

# *Australian Predators of the Sky*

By Penny Olsen

Our relationship with the birds of prey has always been conflicted. Raptors are admired for their strength and independence, but despised for their depredations on livestock and favourite garden birds, while the owls are at once respected for their wisdom and watchfulness and feared for their mournful cries and association with darkness and ill-omen.

From the early European discovery of birds of prey in Australia and the naming and describing of species in the nineteenth century, this book describes the physical characteristics of birds of prey, their distribution, their hunting methods and other ecological features.

*Australian Predators of the Sky* comprises over 200 striking paintings, lithographs and engravings of all 34 Australian species—25 diurnal birds of prey and nine owls. From odd-looking first depictions to stunning, detailed portrayals of the species, the illustrations cover more than two centuries of bird art, selected from the National Library of Australia's collection. The artists include George Raper and John Hunter (First Fleet naval officers), Sarah Stone, John and Elizabeth Gould, Henry Constantine Richter, Henrik Grönvold, Ellis Rowan, Neville Henry Cayley, Lionel Lindsay, Lilian Medland, Ebenezer Edward Gostelow, and, more recently, Betty Temple Watts, Frank Knight and Jeff Davies.

## **Publication details**

ISBN 978-0-642-27856-2 (paperback)

284(h) x 233(w) mm; 216 pp

**RRP \$39.99**

This publication is available now from our [online shop](#).

Caption for images: *Australian Predators of the Sky*, National Library of Australia 2015

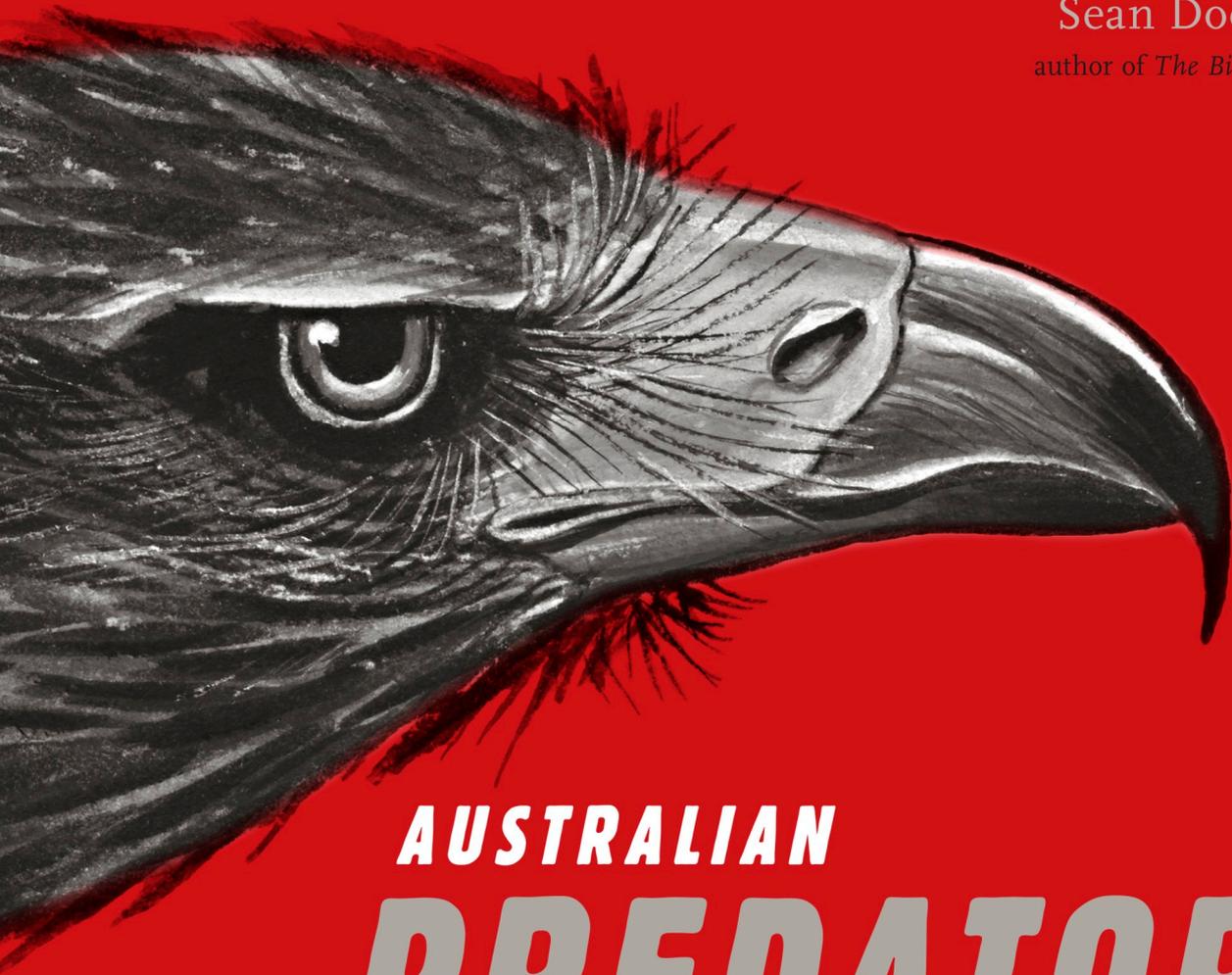
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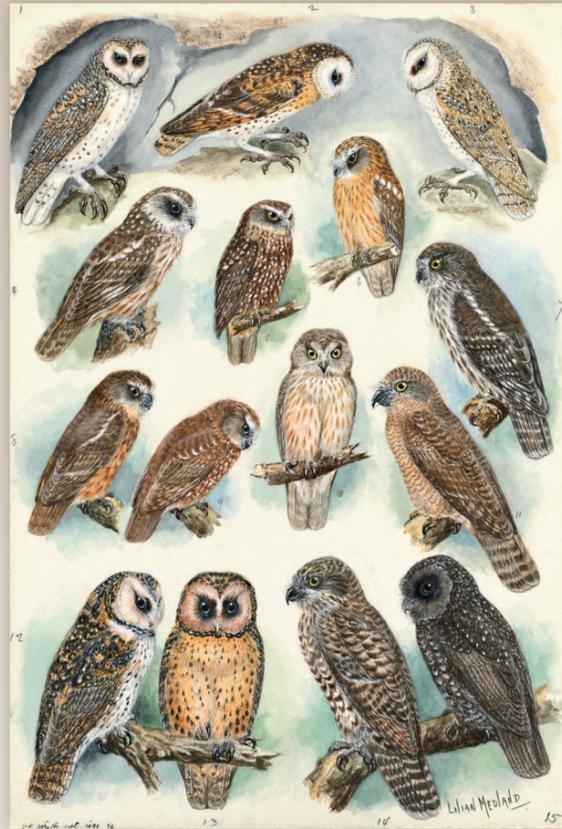
*'These pages  
will inspire an  
appreciation for an  
incredible group  
of birds.'*

