basic information about habitat, prey, and other tidbits. The plumage descriptions correspond to the plates, helpfully pointing out unique features of a species that could be hard to articulate. Photos of representative habitat are included for some species, which can be helpful for birders who are unfamiliar with a species or are birding outside of their normal neighborhood. The author focused on identification instead of including general natural history information for each species, which can add a lot of joy to birding by learning about the species you have just identified or perhaps have seen for the first time. The description of Red-tailed Hawks is jam-packed and comprehensively covers their variations. Some descriptions

can be quite dense and may be useful only for the most enthusiastic birders.

I recommend packing this field guide for a day of birding or stocking it on a bookshelf at a hawk migration site. *Birds of Prey of the East* would be complementary to Jerry Liguori's (2005, 2011) field guides that help identify birds of prey in the field at a distance. The color plates in *Birds of Prey of the East* are of great value; however, the plates are missing some niceties, such as side-by-side comparisons of tricky species such as Sharp-shinned (*Accipiter striatus*) and Cooper's (*Accipiter cooperii*) hawks. *Birds of Prey of the East* is probably best for the intermediate to advanced birders because its comprehensiveness, which is excellent, may be overwhelming for beginners that are looking for basic identification traits. The real mettle behind a field guide that focuses on birds of prey is the section dedicated to the variability in Red-tailed Hawk plumages. They are complicated beasts, and Wheeler uses highly researched visuals and text to illustrate the nuances of Red-tailed Hawk plumages. This is another gem of a field guide that will hopefully see some sun and dirt in the field.—Janet W. Ng, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, 11455 Saskatchewan Drive, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E9, Canada.

**LITERATURE CITED**

- Liguori, J. 2005. Hawks from every angle: how to identify raptors in flight. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA.
- Liguori, J. 2011. Hawks at a distance: identification of migrant raptors. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA.