

REVIEWS

The Raptors of Europe and the Middle East: a handbook of field identification

By Dick Forsman.

T. & A. D. Poyser, London, 1999.

589 pages; over 700 colour photographs.

ISBN 0-85661-098-4. Hardback £29.95.

One cannot fail to be impressed by the depth of knowledge contained in this book. For more than two decades, Dick Forsman has probably been the leading authority on European raptors and, along with Bill Clark, has made one of the greatest contributions to the advancement of their field identification. The small group of Danes (Steen Christensen prominent amongst them) who published those first eagle and buzzard flight-identification papers in *Dansk Ornitologisk Forenings Tidsskrift* 30 years ago would never have dreamed that their pioneering work would have led to a tome such as this.

Essentially, this is a photographic guide covering 43 species that occur in Europe and the Middle Eastern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In that respect, 'Middle East' is a slight misnomer in the book's title; indeed, it is a pity that the whole of the Middle East has not been included, so as to cover tricky species such as Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* and, ideally, Oriental

Honey-buzzard
Pernis ptilorhyncus.

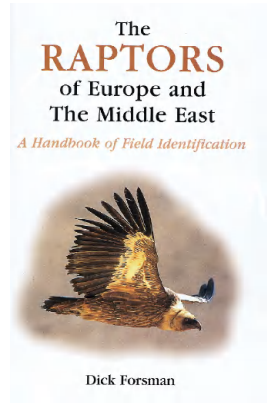
For each species, the text covers subspecies, distribution, habitat, movements, hunting and prey.

Then follow

detailed sections on identification (in which the notes on confusion species are particularly valuable), moult, ageing and sexing. The text is complemented by an excellent series of photographs (mostly flight) showing all plumage patterns clearly. In the case of the Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, for example, there are 31 photographs. The exceptionally high standard of photography and the comprehensiveness of the collection make the approach used in this book a serious rival to that of traditional handbooks which employ the work of artists.

If I have one criticism, it is that the book is not smaller so that it could easily be carried in the field. I believe that this could have been achieved by a pruning of the photographs, tightening of the text and the use of a less high-quality paper. 'Oh, no!', I can hear you cry, but all I am suggesting is that this would have given a wider practical application to a great book.

RICHARD PORTER



Costa Rica: the Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide

By Les Beletsky. Academic Press, London, 1998.

426 pages; 80 colour plates; numerous line-drawings. ISBN 0-12-084810-4. Softback, £19.95.

The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guides are well named: 'all the information you need to find, identify, and learn about Costa Rica's magnificent wildlife ... easy-to-carry, entertainingly written, beautifully illustrated.' Admittedly not comprehensive, but the selection is sensible, based on the likelihood of a species being seen by the short-term visitor: 80 species of amphibians and reptiles, 50 mammals, over 200 birds. The information on identification, distribution, ecology, behaviour, conservation, and habitats is enlivened by fascinating 'environmental close-ups' – intriguing reading for spare moments or to stimulate post-prandial group discussions. BRYAN BLAND