

Preface

When I began to write these chapters of autobiography a few years ago, it was due largely, I suppose, to the pleasure an old man gets in dreaming himself back into his youth. I thought it unlikely that any publisher would care to publish what I was writing. True, I did rather want to get the main facts of the mapping of summer migrants in parts of the Kentish Weald into print, somewhere, in the hope that, perhaps in the nineteen-seventies or eighties, some Kentishman might be able to survey some of the ground again to see what changes there have been after sixty or seventy years. And those are, perhaps, just the chapters that the 'average reader', if such an animal exists, may find less readable.

The later chapters will show, I believe, that I enjoy birdwatching in my eighties just as much as I did in my teens. Birds become more and more fascinating, not less, the more you watch them. Today's Baltimore Oriole seen just outside our window in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, is as fascinating as the first Hawfinches outside our window at Tunbridge Wells, Kent, in March 1898.

It would have been difficult to negotiate successfully with a publisher in England whilst still in the United States without most generous assistance from Bruce Campbell. Both Michael Rowntree and his sister Tessa Cadbury, who married across the Atlantic before I did the same thing, have nobly carried heavy scripts in their baggage across the ocean; and they and Jack Cadbury have given me a lot of encouragement to keep me going until the script was finished and the publisher found. So I have much reason to thank them for their help; and, of course, most of all my wife for the kind of help that cannot be put into words.

To some extent this is a family biography of three brothers who all found birdwatching an absorbing operation, but inevitably it becomes personal to myself from quite an early time. Christopher went to Rome in 1911, Wilfrid to Australia in 1912. Christopher was killed in Flanders in 1917. Wilfrid had gone off birds for the years from about 1905 till he went to Australia. When he returned to England in the nineteen-twenties I was delighted to find that birds were his main hobby. We were able to go birding together from time to time in the remaining forty years of his life; but most of his work was done from Oxford, whilst I was living in Birmingham—or in India. So the work that made his fame does not come into these pages.

When you have lived as long and have travelled as much as I have done you meet plenty of birdwatchers in many different countries. Some of my birdwatching friends come into these pages; others do not. It depends on the places and occasions that I happen to have written about. Anyway, I hereby apologise to those who might fairly have expected to find themselves here, but who are absent. If I had written a few more chapters, covering other events, especially in various parts of Europe, their pleasant companionship would have been acknowledged.

I must, however, record my thanks to Robert Gillmor whose drawings have long given me pleasure, but never more so than in the pages of this book.

H. G. A.

Swarthmore, Pennsylvania