

STATUS OF WET FOREST RAPTORS IN NORTHERN ARGENTINA

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ABSTRACT

The present status of the 3 species of Cathartidae, 23 Accipitridae, 3 Falconidae and 11 Strigidae known from the wet forests of northern Argentina is given. Primary forest still occurs mainly in four National Parks and totals 247,000ha. Extensive destruction of forests and heavy hunting pressure (primarily reducing prey for eagles) are the main reasons for the decrease of forest raptors in this country.

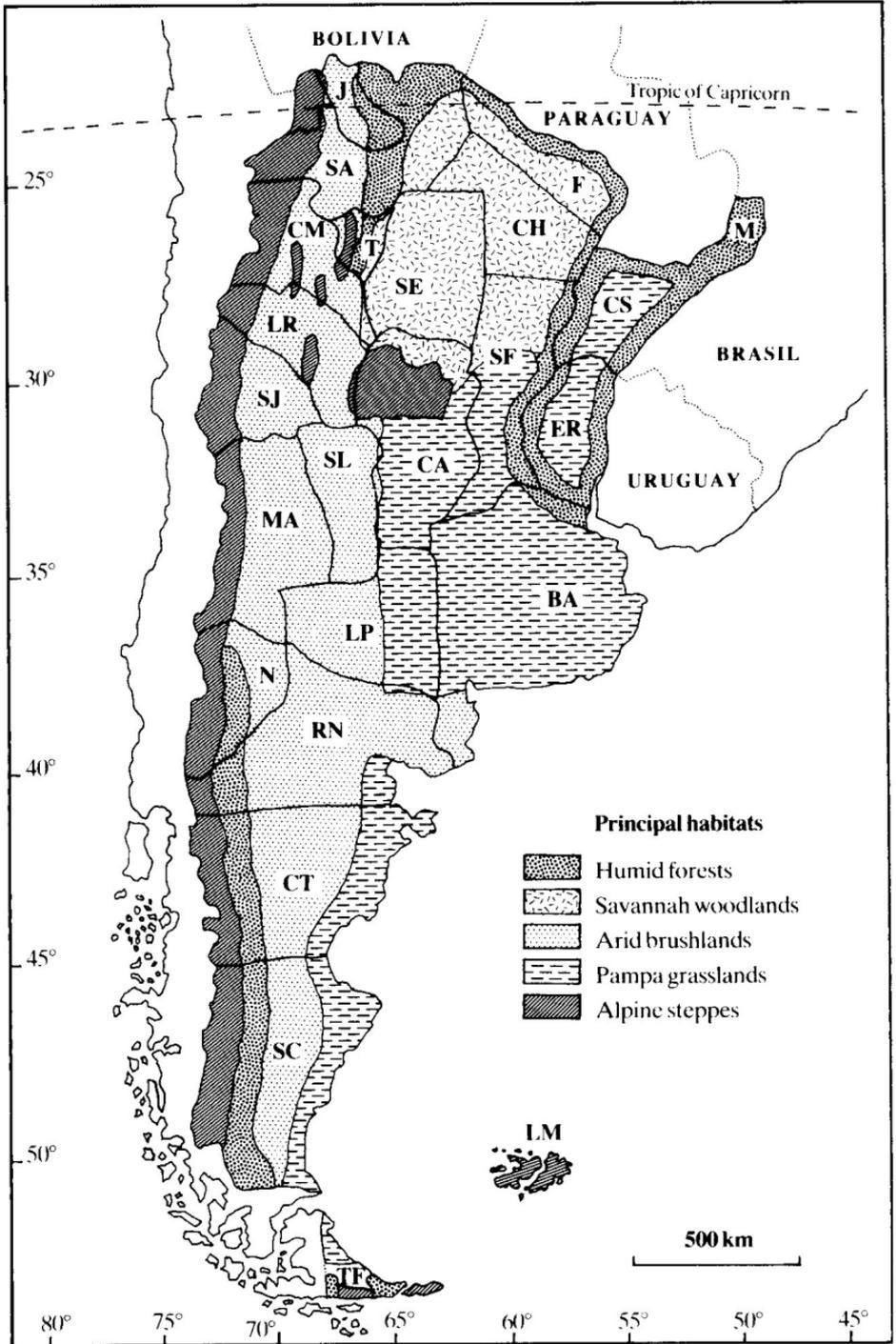
INTRODUCTION

The decline of raptor and other bird species inhabiting humid forests in Argentina seems to be related not only to extensive clearing of forest for agriculture and cattle breeding, but also to replacement of native trees with exotic ones, such as pines grown for paper-pulp. During the last ten years, millions of hectares of wet forest have disappeared for ever, and those areas still intact are mainly found in the National Parks, which include Iguazù (55,000ha), Province of Misiones; Calilegua (76,000ha), Province of Jujuy; Baritu (72,000ha) and El Rey (44,162ha), Province of Salta. All of these have only slightly modified non-deciduous and semi-deciduous forests. Another factor promoting a decline among the larger raptors—e.g. hawk eagles and allies—is possibly the lack of prey. Only recently (about four years ago) have the National Office of Fauna and the Administration of the National Parks taken steps to control hunting, which was hitherto practised extensively, even in the parks. The lack of prey for eagles is notorious and, for some species, a serious problem.

