

# Preface

Many years ago, I had the pleasure of working with the National Wildlife Federation on the design and distribution of a bilingual poster about birds of prey. The poster was to dispel some of the common myths about raptors. For distribution throughout the Americas, most of the myths were familiar; eagles do not kill lambs (especially those in the tropics), vultures do not spread disease, and all hawks do not eat chickens (in fact many feed on snakes). But when it came to the owls, not being familiar with any myths, I had to do some research, and I was astounded with the results.

According to the Kwakiutl people in the Canadian Northwest, if you hear an owl call your name, your death is imminent. In the American Southwest in the culture of the Uto-Aztecan tribe, the Hopi, taboos about owls are associated with sorcery and other evils. Further south, the Aztecs and Mayan, along with other natives of Mesoamerica, considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction. In fact, the Aztec god of death, Mictlantecuhtli, was often depicted with owls. There is an old saying in Mexico that is still in use: *Cuando el tecolote canta, el indio muere* (“When the little owl sings, the Indian dies”). The Popol Vuh, a Mayan religious text, describes owls as messengers of Xibalba (the Mayan “place of fright”). In modern day some people believe owls will tear out your eyes or heart. The mother of a friend living in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, simply thought owls were bad luck. So it would appear that there is no shortage of myths about owls. Most people fear anything that moves about in the night. Modern-day reports of nesting territorial owls attacking people likely just reinforce the myths. Perhaps such attacks in earlier times resulted in the creation of the various myths in the first place. As with most myths, they reflect a lack of accurate knowledge about the animal. Not only do most laypeople lack even the basic knowledge about owls, but many species have also been little studied by scientist.

There is certainly no shortage of books on owls. A few of the most recent include two titled *Owls of the World* (Burton, John A. 1992. Eurobook Ltd; Third Edition 208 pp. and Claus König, Friedhelm Weick, and Jan-Hendrik Becking. 2009 Second Edition, Yale University Press 528 pp.). Heimo Mikkola’s 2012 book titled *Owls of the World: A Photographic Guide* published by Firefly Books is likely the best book available for identification using photographs. For a more general overview of all

the owls, one should consult Josep Del Hoyo, Andrew Elliot, and Jordi Sargatal's *Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol. 5: Barn Owls to Hummingbirds*. Until now no singular source existed for detailed scientifically accurate information on the owls throughout Mexico and Central and South America. The scientific literature contains some information as does a recently published book by the Peregrine Fund (David F. Whitacre and J. Peter Jenny 2012. *Neotropical Birds of Prey: Biology and Ecology of a Forest Raptor Community*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. pp. 428). While the vast majority of the Peregrine Fund's book is on diurnal birds of prey, several owls are included in the treatment. Considering our lack of knowledge about this interesting family of nocturnal birds, *Neotropical Owls: Their Diversity and Conservation* will certainly fill in some of the major gaps.

Books of this nature are only as valuable as the knowledge of their contributors. Clearly not simply another book written by a single author who reviewed the literature, *Neotropical Owls: Their Diversity and Conservation*, contains contributions from the region's authorities on owls. Rather than presented in a species format, the book contains country profiles, which include tables, lists, and even some species accounts of the owls that have been recorded within the various countries. Available in two versions, its <sup>1</sup>downloadable bilingual (Spanish-English) version allows individuals conversant in either language to extract important information contained within the accounts. If the current data contained within the English hardcopy book was not enough to justify adding it to your ornithological libraries, the artwork certainly should provide such justification. Throughout the book, illustrations by renowned artists Lynn Delvin and Rina Pellizzari Raddatz are liberally distributed. A graduate of the arts program at Western Michigan University, Mr. Delvin developed an interest in owls at an early age. His work is included in the *Michigan Breeding Birds Atlas* as well as in various magazines and can be viewed at numerous private shows in Southern Michigan. Born in Santiago de Chile, Ms. Pellizzari studied arts at the University of Chile and design at the Metropolitan Technological University of Santiago. Some of her projects include scientific illustration and editorial design for scientific publications and scientific outreach, in Mexico and also in Central America and Chile.

Without a doubt, *Neotropical Owls Diversity and Conservation* will make a lasting contribution to our knowledge of this little known group. Kudos to Paula Enríquez and her staff for producing such a stellar product which will likely become a classic reference on these nocturnal birds in the Neotropics.

Director, Center for the Study of Tropical Birds, Inc.  
San Antonio, TX, USA

Jack Clinton Eitniear

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://bibliotecasibe.ecosur.mx/sibe/book/000012610>

Neotropical Owls

Diversity and Conservation

Enriquez, P.L. (Ed.)

2017, XIV, 670 p. 190 illus., 102 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-57107-2