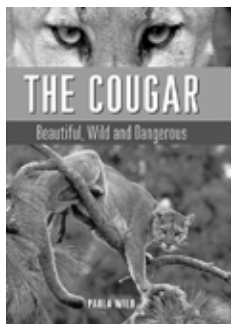


## BOOK REVIEWS

*Compiled and Reviewed by Chris Siddle*

**The Cougar: Beautiful, Wild and Dangerous** by Paula Wild. 2013. Douglas and McIntyre Ltd. P.O. Box 219, Madeira Park, B.C. V0N 2H0. www.douglas-mcintyre.com. 16 x 23.5 cms. Twenty-two colour and 68 black and white photographs 288 pages. Hardcover. \$34.95 Can.



Like cat tracks on fresh snow, you can follow writer Paula Wild's trail, from frightening yet indefinite encounter with what may have been a Cougar at her home on Vancouver Island, to a bear and Cougar attack survival school she attended near Clinton, B.C., to a small zoo specializing in Cougars she visited in Washington State, to her conversations with Lynn Hancock who wrote her Master's thesis on Cougars and kept Tom, a Cougar kitten until he grew too big to handle, to her reading of Zane Grey's book about a Cougar hunter, to the conversations she had in person and on the internet with Cougar specialists. Follow the tracks and they will lead you to her latest book, *The Cougar*.

I have a quibble with the title which I find misleading since her book is not a natural history of the Cougar (*Puma concolor*) but an exploration of people's relationships and attitudes towards Cougars, from the automatic kill-all responses of backwoods types like "Cougar Annie" and convicted poacher Bernie Solberg, the fiction making of Charles G.D. Roberts and the pseudo-non-fiction writing of that productive author of western pot-boilers, Zane Grey. Unfortunately in the instance of Grey, Wild doesn't

question his reliability as a truth teller. Her book is also a compendium of Cougar attack accounts, advice on how to act if being stalked by a Cougar, and more advice on how to minimize Cougar encounters of any kind. For people who recreate in the outdoors of British Columbia where more Cougar attacks of humans have happened than anywhere else on the continent, Paula Wild's Cougar becomes an important book to read. It contains information that might one day save your life.

Paula Wild has based her book upon fear, not upon curiosity about *Puma concolor*. Check for basic facts of Cougar biology in the book and you will find only the minimum amount of information about breeding, care of the young, territoriality, etc. If the Cougar's natural history is the information you're after, then I suggest you spend just a few more dollars and buy *Cougar, Ecology and Conservation* edited by Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri (University of Chicago Press 2010). [Recommended for those interested in Cougar-human interactions.](#)

**Owls of the World: A Photographic Guide** by Heimo Mikkola. 2012. Firefly Books, 66 Leek Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ont. L4B 1H1. 17.5 x 24.5 cms. 850+ colour photographs. 512 pages. Hardcover. \$49.95 Can.



The most recent survey of the world's owls is *Owls of the World: A Photographic Guide* by European owl expert Heimo Mikkola, author of the

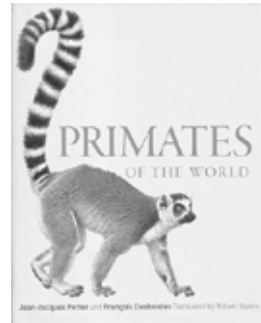
highly regarded *The Owls of Europe* (Poyser 1983). This new book mostly follows the taxonomy of the second edition of *Owls of the World* by Konig, Weick and Becking (Christopher Helm 2008) but adds four new species and excludes two poorly defined small island “species” and three extinct species. Mikkola’s book contains accounts of 249 species. A glance at *Handbook of Birds of the World, Volume 5 – Barn Owls to Hummingbirds* (Lynx 1999) reveals that in 1999 only 205 species were widely regarded to exist so where did the extra 44 come from? Many resulted from taxonomic splits, not all of which are recognized by the conservative and slow-to-act august taxonomic bodies. For example in Mikkola’s book 26 species of barn and bay owls are given compared to 16 species in HBW. Several other species, like the Little Sumba Hawk Owl (*Ninox sumbaesis*) from Sumba in the Lesser Sundas Islands have in fact been recently discovered or described.

Photos of all species are included, along with between 200 – 600 words of compact text for each species, emphasizing identification, status and distribution, and geographical variation. Notes about calls, food and hunting and habitat are very brief. A map shows each species’ range. The number of photos per species ranges from 1 to 9 images, with the average 4. Several poorly known tropical species are illustrated with only one photo each, but a few of the better known owls can have as many as 9 photos. In a few cases, as in the case of the Bismarck Hawk Owl (*Ninox variegata*) where photos of living birds couldn’t be located, stuffed museum specimens are shown. The bibliography contains only 28 titles, almost all of general reference books. The sheer number of splits makes one yearn for more references. However, the author does include his email address so the curious may contact him.

Fifty-five pages of introductory material discuss everything owlish from voice and hearing to taxonomy and DNA-sequencing. Included is a fascinating chart detailing the uses owl parts were put to in curing human ailments!

Although readers may be surprised by the sheer number of “new” species recognized by Mikkola, most owl enthusiasts will recognize *Owls of the World* as an important new reference work written by a world authority. Highly recommended.

**Primates of the World** by Jean-Jacques Petter and Francois Desbordes. Translated by Robert Martin. 2013. Princeton University Press, 41 William St., Princeton, N.J. 08540. Hardcover. 21 x 26 cms. 186 pages. Colour illustrations throughout. \$29.95 U.S.



Princeton University Press ([press.princeton.edu](http://press.princeton.edu)) has been doing an outstanding job publishing a wide variety of reasonably priced natural history books, virtually give-aways compared to the ridiculous prices charged by its English counterpart, Oxford University Press. *Primates of the World* is a prime example of Princeton’s good work. Seventy-two plates illustrate by continent about 50 percent of the world’s primates, from the startling looking Aye-aye (Family Daubentoniidae) to the bright looking Bonobo (Hominidae). Obscure and cryptic species like the dozens of look-alike dwarf galagos and tarsiers have been restricted to representative types. The artist Francis Desbordes may be the best artist today depicting primates. His plates illustrate several species of each family and where space permits, he shows a species involved in a variety of typical activities as well as illustrating details like the close-up of a paw. In the case of the Aye-aye, a kind of perpetually surprised looking squirrel-like lemur of Madagascar, Desbordes shows an Aye-aye on the ground, walking along a branch, hanging by four legs below a branch, hanging by two legs while scratching a forelimb, and handling some kind of nut with its ET-like fingers. The plates are so good that they sell the book. Primate enthusiasts, tropical zoologists, and lovers of beautifully illustrated natural history books must have this volume in their libraries. Recommended.