



## Book Reviews

*The Golden Eagle*. By JEFF WATSON. London: T. & A. D. Poyser (1997). Pp. xx+374. Price £29.95.

The golden eagle is a bird of prey widely distributed in the northern hemisphere and a species on which a lot of scientific research has been carried out. It is probably one of the best known raptors after the peregrine falcon and the osprey. Jeff Watson's book on the species is the first comprehensive monograph in the last 40 years, after the work of Seton Gordon (1955). Most monographs on birds of prey are based almost exclusively on the work of a single researcher in a limited area. Although Watson's book is based on his 15 years of field experience and research with the golden eagle in Scotland, he has taken advantage of the numerous researchers that have studied the species in countries such as France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The author has carried out an extensive review of the literature of the species and has also considered those papers difficult to find, often published in local journals, and those difficult to read, in languages other than English. From that point of view, Watson has done an impressive job. The monograph also takes a more comparative than a mere descriptive approach, and explores the similarities and differences in the ecology of the species in different parts of its range, and compares the golden eagle with other species of the genus *Aquila*.

The structure of the book is similar to that of other bird monographs. A total of 22 chapters review most aspects of the biology of the species: distribution, hunting behaviour, food, nest sites, ranging behaviour, population density, population estimates and trends, breeding cycle, breeding performance, moult, movements, mortality, threats and conservation. There is also an interesting chapter on history and tradition which reviews the information available on the relationship between golden eagles and people in Europe, North America and Central Asia, and a final chapter on aspects of the biology of this species that require further research. As I said previously, the chapters are not only of a descriptive nature but also compare populations in different parts of the range and different species of eagles, and try to find ecological factors that explain the differences. I found particularly interesting the relationship between dietary breadth and breeding success

(Figure 59) which indicates that eagles breed more successfully where they are specialist hunters.

The monograph is really comprehensive and the 73 tables provide an extensive summary of the quantitative data for the species found in the scientific literature. In general, I found the book easy and enjoyable to read, and I think it will interest the amateur and the specialist alike. From my point of view as a specialist, I sometimes found having the tables at the end of the book while the figures are intercalated in the text inconvenient, especially when the text refers to a figure, and the figure caption refers to another figure and one or several tables, and perhaps even an appendix. I agree this is perhaps the easiest way of making the book easy to read for the layman, while keeping all the details for the specialist, but perhaps it would have been good to try to avoid so many cross references at the cost of making some repetitions. A point on which I do not agree with Jeff Watson, although almost collateral in this monograph, is his consideration of the Spanish imperial eagle, *Aquila adalberti*, as a race of *Aquila heliaca*. All people working with the imperial eagle have the opposite view and all scientific and conservation papers published recently give the Spanish form a full species status. Also, recent molecular genetic research supports the consideration of the Spanish imperial eagle as a full species (Seibold et al. 1996).

In conclusion, this monograph is of generally high quality and reflects the long first-hand experience of the author with the species and the extensive review and integration he has done on the research carried out in different parts of the world.

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### References

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