

# Threatened Raptors of the Americas: Work in Progress from the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book

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I

In keeping with the first part of the new (third edition) bird Red Data Book (Collar and Stuart 1985), the taxonomy to be followed in Threatened Birds of the Americas, currently in preparation, is that of Morony et al. (1975) with the alterations of Bock and Farrand (1980). From their listings, there are 99 species of raptor (Carthartidae included) in the Americas, which for the purposes of this study are North, Central and South America plus the Caribbean, associated Atlantic and Pacific islands, but excluding Hawaii and Greenland. King (1978-1979), who also largely followed Morony et al. (1975), listed eight species and nine subspecies from this region as threatened, as follows (IUCN category of threat after each).

California Condor Gymnogyps californianus (Endangered)  
Grey-backed Hawk Leucopternis occidentalis (Indeterminate)  
Mantled Hawk Leucopternis polionota (Indeterminate)  
Galapagos Hawk Buteo galapagoensis (Rare)  
Harpy Eagle Harpia harpyja (Rare)  
Crested Eagle Morphnus guianensis (Rare)  
Kleinschmidt's Falcon Falco kreyenborgi (Indeterminate)  
Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus (Vulnerable)

Grenada Hook-billed Kite Chondrohierax uncinatus mirus (Endangered)  
Cuban Hook-billed Kite Chondrohierax uncinatus wilsoni (Rare)  
Florida Everglade Kite Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus (Rare)  
Southern Bald Eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus leucocephalus (Endangered)  
Cuban Sharp-shinned Hawk Accipiter striatus fringilloides (Rare)  
Puerto Rican Sharp-shinned Hawk Accipiter striatus venator (Rare)  
Puerto Rican Broad-winged Hawk Buteo platypterus brunnescens (Rare)  
Tundra Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus tundrius (Endangered)  
American Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus anatum (Endangered)

Collar and Stuart (1985) took the step of excluding subspecies from the new Red Data Book, because the number of them at risk was considered unmanageably high. As partial compensation, they provided appendices for brief updatings of species treated by King (1978-1979) and for full species that they judged to be near-threatened. They also introduced the unofficial category "Species of Special Concern" to cover birds of particular interest in conservation and which are commonly assumed to be threatened ("threatened" is the IUCN generic term for any species included in its specific Red Data Book categories, and is thus different from the meaning of the word under U.S. conservation legislation). These precedents will be followed in Threatened Birds of the Americas.

The evaluation of candidate species for inclusion in Threatened Birds of the Americas began during 1985 and is a process that will continue throughout the preparation of the volume. Presented below are brief accounts of each species that is currently judged likely to appear in the book, which it is hoped will be published in the course of 1988.

## II

CALIFORNIA CONDOR Gymnogyps californianus, endemic to the U.S.A., stands at the very brink of extinction. It is intended to provide a complete review of the species and the efforts to save it in Threatened Birds of the Americas.

ANDEAN CONDOR Vultur gryphus occurs throughout the Andes of South America, although it is extinct in Venezuela and nearly so in Colombia (Blake 1977). It is still widespread and common throughout the southern Andes however (C. König pers. comm. 1983, D.A. Scott in litt. 1985) but, because of the popular interest and local conservation activities it attracts, it remains a candidate for treatment as a Species of Special Concern.

SEMI-COLLARED SPARROWHAWK Accipiter collaris is known from a few localities in northern and western Colombia (Hellmayr and Conover 1949, de Schauensee 1949, 1966), the province of Pichincha in northern Ecuador (Hellmayr and Conover 1949), and a single specimen from the Montanas del Morro in the Andes of Mérida, Venezuela (Hellmayr and Conover 1949, Phelps and Phelps 1958), although it has recently been listed from Peru, without details (Parker et al. 1982). It is apparently a bird of forest interior (there seems to be no evidence of its use of forest edge, contra Blake 1977), chiefly in the Subtropical Zone and the upper Tropical Zone (de Schauensee 1949, de Schauensee and Phelps 1978, Parker et al. 1982).

GUNDLACH'S HAWK Accipiter gundlachi is confined to Cuba, where most of this century it has generally been judged very rare (Barbour 1923, 1943, Bond 1945, Brown and Amadon 1968), although since the 1960s it has gradually been realised to be widespread and even fairly common in places, but very secretive (Bond 1964, 1968, Wiley 1985; also C. Wotzkow in litt. to R. F. Pasquier 1982). Nevertheless, full evaluation of the recent evidence is needed before a decision can be taken on whether or not it is threatened.