The raptors known to inhabit these forests belong to four groups:

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| Cathartidae (American vultures) | : 3 species |
| Accipitridae (Kites, hawks and eagles) | : 23 species |
| Falconidae (Falcons) | : 3 species |
| Strigidae (True owls) | : 11 species |

This account is concerned only with the northern wet forests, mainly found in the north-east (Misiones, parts of Corrientes, easternmost Formosa and Chaco) and north-west (northern Salta, southeastern Jujuy and parts of Tucuman and Catamarca) (*Figure 1*). It does not cover the southern (Patagonia) wet forest. The account is based principally on my own observations, supplemented by those of C. Henschke, M. Nores, M. Rumboll, R. Straneck and A. Tarak, together with the collections of the late W. Partridge (Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales, Buenos Aires) and of Fundacion Miguel Lillo, Tucuman.



AMERICAN VULTURES (*CATHARTIDAE*)**Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)**

Of the three subspecific populations in Argentina, two are common over the wet forests both in the north-east (*C. a. ruficollis*) and north-west (*C. a. jota*). Food is probably abundant because cattle and horses are commonly kept in clearings.

Greater Yellow-headed Vulture (*Cathartes melambrotus*)

Not previously recorded for this country, but the Yellow-headed Vultures seen by me in the Iguazú National Park (Nov. 10–20, 1981) were much larger than those seen in the open country of Corrientes and probably belonged to this species. According to M. Rumboll, naturalist of the National Parks, several visiting ornithologists had the same impression. The bird seemed to be common in the park and was observed flying low over the canopy. It may also have been observed at Calilegua, Jujuy (Straneck & Henschke, May 1981).

King Vulture (*Sarcorhamphus papa*)

Appears regularly in the wet forests of the north-east and north-west, in the mountains up to 2300m, and may be seen in the Santa Barbara and Calilegua Mountains, southeastern Jujuy, where it breeds (1st-year birds are frequently seen). Breeding, though no nest has actually been found, is also known from Tucuman and Misiones. The Argentine population may be as low as 10–15 pairs.

KITES, HAWKS AND EAGLES (*ACCIPITRIDAE*)**Grey-headed Kite (*Leptodon cayanensis*)**

Rather local in northeastern Argentina, where it is found both in wet forests and in savannah woodlands, often near marshes. The last sight records are one adult in eastern Chaco (Olrog Nov. 1977) and two birds displaying low over the tree-tops in Misiones (Olrog Nov. 1981). Possibly not adversely influenced by clearing as it also lives in open forests.

Hook-billed Kite (*Chondrohierax u. uncinatus*)

Prefers tall forest with dense underbrush. Twenty years ago it was not uncommon, but today it is scarce both in the north-east and north-west, evidently because of extensive clearing. The last information is from Tartagal, northern Salta (Olrog Oct. 1979), where a pair was found nesting at 1600m in wet mountain forest. No recent record from Misiones, where W. Partridge found it common in the late 1950s.

Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus vetapa*)

Has increased during the last 15 years, especially in the north-west, though no nests reported. Observed mainly in small parties of five to ten birds but also in pairs. Possibly the northern form (*E. f. forficatus*) is also involved as a migrant, but all specimens so far examined from Argentina belong to the southern form.

Figure 1: Map of Argentina, showing the five principal habitats and the Provinces mentioned in the text. BA = Buenos Aires; CA = Córdoba; CH = Chaco; CM = Catamarca; CS = Corrientes; CT = Chubut; ER = Entre Ríos; F = Formosa; J = Jujuy; LM = Las Malvinas; LP = La Pampa; LR = La Rioja; M = Misiones; MA = Mendoza; N = Neuquén; RN = Río Negro; SA = Salta; SC = Santa Cruz; SE = Santiago del Estero; SF = Santa Fe; SJ = San Juan; SL = San Luis; T = Tucumán; TF = Tierra del Fuego.

Plumbeous Kite (*Ictinia plumbea*)

Common in the northeastern wet forests, often appearing in parties of six to ten individuals chasing large insects over the tree-tops in late afternoon. Also found in savannah woodlands and seems not to be affected by clearing.

