

FOREWORD

by Christoph Imboden, Director,
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Raptors are a paradox, and our sentiments towards this awe-inspiring group of birds have always been equivocal. Our close relations go back to the dawn of history. This in itself has produced some curious enigmas: one has only to check out the various etymological guesses at the derivation of Gyr Falcon—from the Germanic ‘spear’, from the Latin ‘to circle’, from the Greek ‘sacred’, from the High German ‘greedy’, from the Old Norse ‘worthy’.

No group of birds can so powerfully evoke the gamut of human emotions, from repugnance for the vulture (from the Latin ‘to pluck or tear’) to admiration for the magnificence of the eagle. Since the Romans first used it as a standard, the eagle has been taken as a symbol of national strength and pride by numerous countries. Even this has been a mixed blessing, depending on whether or not you happen to be a political ‘hawk’ or a ‘dove’. Benjamin Franklin for example, one of modern history’s first ‘doves’, deplored the choice of the Bald Eagle as the emblem of the United States, calling it a bird of ‘bad moral character’.

Hawks and falcons are associated with the sport of kings, yet farmers and gamekeepers have persecuted them rigorously, begrudging them the occasional chicken or pheasant chick and oblivious to their manifold blessings as a highly efficient form of pest control. The goddess Athene is associated with the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), which stands for wisdom; other cultures have regarded the owl as a bird of ill omen, or even as a symbol of stupidity. It is unfortunate that the obvious power of raptors to stir the human imagination, when coupled with ignorance of the vital services they perform for the benefit of a well-ordered natural system, has more often than not led to their persecution or even destruction.

For me, as for most people reading this book, the sight of a soaring raptor evokes a deep sense of awe at such powerful mastery of its element. And yet in our professional lives we know this appearance of omnipotence to be an illusion, part of the paradox of birds of prey. In reality they are terribly vulnerable to the same human pressures that are responsible for placing so many species on the pages of the *Red Data Book*; primarily loss of habitat, as well as direct killing. Most recently, the new and insidious threat of pesticides has led to the decline of numerous species, perhaps the best documented of which is the Peregrine. Research on the effects of pesticides on birds of prey clearly demonstrated, for the first time, the extent of the spread of organic chemicals throughout the environment, and revealed the hazards they represent for humans as well as wildlife. In

so doing, this magnificent group of birds performed yet another service to mankind: that of bio-indicator.

Even the Osprey has not escaped the paradox which seems to haunt birds of prey: the King James version of the Bible specifically stigmatizes it, along with the eagle and ossifrage, now known as the Lammergeier or Bearded Eagle, 'They shall not be eaten, they are an abomination' (Leviticus). However, we chose it to symbolize the work of ICBP because of its strength, grace and its global range. Raptor enthusiasts, especially, will agree it is a worthy emblem. I am delighted to see its portrait on the cover of this volume.

EDITORS' PREFACE

by Ian Newton and Robin Chancellor

The Second World Conference on Birds of Prey was held at Thessaloniki, Greece, from 26 to 29 April, 1982, and was organized, in close collaboration with the Greek authorities, by the ICBP World Working Group on Birds of Prey, under the chairmanship of Richard Fyfe. Birds of prey had previously been the subject of a small ICBP meeting at Caen in 1964 and of a First World Conference in Vienna in 1975.

One reason for holding the present meeting in Greece was to focus attention on the plight of raptors in the Mediterranean region, where populations of some species are fast declining. It was attended by 125 participants, many of whom came from as far afield as Australia, South Africa and both North and South America.

In addition to providing a forum for the exchange of information and ideas, the main objectives of the conference were to review current research and methodology relative to priorities in raptor conservation; to develop guidelines for the promotion of conservation needs; and to provide guidance to government and conservation agencies for the resolution of current critical issues facing birds of prey. The meeting was conducted as a series of six one-day workshops, with two workshops running concurrently on each day, and covered the following major topics: conservation and management of birds of prey in the Mediterranean; conservation strategy for birds of prey in tropical forests; methods for studying problems of birds of prey on migration; Peregrine breeding and re-introduction in Europe and North America; conservation and management of vultures; and conservation education on birds of prey.

This volume contains the main papers presented at the Conference, arranged in the same order as the themes listed above. However, the need to contain costs has prevented us from reproducing all the reports submitted. The contents have therefore been restricted to papers of a

scientific nature which present new material, together with a section of miscellaneous papers covering different management techniques. A few papers describing work already published in greater detail elsewhere have been excluded altogether, whilst others, such as those from the session on education, together with some short reports of a general nature, have been published in the World Working Group's Bulletin, edited by the group's present chairman, Dr B.-U. Meyburg.

Finally, we would like to thank the Greek authorities and organizers of the Conference for providing an ideal venue, for ensuring the smooth running of the meeting, and for arranging an excellent field trip to the Evros Delta, an area which is still particularly rich in raptors. The only element over which our Greek colleagues had no control was the weather, which turned out to be unexpectedly cold and wet for most of the week. This did not, however, detract from the interest and enjoyment of the meeting.

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