

Preface to 1974 edition

A great many people over three decades have been introduced by *Watching Birds* to the tremendous fields of interest that opened out before them once their attention has been drawn to the possibilities. Beyond the pure, largely aesthetic, pleasure of just looking at birds are to be found the delights of *watching* birds and attempting to understand more of their lives, their movements or their biology. As an interest, birdwatching is compulsive: amongst its charms are that as a hobby it can be practised anytime and anywhere, and that the commonest of birds retain their charm and fascination no matter what level of expertise is reached.

This much was realised by James Fisher when he first devised this book. He could hardly have visualised the impact that it would have: the fantastic growth of birdwatching and bird conservation societies is in large part due to his influence, and for many years the mainstream of fieldworkers involved in the studies of the British Trust for Ornithology was initially stimulated by his abilities to present general ideas in an attractive manner.

The structure he planned remains quite adequate, though the attendant techniques may have progressed farther than even James Fisher could visualise. Where my own ideas differ from his, I have tried to state in an open discussion our points of view, and in many cases I have retained outdated figures because of the interesting comparisons they offer between the 1930's and the 1970's.

It is a daunting task to revise the bird book on which you cut your teeth: it is the surest measure of the man who wrote it that what is needed, after thirty-odd years, is an updating and not a sweeping revision.

JIM FLEGG

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