



Hawk Mountain: A Conservation Success Story

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BOOK REVIEW

Hawk Mountain: A Conservation Success Story

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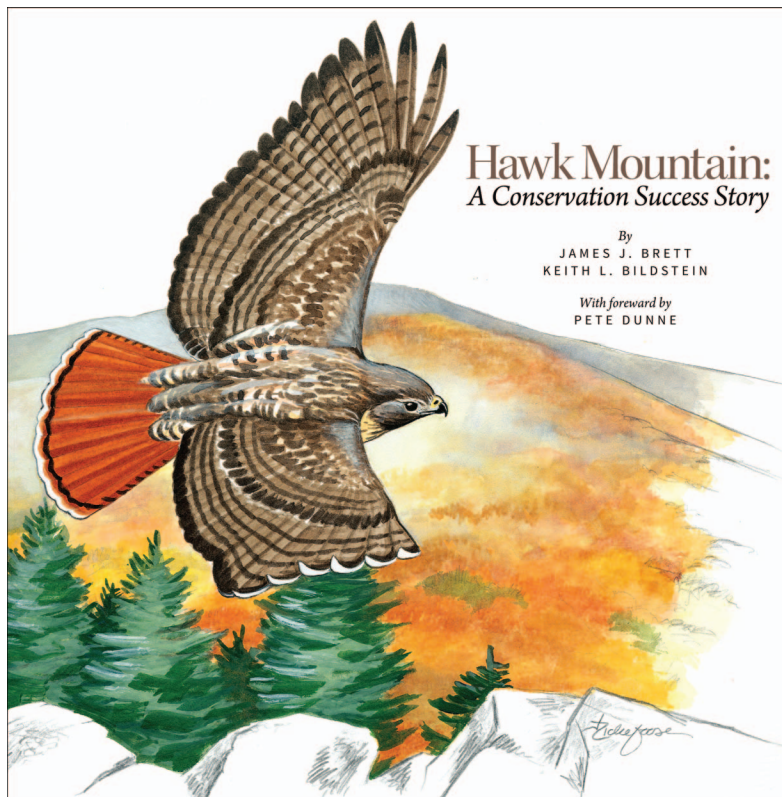
Hawk Mountain: A Conservation Success Story by James J. Brett and Keith L. Bildstein. 2014. Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Kempton, PA. xxiii + 192 pp, 3 appendices, 25 color drawings, 12 sketches, 67 photos, 5 figures. \$39.95 (hardcover). ISBN-978-0-9769164-0-6.

This collaboration between Brett and Bildstein provides an artistic summary of the history, natural history, scientific contributions, and conservation impact of the quintessential Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, and its associated nonprofit organization. The volume begins with a series of brief testimonials and introductory sections provided by supporters and luminaries lauding the accomplishments and global impacts of the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association. The meat of the volume consists of eight chapters, five authored by Jim Brett and three contributed by Keith Bildstein. Chapter 1 describes some history of the region, briefly details the historical slaughter of migrating hawks on the Kittatinny Ridge at a rocky promontory locally known as “Hawk Mountain,” and the successful effort by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary founder Rosalie Edge to purchase and establish the world’s first sanctuary for the protection of raptors. Chapter 2 provides an

overview of the geological history of Hawk Mountain and the surrounding region. Chapter 3 characterizes the natural history, biological diversity, and some of the local land features and natural attractions of the Sanctuary. Chapter 4 describes some of the long-standing tenets of raptor migration along ridges and the classic influence of weather patterns on autumn hawk flights at Hawk Mountain. Chapter 5 chronicles the origin of the intern and training programs that began at Hawk Mountain in 1947 and have expanded to

emphasize international conservation science. Chapter 6 offers a history of ornithological and conservation science research that began with the sanctuary’s first Curator, Maurice Broun, who published regularly in the ornithological journals, through to the current wide-ranging science program led by Bildstein and his science staff. Chapter 7 presents a brief history, beginning with the direct persecution of raptors, and a review of the current threats imperiling the global populations of raptors. The final chapter is a recounting by Brett of his major associations with key individuals

who influenced him and conservation actions of the Sanctuary during his tenure as Curator of Hawk Mountain; including 1) his interactions with Joe Taylor, long-time Chair



of the Hawk Mountain board, 2) collaborations and exchanges with Yossi Leshem, director of the Israel Raptor Information Center, which culminated in the World Bird of Prey Conference at Eilat, Israel in 1985, and 3) Brett's friendship with Noel Snyder and his involvement as a public awareness advisor with the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) recovery program in the 1980s.

