

FOREWORD

Birds are no more extraordinary than any other living organisms. Yet it is their greater familiarity with people that can make them seem so special. They fly, they sing, they are rich in color and pattern, they are animated, and they are almost everywhere, almost always. No other group of animals can say as much of themselves, however interesting they are.

BIRD superbly illustrates the astonishing diversity among birds. The male Great Bustard (page 207) holds the record for being the heaviest of all flying birds, weighing in at 40lb (1,800g). At the other end of the scale are the hummingbirds—some of them so small that they can easily be mistaken for insects and the smallest of which bears an insect's name, the Bee Hummingbird (page 298), which weighs less than $\frac{1}{16}$ oz (2g).

The familiarity of birds has caused them to be a great source of inspiration to people throughout our shared history. They have a powerful place in our cultures as symbols of freedom and wisdom as well as spirituality, even as bad omens! And the future of the world's 10,000 species of birds is inextricably linked to the welfare and livelihoods of people. One in eight bird species is threatened with extinction; the loss of even one diminishes us all. I hope that this beautifully produced encyclopedia will not only serve as a celebration of birds but also strongly encourage greater efforts to conserve them before it is too late.

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SOUND AND COLOR

The Bearded Reedling (also known as the Bearded Tit) is a beautifully colored inhabitant of wetlands. It usually gives its presence away with a pinglike call.