

Preface

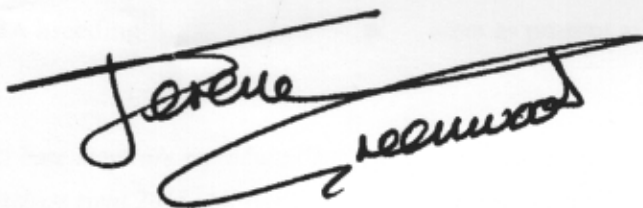
Collaborative surveys by volunteers make a huge contribution to ornithology in Britain, arguably more than any other country in the world. In terms of the numbers of people involved and the amount of work done, systematic surveys of the whole avifauna lead the field. Almost half a century ago, the West Midlands Bird Club undertook such an atlas survey in its region. Its success stimulated the first national atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland. A second followed after a winter atlas and, most recently, an atlas covering both the breeding season and the winter. The national atlases encouraged more regional atlases, often at finer scales than the 10x10 km scale used nationally, such that much of Britain is now covered.

Fife was not in the vanguard of these regional efforts but has now joined the select group of counties that have produced repeat atlases, thanks to the enthusiasm of the local members of the SOC, the Fife Bird Club and the BTO and to the effectiveness and dedication of the organising team.

Atlas fieldwork is enjoyable and fulfilling. Participants feel justifiably proud of the resulting book. But what is the point? What is the value of such work? Conservation benefits greatly for it is difficult to care for our birds if we do not know where they live; and assessing the success or failure of our efforts depends on our knowing whether they continue to occupy the same places and colonize new ones. Furthermore, the ecological science that both underpins conservation and is of interest in its own right asks many questions that can only be answered if we have comprehensive information on bird distributions. How is the distribution of each species influenced by landscape, habitat and climate? How do human activities appear to influence distributions? What are the geographical patterns of species richness?

Birdwatchers have always been aware that species may disappear from some locations as the years go by and colonize new areas. The results of repeated surveys, such as we now have in Fife, not only make us realise just how frequent such changes are but provide us with the information that allows us to address the questions that arise from them. How are distributions changing in response to changes in land use by humans? How are they changing in response to changes in the climate, both those that have already happened and those that are likely to happen in the future? Atlas data provide pointers to the answers to such questions.

This new atlas not only maps the distribution of wintering and breeding birds in Fife but also includes maps of their abundance across the region. Since my return to the Kingdom a few years ago, I have used the Fife Bird Atlas as a constant source of reference. I eagerly anticipate using the new atlas in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Greenwood', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Professor Jeremy Greenwood
Past Director, British Trust for Ornithology