

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this latest *The Birds of Dorset* book was conceived back in 1992, as a result of discussions on how best to publish the results of the Dorset Bird Club's breeding bird Tetrad Survey (1987–1994). At the time, there appeared to be two obvious choices, one of which was to follow the example of several other counties, including our near neighbours the Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society, and produce a book limited to the breeding birds of the county. The alternative was to follow the Hampshire Ornithological Society's example and use the tetrad survey results to produce a book on the county's entire avifauna. Both options had obvious advantages and disadvantages, and after much debate it was decided to follow Hampshire's path and incorporate the tetrad survey results into a new book on Dorset's birds.

Whether this was the right decision is up to others to decide, but suffice it to say, the compilation of this book has taken over 12 years to complete. During this period, plans and deadlines for final production and publication have come and gone, ideas have changed, but at last we seem to be on the verge of finishing the task. It has been rather like 'painting the Forth Road Bridge', once one version of the text for the systematic list had been completed, one or two more annual Dorset Bird Reports had appeared! For reasons that seem both tidy and logical, it was decided that 1999 would be the final year for records to be incorporated into the main species accounts in the systematic list. Even so, this book will be well 'out of date' before publication, but this is inevitable given the time between receiving the 1999 records, completing the final text, and publication. An attempt has been made to include the more notable records for the period 2000–2002 in the main systematic list with the major highlights of 2003 listed separately.

With so many records to analyse and assimilate into a book of this nature, it is inevitable that mistakes and inaccuracies will have been made and possibly perpetuated from previous publications. A considerable amount of effort has been made to reduce such errors to a minimum, but undoubtedly some will have survived into the final text. If any errors are found by readers of this book, it would be very much appreciated if corrections were sent to the author for use in any further editions or revisions that might be published.

An attempt has been made to give a 'local feel' to the book by using, where possible, Dorset-based photographers and artists.

This book should be considered as one in a series of accounts of Dorset's birdlife dating back to 'A Catalogue of Birds Observed in Dorsetshire', which was written by Dr R. Pulteney in 1799, and subsequently followed by such landmark publications as *The Birds of Dorsetshire* (Mansel-Pleydell 1888), *Check List of the Birds of Dorset* (Boys 1972) and *The Birds of Dorset* (Prendergast & Boys 1983). As such, this latest book has attempted to build on what has gone before, rather than to replace them.

So, what are the main aims of the book. Hopefully, readers will find it an interesting, informative and reasonably accurate account of the county's avifauna. I would also like it to be regarded as a celebration of Dorset's birdlife, and a testament to those individuals and organisations, past and present, who have contributed to the study and conservation of birds within the county. Finally, looking to the future, it is hoped that the publication of this long-awaited book will serve to encourage membership of the Dorset Bird Club and so promote its primary objective, which is to record and survey the county's birds, and provide robust information of their status to the various conservation bodies within the county.