

Preface

*One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese,
cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring.*

(Leopold 1966)

Wild geese inspire us in many ways: they announce the seasons with their great flocks and migrations, they remain faithful to mates and family, and they amuse us with musical calls and fun antics. Aldo Leopold's (1966) *A Sand County Almanac* makes an important point: 'That's the question, I think, for our students, for ourselves, for all next generations. What if there be no goose music?' We have written this book about the inner workings of a Barnacle Goose society as a source of continued inspiration.

The lives of wild geese are extremely fascinating, not least because of the many problems and dilemmas that they encounter daily. Dilemmas are found in all areas of life, for example in choices regarding food, mates, migration, breeding, parental care, and neighbours in flocks. Individuals solve dilemmas in a variety of ways, and the collection of responses leads to the 'behaviour' of a population; accordingly a population may grow or decline in number and range. This exciting link between individual and population behaviour is an important theme in the book. Our model species is the Barnacle Goose, which we studied in two migratory flyways at locations in Britain, Norway (including Svalbard) and Sweden. The book was written for a broad readership, including those interested in bird biology in particular or wildlife ecology in general. Perhaps the 'unanswered questions' that we pose in some chapters will encourage others to choose geese and their habitats for study.

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