Throughout the book, the authors emphasize that all aspects of the past and present programs sponsored by Hawk Mountain are guided by Rosalie Edge's mantra that "the time to protect a species is while it is still common." Indeed, this enlightened conservation principle can never be more true than today, but for the most part has not been integrated effectively into most governmental conservation policies and programs. Thus, the role for implementing such conservation efforts, working toward the understanding and conservation of more-common species, has fallen to not-for-profit organizations, such as the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association.

One weakness of the volume is that the flow of topics and chapters seems a bit disjointed. This is explained, in part, by a note on page 190 revealing that Chapters 1–4 are revised versions of chapters in Brett's earlier book, *The Mountain and the Migration*, published in 1986, which was designed to be a guide to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Also, Chapter 7, "Protecting Raptors Then and Now," is a revised version of a chapter in Bildstein's book, *Migrating Raptors of the World*, published by Cornell University Press in 2006. Given that five of the eight chapters included in this book are modified versions of contributions developed for earlier publications, I feel this volume holds together reasonably well and meets the objectives of characterizing the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association and its significant leadership role in conservation.

Another aspect that I found mildly annoying was the lack of citations, which I believe could have been included as footnotes in the text and listed at the end of the book. This would not have interrupted the flow of the text directed toward the general reader, while at the same time satisfying scientists, like myself, who are interested in sources and may want to track down the original reference. Bildstein typically referred to scientific contributions related to work done at Hawk Mountain with a brief content statement and by giving the year and journal that included the specific article. For example, Bildstein mentions that the first scientific paper about hawk flight at Hawk Mountain was published by George Sutton in *The Wilson Bulletin* in 1928. In the chapter that reviews past and current threats to raptor populations (Chapter 7), Bildstein's references to other work and studies are even more vague. For example, Bildstein refers to "A falcon specialist in Great Britain" who documented the tight correlation between the timing of Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) eggshell thinning in relation to the use of DDT, without mentioning a reference (i.e. Derek Ratcliffe).

One of the highlights of the volume is the Foreword contributed by Pete Dunn, which best captures the wondrous magic of Hawk Mountain. Here, Pete describes his first visit to North Lookout in the 1970s, which undoubtedly occurred on an ideal migration weather day when a mild to moderate northwest wind was blowing, bringing migrating raptors zipping by at eye-level. This special day was capped off by an awe-inspiring kettle of Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*), using the last dwindling remnants of late afternoon light, that settled down all around the observers at North Lookout. Pete acknowledges this was an epiphanous experience that led him to dedicate much of his life to the study of migrating raptors. I have been lucky enough to have had similar experiences at Hawk Mountain, and although each has reinforced my personal commitment to work for conservation, it is rather incredible to see novice or developing nature watchers experience such a spectacle and undergo an instantaneous life-transformational moment—the true magic of Hawk Mountain!

The conservation impact of Hawk Mountain directly emanates from these spellbinding experiences that interns, students, and trainees have during their time on the mountain. Also, Bildstein and Brett successfully capture this vital global conservation impact of Hawk Mountain by relating their experiences with various "students" and interns and providing brief biographies of past selected trainees in Chapter 5, listing their many accomplishments as professional raptor biologists and conservationists.

Another very positive and attractive enhancement of the volume are the pleasing color drawings and pencil sketches by Julie Zickefoose scattered throughout, illustrating many of the species of birds and raptors, as well as some of the plants and other fauna that occur at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

Perhaps a minor fault of the book is that it does not adequately, in my opinion, give due credit to the substantial impact that science done at Hawk Mountain has had on avian and passerine conservation in general. This important contribution of Hawk Mountain is only mentioned in passing related to Laurie Goodrich's work on page 104, with little or no mention of the key papers produced by sanctuary scientists or the interns and students involved, who have since become eminent leaders in many aspects of avian conservation.

In summary, this book accomplishes its mission by providing a solid characterization of the place and of the organization, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, and importantly their impacts on conservation both regionally and globally. This book should be read by all supporters and those interested in Hawk Mountain and its host organization. Further, all not-for-profit conservation organizations, whether they feature birds, habitats, or other aspects of nature, should have a copy of this book in their libraries and use it as a model to enhance their effective impact on both local and global conservation.

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