Rufous-thighed Kite (*Harpagus diodon*)

Seems rare but may be overlooked. Its resemblance to a small accipiter makes it easily confused. It appears generally in the middle and lower strata of dense forest and seems to feed on large insects. Last sight records: Tartagal, Salta, feeding on large locusts (Olrog Oct. 1979); Iguazù, Misiones (Rumboll July 1981). Partridge found it rather common at Uruguay-i, Misiones, in the late 1950s.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus erythronemius*)

Most abundant in transition and semi-dry forests and savannah woodlands, but appears also in wet forests, as in Misiones and Jujuy, and up to 2700m. Where trees are lacking the bird perches on telephone lines. In northern Salta, between Embarcacion and Tartagal, 62 individuals, mostly adults, were counted along 20km of road (Olrog May 1980).

Tiny Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter s. superciliosus*)

Little known. Reported only from the extreme north-east, where W. Partridge (1956, 1957, 1959) found it not uncommon at Tobuna and Uruguay-i, Misiones.

Bicoloured Hawk (*Accipiter bicolor*)

Three subspecific populations breed in Argentina. *A. b. pileatus*, in Misiones, seems to be scarce; and *A. b. guttifer* occurs in the northern parts of the country, being especially common in the northwestern mountain forests up to 2700m. It seems to have been little influenced by extensive clearing; the last record (Nores Oct. 1981) is of a pair nesting at Caramarca. The third population, *A. b. chilensis*, is characteristic of the temperate wet forests of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

Grey-bellied Hawk (*Accipiter poliogaster*)

Since W. Partridge collected several specimens in northern Misiones in 1954 and 1956, there are no recent data except for one sight record from Lanuse, Misiones (Olrog Nov. 1974), probably an adult male.

Mantled Hawk (*Leucopternis polionota*)

No data. Listed for many years (Dabbene 1910), apparently based on supposition.

Great Black Hawk (*Buteogallus u. urubitinga*)

Still common and seems not to have been influenced by extensive clearing and lumbering, but has accepted the new conditions and begun, for example, to nest on telephone and high-tension poles, using old nests of other birds such as the Monk Parakeet (*Myopsitta monacha*). The hawk is considered to do some harm, causing serious short circuits in the provinces of Salta, Santiago del Estero and Tucuman. The only official action taken, however, is to clear nests from the poles.

Solitary Eagle (*Harpyhaliaetus s. solitarius*)

One population in northern Salta, where a pair, year after year, has been seen in heavy forest (Olrog 1977–80). Solitary birds were also seen in May 1980 (one adult, one yearling). Possibly two to three pairs breed in northernmost Salta.

Grey Hawk (*Buteo nitidus pallidus*)

Seems to be local in wet gallery lowland forests along the Parana River, and also accidentally in the north-west. Single individuals, all adults, seen in easternmost Chaco Province (Olrog Oct. 1974, Nov. 1976 and Nov. 1981). The last known record from the north-west refers to an adult observed in the Calilegua Mountains, Jujuy, at 1300m (Olrog Nov. 1971).

Roadside Hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*)

Of three subspecific populations in Argentina, two inhabit wet forests: *B. m. magniplumis* in Misiones and *B. m. saturatus* in the north-west. Both are still abundant.

White-rumped Hawk (*Buteo leucorrhous*)

Inhabits chiefly mountain forests up to 2000m in the north-west. It seems to have decreased during the last ten years, evidently because of clearing, as it prefers dense forests. In the north-east Partridge found it rather common around Uruguay-i, Misiones, in the late 1950s, but there is only one recent record, in easternmost Chaco Province (Olrog Nov. 1974).

Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo b. brachyurus*)

Fairly common in the north-west but rather local in tall humid or semi-humid forests, generally near marshes. It does not seem to have decreased. Also known from the north-east, but apparently no date since W. Partridge collected in Misiones in 1955–60.

White-throated Hawk (*Buteo albigula*)

Known from hilly wet forests in Patagonia, but seems to be extremely rare elsewhere in Argentina. Two records from the north-west (Jujuy and Tucuman), possibly of migrants from the south.

Crested Eagle (*Morphnus guianensis*)

Very little is known about this hawk eagle in Argentina since one specimen was mentioned from Santa Ana, southern Misiones (Steullet & Deautier 1935–50). A pair was seen displaying in Iguazú National Park, Misiones (Rumboll & Straneck Sept. 1980), so a population still exists there.

Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*)

The only certain population in Argentina seems to be in Misiones, where adults and juveniles are observed almost every year. From the north-west, however, there are no records according to my knowledge for the last 30 years.

Black-and-white Hawk Eagle (*Spizastur melanoleucus*)

The most abundant of the hawk eagles, with yearly reports from the north-west and north-east, although no breeding records. Last sight records were from Tartagal, Salta and Calilegua, Jujuy (Olrog Oct. 1979 and May 1980).