FOREWORD BY  
**Sean Dooley**  
author of *The Big Twitch*



**AUSTRALIAN**  
**PREDATORS**  
**OF THE SKY**

**PENNY OLSEN**



**ABOVE LEFT**  
Lilian Marguerite Medland,  
Plate of owls of Australia, 1930s



**ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT**  
Lilian Marguerite Medland,  
Plates of diurnal birds of prey of Australia,  
1930s



In the 1930s, the first true field guides became available, allowing anyone to identify the birds they saw. Lilian Medland illustrated a proposed guide by Gregory Mathews that did not eventuate.



**ABOVE**  
Lionel Arthur Lindsay,  
*The Brown Hawk (White-bellied Sea-Eagle)*  
1924

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
Lionel Arthur Lindsay,  
*Study for Owls* 1920s

The strong form and presence of raptors has appeal to fine artists, such as Lionel Lindsay, who made woodcuts of a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle (above) and drawings for a woodcut of owls (above right).



Mathews also worked on other publications, including *Handbook of Australian Birds*—with field guide-style plates painted during the 1930s by Lilian Medland in Sydney—which never saw the light of day, leaving the field open to Neville William Cayley, son of Neville Henry, who published the first comprehensive field guide to Australian birds.

About the same period, Ebenezer Gostelow, after his retirement as a school teacher, set himself the task of painting all the Australian birds in appropriate habitat, completing illustrations of the 730 species known at the time by 1943. As did Medland, Gostelow referred to skins in the Australian Museum. He apparently built the collection of paintings for his own pleasure and bequeathed it to the National Library of Australia.

In the 1960s and 1970s, with increasing prosperity and the need for conservation of wildlife becoming apparent, there was a push to improve knowledge of the nation's birds. A raft of field guides and beautifully illustrated bird books, harking back to the Gouldian era, began to appear. Among the illustrators for guides was Betty Temple Watts who, in 1958, moved to Canberra to illustrate birds for Harry Frith, the Chief of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial

John Gould and Henry Constantine Richter,  
*Astur approximans* (Australian Goshawk) 1848  
 (female, behind; male, in front)



John Gould (artist),  
 Henry Constantine Richter (lithographer),  
*Astur cruentus* (West-Australian Gos-Hawk) 1848

For some years, the common Brown Goshawk was confused with the rare Red Goshawk. Specimens of young Brown Goshawks, with their heavily barred bellies, proved especially baffling. Inspecting the specimens in the collection of the Linnean Society of London, John Gould noted that Vigors and Horsfield had described male and female adult Brown Goshawks as *Astur fasciatus*, an immature male as *Astur radiatus* and an immature female as *Astur approximans*. However, having sorted that out, he added more complexity by specifically separating the smallish, more rufous-bellied and greyer-backed goshawk from south-western Western Australia as *Astur cruentus*, the West-Australian or Lesser Goshawk. Any such differences are now regarded as regional variants of the widespread Brown Goshawk.





John Gould (artist), Henry Constantine Richter (lithographer),  
*Astur novae-hollandiae*; White Variety? (White Goshawk) 1848

John Gould (artist),  
Henry Constantine Richter (lithographer),  
*Astur novae-hollandiae*  
(New Holland Goshawk) 1848

