



from
the field . . .

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San Antonio, Texas

Hawk-eagles

Birds of prey, as a rule, are not popular among aviculturists. I must admit, my first experience with such magnificent birds was much the same as most gamebird breeders. Having a small pheasant and waterfowl collection I awoke one day to discover a few less pheasants and one rather full red-tailed hawk. Not wishing to harm the bird I consulted with some of the more "seasoned" gamebird breeders who suggested I purchase some guinea fowl. It wasn't clear if the screaming from the birds was supposed to awaken the gamebird breeder, who, in turn, should scare the hawk away, or if they would run the winged killer off themselves. In any event, the hawk, one at a time, killed all the guinea fowl! Fortunately it never returned after it fed upon the last of the flock.

This habit of killing gamebirds and domestic fowl has given the various birds of prey (hawks, eagles, falcons, kites, caracaras, osprey, vultures and owls) the collective name "chicken hawk." Due to such labeling they are frequently shot on sight throughout their ranges despite scientific documentation that many survive on diets of rodents, insects and snakes. While most temperate species are wide-ranging, abundant and often migratory, many other species throughout the world have naturally low population densities, laying but one egg and requiring many years to mature. The majority of these species remain in a defined range throughout their entire lives.

Human persecution only further inhibits the ability of these birds to maintain genetically sound population numbers as they are already threatened from habitat destruction, pesticides and

lack of prey (due to competition with man for the medium sized mammals/birds).

One of the most striking groups of such birds is the eagles. Those of the subfamily *Aguilinae* are perhaps the most stunning and popular. This group (of 30 species) not only includes the North American golden eagle but the Australian wedgetail eagle and the African tawny eagle as well. Frequently referred to as "booted eagles" they have feathered legs down to their toes. The subfamily is further divided into those whose young are generally similar in appearance to their parents and often feed upon carrion (*Genus Aguilina*) and those whose young differ from their parents and seldom feed upon carrion (*Genera Hieraaetus, Spizastur, Spizaetus, Stephanoaetus, Oroaetus, and Polemaetus*). This latter group is frequently referred to as the hawk-eagles.

Encountered in forests throughout tropical America, Africa, and Asia, the twenty or so species of hawk-eagles derive their names from their short wings and long tails making them intermediate between the hawks and eagles. They are a very diversified group including the largest eagle in Africa, the martial eagle (6000 grams) and the very small Malaysian Wallace's eagle (500 grams). Taxonomically the group is rather unclear as the young of the black and white hawk-eagle look like their parents and the martial eagle inhabits open country unlike its relatives that prefer dense forest.

Due to most species' preference for dense tropical forests, their life histories are poorly documented. Even the rather common black "tyrant" hawk-eagle, which occurs from Mexico to Argentina often in disturbed secondary forests, is poorly known.

In addition to the black "tyrant" hawk-eagle, the neotropics are home to three other species of hawk-eagles: the black and white hawk-eagle, ornate hawk-eagle and Isidor's eagle. The first two prefer tropical forests although the black and white hawk-eagle does inhabit riverine areas and forest borders. The last species, Isidor's eagle, is found in the forested valleys of the Andean range of northern South America.

While the ornate and black hawk-eagles are frequently encountered, their future is less than secure. The ornate requires dense tropical forests and feeds upon large parrots, cracids and tinamous. Both its preferred habitat and prey are becoming increasingly scarce. The black hawk-eagle's future appears

brighter as it appears to thrive on a variety of smaller prey items and often inhabits disturbed secondary forests. Human persecution appears to be its major limiting factor. Isidor's eagle and the black and white hawk-eagle both occur in habitats under human alteration and are little known as to their ecological requirements. A recent census of the black and white hawk-eagle has given indications that it may be one of the rarest of neotropical raptors.

Certainly the hawk-eagle of greatest concern is that of the Java hawk-eagle. The island of Java is one of the most densely inhabited areas of the world. Previous attempts at securing the future survival of Java's endemic rhino and tiger are less than encouraging. Java's native hawk-eagle is little known to science with its eggs as yet undescribed. A recent visit by international raptor biologists Berndt Meyburg and Jean Marc Thiollay may give us some indication as to the status of the species but their stay was limited due to lack of funds.

1987 has been proclaimed the International Year of the Raptor with the Third World Conference on Birds of Prey scheduled during March in Eilat,

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Israel. It would, therefore, seem appropriate for us to think of the role raptors play in their respective ecosystems. Since the purpose of AFA is dedicated to the "conservation of bird wildlife" we should recall that one of the most critically endangered avian species is the California condor. Human persecution has played a major role in its population decline and aviculture, hopefully, in its future survival. Additionally, in our hemisphere during the 1900s the caracara endemic to the Guadalupe Islands was persecuted to extinction.

While birds of prey often conflict with our avicultural efforts, I am hopeful that our personal "tastes" will not dictate which species will find room in our modern day arks. Through education, scientific research and captive propagation not only will the future survival of the popular species of parrots and birds of paradise be secured but that of the magnificent hawk-eagles as well. ●

Photo compliments of Alistair Robertson



The largest of the hawk-eagles is also Africa's largest eagle, the martial eagle.

Due to its ability to adapt to disturbed forests the future of the black hawk-eagle appears brighter than most hawk-eagles.

Photo by author



The ornate hawk-eagle inhabits tropical forests from Mexico to Argentina.

Its strikingly contrasting coloration and its habit of perching along river ways and in forest borders has undoubtedly contributed to the black and white hawk-eagle's rarity throughout its range in the American tropics.

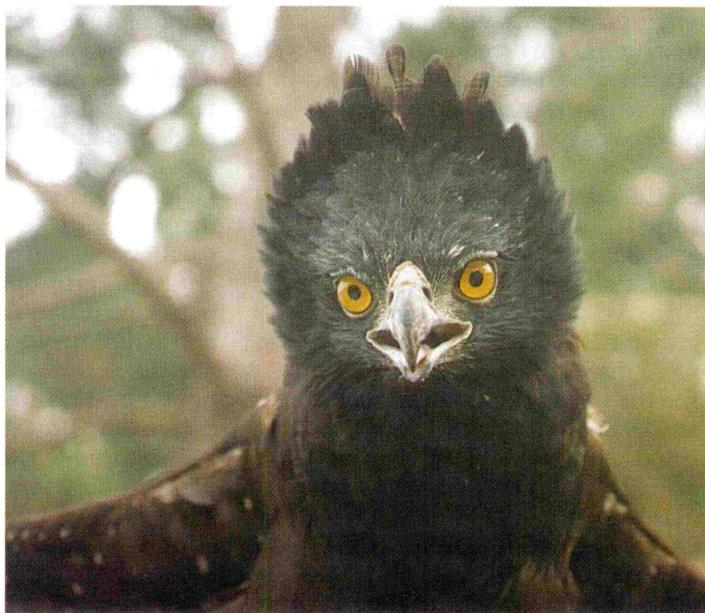


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