

# WINTER BULLETIN 2019

**Falcon Research Group**

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## **Raptors of Madagascar Tour**

Our recent FRG Raptours to Australia and South Africa were so successful that we have decided to sponsor another trip to Madagascar in November to view all of their birds of prey too. Of course, we will be viewing other wildlife as well, for example lemurs and the Golden Orb Spider.

The two week tour will take place from 24 November-7 December, with an extension to the Seychelle Islands and Mauritius to see their rare endemic kestrels.

Sergio Siepke, who will be leading the trip, is going to be visiting Washington in February and will present talks in Tacoma (5 February, Slater Museum), Bellingham (10 February, Bellingham Library) and Mt. Vernon (9 February, Padilla Bay Center).

Sergio is currently finalizing the cost of the tour. If you are interested in joining us, send us an e-mail and Bud will contact you. A remarkable trip is guaranteed with this guy.

## **A New Book on Cooper's Hawks**

Bob Rosenfield, who hails from Wisconsin, is the world's leading expert on this species. His new book, "The Cooper's Hawk", has just been published by Hancock House (Blaine, WA). It covers everything you could want to know about Cooper's Hawks and I highly recommend it, as does our local Cooper's expert, Ed Deal. 164 pp. Price is \$34.95. Money well spent.

## **Classes on Hawkwatching in Western Washington**

Designed for beginning and intermediate hawk watchers, this class will teach you about the 16 regularly occurring species of hawks, eagles, harriers and falcons that normally occur in the Puget Sound basin. During the 5 two-hour classes, we cover the 16 species of raptors, how to identify them, where to find them, when they are here, how they make a living and what you need to observe them. The class also includes a full day field trip to the Skagit Flats to practice your newly acquired skills. There will be several dates available for your field trip. Cost of the class is \$175.00. To register, please send a check to Falcon Research Group, Box 248, Bow, WA 98232. For questions, call (360) 757-1911.

PLEASE NOTE: I just turned 73 so not sure how much longer I will be teaching these classes. Just saying that if you are planning to take it, now is probably a good time to take it.

1. **Bellingham** Thursdays, 7-9 pm 3-31 January Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship
2. **Mt. Vernon** Tuesdays, 7-9 pm 8 January-5 February Padilla Bay Interpretive Center

### **30<sup>th</sup> Annual Skagit Flats Hawk Census**

This year, our 30<sup>th</sup> annual hawk count will be held on Saturday, 9 February from 9-11. To participate, contact Ed Deal at (206) 723-4742 or [falcophile@comcast.net](mailto:falcophile@comcast.net). There will also be **TWO** short lectures this year: one by Bill Clark on the proposed new status of the Harlan's Hawk; and, the other on Raptors of Madagascar by Sergio Siepke describing our upcoming tour in November.

### **New Peregrine Film**

In case you missed it, Nova just released an excellent BBC documentary on the Peregrine Falcon. Broadcast locally on PBS (KCTS), you can access the film anytime by going online and search **World's Fastest Animal**. There is some breath-taking footage of flying peregrines. Don't miss it!

### **Advanced Raptor Class with Bill Clark**

Bill will be here once again this winter and we want to maximize the opportunity for everyone to meet him and enjoy his incredible ability in identifying all raptors. Therefore, he will be teaching a 3-day special class from 15-17 February at the Padilla Bay Center on **advanced raptor identification**. Cost is \$175 per person. The class is limited to 25 people and is near full now so call in right away. No guarantees, but we will have a wait list. Register at [www.frg.org](http://www.frg.org).

### **Important New Raptor Organization**

Ed Deal, Martin Muller and Patty Loesche have been granted 501.c3 status for the new **Urban Raptor Conservancy** they recently founded in Seattle. Based initially on their excellent work with Cooper's Hawks (a project founded by Jack Bettsworth), they are now expanding into the very important issue of anti-coagulant rodenticides and how they are affecting birds of prey in Seattle. Working with PAWS, they plan to analyze up to 120 dead raptors that come into Paws and document the extent of this problem. These are good people and well worth supporting. Check out their new website at [www.UrbanRaptorConservancy.org](http://www.UrbanRaptorConservancy.org).

### **Week-long Skagit Winter Hawk Tour with Bill Clark**

Bill Clark will also be guiding a week-long Raptours LLC tour from 2-10 February this year. The trip will focus on raptors on the Skagit Flats, Lummi Flats, as well as Boundary Bay and Reifel Refuge in British Columbia. Co-lead by raptor experts Sergio Siepke and Sue Cottrell, this

promises to be a rare opportunity to meet Bill, brush up on the latest techniques and get your field guides signed. To learn more and sign up, visit [www.RaptoursLLC.com](http://www.RaptoursLLC.com).

### **A Revolutionary Global Peregrine Falcon DNA Study**

One of the greatest interests in my life has been Peregrine Falcons. For example, I always wanted to know how many races there were and how they were all related. Since Peregrines happen to be the most widely distributed land vertebrate (and bird) on earth, occurring on six continents and many oceanic islands, they are an ideal subject for research. As a result of their incredibly wide geographic range, a variety of fascinating forms have evolved, ranging from the largest and darkest Peale's peregrine to the tiny, reddish Barbary Falcons of Israel.

Back then, having learned about the DNA revolution started by Franklin, Watson and Crick, I knew that someday we would need DNA samples from the entire 19 races worldwide to answer my questions, but that it would not happen until the distant future. I learned to take peregrine blood samples on Padre Island from Scott Ward in 1980 and began my path towards collecting samples from peregrines worldwide. Over the years, I have obtained them from Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Greenland, Israel and the US. I also specialized in sampling the more remote subspecies on the Cape Verde Islands, Canary Islands, Fiji, and the Falkland Islands. These included 8 of the 19 races. Fortunately, several colleagues from other countries were also collecting samples from the remaining races.

One of the great recent tech stories is how the cost of analyzing DNA samples has dropped from several million dollars in 2000 to a million, to \$500,000, then \$100,000, and now with current machines promising whole individual genome analysis for \$100 soon to be possible. This means that individual researchers are able to afford genome analyses.

Therefore, I decided it was time to begin the analyses. Working with Dr. Jeff Johnson, one of the leading peregrine DNA experts (University of North Texas) and Dr. Clayton White, leading expert on peregrine subspecies, we raised enough funding to begin analyzing all of the races.

Jeff just gave a presentation describing our initial results at the 2018 Raptor Research Foundation annual meeting at Kruger National Park in South Africa last month.

To read the summary, go to [www.raptorresearchfoundation.org](http://www.raptorresearchfoundation.org), click on "Conferences", Kruger, "Program Schedule" and scroll ALL the way down to page 79. See also all of the authors.

This study is revolutionizing our understanding of global peregrine phylogeny. The majority of the funding was provided by the Falcon Research Group. That means that all of you who have donated in the past have made this study possible. Thanks to all of you.

### **Annual Dues**

If you like what we are doing, please send in \$25.00 or more for your annual dues. Thank you for your support. (See address at beginning of newsletter.)

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