

Foreword

By HRH Prince Charles



CLARENCE HOUSE

There is no doubt that the county of Devon has a particular magic all of its own. It is rightly famed for its deep lanes, high hedge banks, oak woods, lush pastures, flower-rich meadows, wild moorland, beautiful beaches and rocky bays. The second largest county in England, Devon has an almost unrivalled range of different habitats that offer homes to a wide diversity of wildlife, including some of our rarest and most charismatic birds.

The new *Devon Bird Atlas* documents all the species that breed or winter in the county. It is an impressive publication; the product of tens of thousands of hours of fieldwork by hundreds of volunteers. Every inch of the county has been visited, in Winter and in the breeding season, and every record has been analysed and documented. You hold in your hands the Domesday Book of birds in Devon at the start of the twenty-first century.

The story it has to tell is a mixed one. Thirty years ago, there were no Little Egrets in Devon; now this elegant white heron is a fairly common sight along our coastlines. Other birds that have fared well include Goosander, now found along many of our upland rivers, Siskin, Dartford Warbler and Nightjar. Good conservation work, in partnership with local farmers in South Devon, has also reversed the decline of the Cirl Bunting, a bird that was heading towards extinction in England.

Many of our farmland birds have fared much less well. The plight of the Cuckoo is becoming more widely known. This iconic species has all but disappeared from most lowland areas; fortunately, in Devon it has found a stronghold on Dartmoor. The hope is that this herald of Spring will be able to re-colonise old haunts once the reasons for its decline are identified and addressed. Other species are in even greater trouble. The hauntingly evocative cry of the Curlew is tragically rarely heard; Golden Plover no longer breed in the county; Lapwing and Turtle Dove look doomed to follow.

I believe we still have the chance to reverse these declines. To do that we need two things: strong partnerships and reliable evidence. Since 2005, the Duchy of Cornwall has worked closely with Dartmoor National Park Authority, the R.S.P.B. and Natural England to operate the Dartmoor Wader Project. The Project has monitored the breeding success of key wader species, particularly Curlew and Lapwing. The results have proved fascinating, and demonstrated the importance of correct habitat and targeted predator control. The Project has implemented habitat improvements with the assistance of both Duchy tenants and local landowners. Crows have been controlled to increase hatch rates and subsequent chick survival.

The partnerships, such as the Dartmoor Wader Project, are being forged by conservationists, scientists, farmers, landowners and passionate individuals. The evidence that is needed for positive conservation measures to work is here in this book.

We owe it to future generations to do all we can to conserve not just the beauty of Devon, but its biodiversity too. Without its birds, and particularly the rarer and more vulnerable species that are so prone to predation, this jewel of a county will lose much of what makes it special.

I can only commend the work of the Devon Birds Association, its members and volunteers, for their vision in producing this new Atlas. I hope that it is the foundation upon which we can build a more balanced home, one in which people and Nature can live together and flourish in harmony with one another.

Cheryl