WHITE-NECKED HAWK Leucopternis lacernulata is endemic to the Atlantic forest fragments of eastern Brazil, evidently from the records (in Pinto 1938, 1952, Hellmayr and Conover 1949, Mitchell 1957, Scott and Brooke 1985, and from D.A. Scott in litt. 1985) largely restricted to lowlands, where habitat destruction has been most serious (see Sick and Teixeira 1979).

GREY-BACKED HAWK Leucopternis occidentalis is restricted to western Ecuador, where "a great decline has taken place" (King 1978-1979), and adjacent north-western Peru, where it is uncommon (Parker et al. 1982). It supposedly occurs in both Tropical and Subtropical Zone Forests (Brown and Amadon 1968, de Schauensee 1970, Blake 1977).

MANTLED HAWK Leucopternis polionota is endemic to the Atlantic forest fragments of eastern Brazil, south-east Paraguay and northern Argentina, occurring in both lowland and montane forest (Hellmayr and Conover 1949, King 1978-1979, Scott and Brooke 1985). Its recently recorded occurrence in areas where deforestation has been extensive suggests that it is perhaps not as seriously threatened as was formerly supposed (D.A. Scott in litt. 1985).

HISPANIOLAN HAWK Buteo ridgwayi is confined to the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the satellite islands of Beata and Alto Velo (Dominican Republic), Gonave, Grande Cayemite, Petite Cayemite and Ile-à-Vache (Haiti) (AOU 1983). Studies in the mid-1970s by Wiley and Wiley (1981) support the judgement of Bond (1956) and Stockton de Dod (1978) that the species is locally common, but it has suffered local decline and extinction owing to forest clearance, which continues even in the Los Haitises National Park, one of its strongholds (Wiley and Wiley 1981).

GALAPAGOS HAWK Buteo galapagoensis is confined to certain of the islands of the Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador, having declined in numbers and suffered extinction on other islands owing to human interference and killing; its population is estimated at around 130 pairs (King 1978-1979, Harris 1982).

CRESTED EAGLE Morphnus guianensis occupies humid lowland forest in the Tropical and lower Subtropical Zones from Guatemala south throughout such habitat primarily east of the Andes (AOU 1983). In much of its range it is accounted rare (e.g. Blake 1977, Parker et al. 1982) and is "nowhere numerous" (Friedmann 1951); because of this, its great size (i.e. its wide territorial needs) and its dependence on primary rainforest, it was treated as threatened by King (1978-1979). Two recent observers, however, consider it probably better able to withstand a small degree of human pressure than the Harpy Eagle Harpia harpyja (Thiollay 1984, D.A. Scott in litt. 1985). Nevertheless, in some areas (e.g. Central America, Venezuela, Suriname) it seems much rarer than the Harpy (see Phelps and Phelps 1958, Haverschmidt 1968, Blake 1977) and it must be at some risk.

HARPY EAGLE Harpia harpyja is resident in dense lowland forest of the Tropical Zone from southern Mexico south throughout such habitat primarily east of the Andes (AOU 1983). It is rare in Central America (Slud 1964, Monroe 1968, Land 1970, Aguilar-Ortiz 1979, Ridgely 1981) and has been recorded as such in parts of its South American range (e.g. Willis 1977, Parker et al. 1982, Terborgh et al. 1984); because of this, its great size (i.e. its wide territorial needs) and its dependence on primary rainforest, it was treated as threatened by King (1978-1979). However, in the Guianas it appears fairly well represented (Haverschmidt 1968, Snyder 1970, Thiollay 1984), although recent fieldwork suggests it to be the most sensitive of all Neotropical raptors in French Guiana to human hunting pressure, both directly and through lack of prey (Thiollay 1984).

STRIATED CARACARA Phalacrocorax australis is a scavenger at seabird and marine mammal colonies, confined to the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas and to the extreme of southern Argentina and Chile (Blake 1977). It has declined with persecution on the Falklands/Malvinas, with only some 1,000 pairs remaining (K.T. Standring pers. comm. 1982). On the islands of southernmost South America it was believed to be of very restricted distribution (Humphrey et al. 1970), but recent observations have extended

its range and suggest that it may not truly be at risk (Venegas and Jory 1979, Clark 1984).