Black Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus tyrannus*)

No records since 1912 and 1917, when specimens were collected at Santa Ana and Bonpland, southern Misiones (collections of Museo Argentino and Fundacion Miguel Lillo).

Ornate Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus o. ornatus*)

Has evidently decreased seriously, with few reports in recent years. It is known from both the north-east (common 20 years ago) and north-west. This hawk eagle hunts very low in dense forest, and specimens taken in mist nets were caught one to two metres above ground, in two cases apparently attracted by entangled chachalacas (*Ortalis garrula*).

Black-and-chestnut Eagle (*Oroaetus isidori*)

Since a population was discovered in the north-west (Jujuy and Tucuman) in 1956 and 1957, there have been no further records. At least four specimens, three adult and one juvenile, were collected in two years and one nest was destroyed. Possibly the whole population was wiped out.

FALCONS (*FALCONIDAE*)**Collared Forest-falcon (*Micrastus s. semitorquatus*)**

Scarce and little seen, but may be more abundant than supposed. Last reports were of two juveniles ringed in Jujuy (Rumboll 1979) and one adult ringed in Misiones (Tarak 1978); all three birds captured in mist nets.

Barred Forest-falcon (*Micrastur ruficollis*)

Two subspecific populations, both still common, the nominate race in the north-east and *M. r. olrogi* (Amadon 1964) in the north-west, found up to 2700m in mountain forests.

Orange-breasted Falcon (*Falco deiroleucus*)

The typical habitat in Argentina is not wet forest (cf. Brown & Amadon 1968), but savannah woodlands. However, it may also occur at the edge of wet forest. To my knowledge, populations occur in Salta, Jujuy and Chaco, and probably also in Misiones, Corrientes and Formosa. One falcon was seen to strike a pigeon (*Columba cayenensis*) in the same way as a Peregrine would (Olrog 1974), over open forested country in easternmost Chaco Province.

TRUE OWLS (*STRIGIDAE*)**Tropical Screech Owl (*Otus ch. choliba*)**

Still common in most types of forest, including wet forests. Found up to 2700m in the northwestern mountain forests.

Long-tufted Screech Owl (*Otus atricapillus sanctaecatarinae*)

Very little is known about this bird since W. Partridge found it locally common in northern Misiones some 25 years ago. One specimen captured with mist nets in the Iguazú National Park (Tarak 1978).

Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

Of the two subspecific populations inhabiting Argentina, one (*B. v. nacurutu*) is also found in humid forests, but locally, probably depending on the food supply.

Spectacled Owl (*Pulsatrix perspicillata boliviana*)

In spite of extensive clearing, still common in the northwestern mountain forests. It seems to have adapted to the secondary growth and wet brush which have replaced the heavy forest.

Tawny-browed Owl (*Pulsatrix koeniswaldiana*)

Little known and has apparently decreased because of extensive timber-cutting in Misiones. W. Partridge found it scarce in the late 1950s and the last record was of an adult taken in a mist net in scrub near a meadow (Olrog July 1974).

Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium b. brasilianum*)

Common in most forest types and also in humid forests. Seems not to be influenced by clearing.

Mottled Owl (*Ciccaba virgata borelliana*)

No data since W. Partridge, in 1953, 1954 and 1958, found this species abundant in northern Misiones (Uruguay-i, Iguazù, Tobuna).

Black-banded Owl (*Ciccaba huhula*)

Two subspecific populations in Argentina, and both seem scarce. The nominate race occurs in the north-west; *C. h. albomarginata* in Misiones, where W. Partridge found it locally not uncommon in 1953 and 1954 (Pinalitos, Tobuna). Last heard in the Calilegua Mountains, Jujuy (Olrog Nov. 1976).

Rusty-barred Owl (*Strix hylophila*)

Seems locally common in Misiones and is the most abundant owl of the wet forest there, except for the Tropical Screech Owl and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl. The last report is from Iguazù National Park (Straneck Sept. 1980, tape recording).

Stygian Owl (*Asio s. stygius*)

Inhabits wet forests, mainly in the mountains. The last records were from northern Salta (Olrog Oct. 1979 and May 1980) of adults taken in mist nets.

Buff-fronted Owl (*Aegolius harrisii*)

Two subspecific populations in Argentina, *A. h. iheringei* in Misiones and *A. h. dabbenei* (Olrog 1979) in the north-west. Both are little known but the western form probably prefers forests of *Podocarpus* and *Alnus*, and the eastern form forests of *Araucaria*. Less scarce than generally supposed. Last known records: Iguazù, Misiones (Straneck Sept. 1980, tape-recording, three specimens observed), and Parque Nacional El Rey (Lapham 1974, one adult ringed).

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