PLUMBEOUS FOREST-FALCON Micrastur plumbeus is a poorly known small raptor of Tropical Zone forest interior, restricted to south-western Colombia in Cauca and Narino departments, and to north-western Ecuador in Esmeraldas (Hellmayr and Conover 1949, de Schauensee 1949).

LESSER COLLARED FOREST-FALCON Micrastur buckleyi is a virtually unknown small raptor of Tropical and Subtropical Zone forest interior, restricted to eastern Ecuador and north-eastern and south-central Peru (Traylor 1948, 1958, Amadon 1964, Blake 1977).

ORANGE-BREASTED FALCON Falco deiroleucus is an inexplicably rare species with a wide but very patchy distribution, being found usually in open forest and forest edge of humid Tropical and Subtropical Zone lowlands from southern Mexico through South America, mostly east of the Andes (Blake 1977, AOU 1983). Boyce (1980) suggests that the species prefers ecotones, especially where complex mature forests are interrupted by savannas, clearings, high cliffs or rivers.

### III

The following species were initially considered also to be candidates for the Red Data Book treatment: Plumbeous Hawk Leucopternis plumbea, Barred Hawk L. princeps and Semiplumbeous Hawk L. semiplumbea, because cursory reference to the literature gave the impression they were rare, Mangrove Black Hawk Buteogallus subtilis and Rufous Crab-hawk B. aequinoctialis, because of second-hand reports of much mangrove destruction within their ranges, and Black-and-White Hawk Eagle Spizastur melanoleucus, which the literature very largely treats as almost as rare as both Harpy and Crested Eagles (but see, e.g., Thiollay 1984). None of these is now considered at risk, although this is not a final judgement and all in any case merit consideration in future conservation planning.

D.A. Scott (in litt. 1985) has suggested three further species for possible Red Data Book treatment: Grey-bellied Hawk Accipiter poliogaster ("although it has an enormous range, it seems to be rare and local everywhere"), White-browed Hawk Leucopternis kuhli (which "has a wide range in western Amazonia, but has been very rarely encountered in recent years") and Solitary Eagle Harpyhaliaetus solitarius ("a large eagle with a wide distribution in Middle America and the Andes, but in my experience very rare"). That I missed these species as candidates during my own evaluation of the literature is an indication of the problem of species with large ranges whose numerical status within them is low or decreasing. Several other such species may yet be expected to emerge as serious candidates for treatment.

From the species discussed in Part II of this paper it can be seen that all but one of the eight treated by King (1978-1979) continue to be judged threatened, the exception being Falco kreyenborgi, no longer considered a valid taxon (Anderson and Ellis 1980, Ellis et al. 1980). However the number of species to be treated has risen by around 100%, and will be higher if any of the three birds proposed in the paragraph above is

accepted. Of the 15 current candidates, there are 1 Holarctic and 14 Neotropical representatives. Of the latter, only three, Vultur gryphus, Buteo galapagoensis and Phalcoboenus australis, are not forest-dependent (the first and last of these are the two poorest candidates for threatened species status). Of the 11 forest birds, two, Accipiter gundlachi and Buteo ridgwayi, are Caribbean island dwellers; two, Leucopternis lacernulata and L. polionota, are Atlantic forest species centred on eastern Brazil; four, Accipiter collaris, Leucopternis occidentalis, Micrastur plumbeus and M. buckleyi, are confined to north-western South America; and three, Morphnus guianensis, Harpia harpyja and Falco deiroleucus, occur throughout much Neotropical rainforest.

Major areas of sympatry between these species would naturally make excellent targets for intensified conservation activity. At present my own research has not been adequate to provide a detailed and rationalised list of such areas, but the compilation of full species accounts in due course should render this possible. However, one striking feature to emerge through work so far undertaken is the relative importance of the Guianan forests, which seem to hold relatively high densities of Morphnus guianensis, Harpia harpyja, Falco deiroleucus and e.g. Spizastur melanoleucus. The conservation of tracts of primary forest in these three countries can already be seen as an important need for the long-term security of these four species.

Finally it should be noted that, as perhaps was predictable, it is the conservation of primary forest that emerges from this short analysis as the central requirement for raptor species conservation in the Americas. It is of crucial importance that raptor conservation specialists do not neglect this simple truth.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The collaboration of anyone with any information on any of the species mentioned in the text above - or any other raptor judged to be threatened - is warmly invited. Please send reports, reprints, comments, ideas and data to:

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