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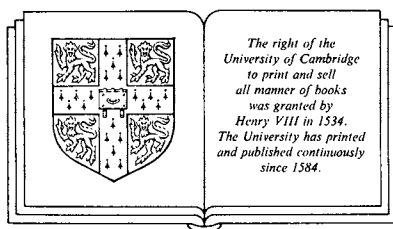


Frontispiece: in the early 1950s, thousands of Pinkfeet flighted to the Nene Washes.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of three early members of the
Cambridge Bird Club

Constantine Walter Benson 1909–1982

David Lambert Lack 1910–1973

William Homan Thorpe 1902–1986

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PREFACE

My interest in birds began as a child in the countryside around my home and I was encouraged by the gift of the three volumes of *The Ladybird Book of Birds* which made such birds as Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Redwing and Fieldfare all identifiable.

At preparatory school I was most fortunate to be taught Natural History twice a week by Susan Taylor, and at the tender age of eight or nine was shown bird ringing for the first time which I found enthralling. She it was who sowed the seed. However, it was not until my late teens that I resumed my interest. I began colour ringing birds in our vicarage garden and joined the British Trust for Ornithology, yet somehow I remained totally isolated from any other birdwatchers.

When I went to work in the University of Cambridge my interest in birds became known and I was given an introduction to Chris Thorne who lifted the level of my interest almost overnight. He took me to the Cambridge Bird Club, where I remember feeling utterly overawed, and he also gave me tuition in the art of bird ringing so that within a few months of this meeting I found myself in a room full of people I did not know, discussing the formation of a ringing group to be centred on Wicken Fen.

At Wicken, during those long weekends surrounded by bird talk, I learned a great deal but I was still hesitant when asked by Michael Allen, the secretary of the group at that time, to write something for the next Wicken Fen Group Report. Thus began my interest in the status of birds, since I chose to look at a bird whose population was increasing: the Redpoll.

It was 14 years later, in a Canterbury book shop, when I came upon the paperback version of the *Birds of Kent* and bought it as an example of a county avifauna that represented value for money, that I became aware that I could write something comparable for Cambridgeshire. It had long been discussed by the Cambridge Bird Club but I knew that previous attempts had failed so I began work without advertising my project. Half-way through the systematic list I decided to approach Cambridge University Press with a view to publication and to my surprise they expressed interest.

This publication has taken two years to write and follows just over 50

x Preface

years from the last that bore this title. Chris Thorne and Nick Davies have read the whole manuscript and used their proof-reading skills to correct typographical errors and improve my syntax! Bill Jordan allowed me to use an amended version of his article 'Where to watch birds in Cambridgeshire' and Tony Edwards has watched me with utmost patience using valuable experimental time in the laboratory to read ornithological articles, and my family have supported my interest. To all these people my thanks are due in no small measure.

My greatest debt is to Graham Easy who has given me more help than I had any right to ask and has read, corrected and constantly improved the text of the systematic list. All the remaining imperfections are my responsibility.

Finally, I must thank Martin Walters of Cambridge University Press for all his help and encouragement during the many stages of production.

Peter Bircham
Cambridge 1988

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This book was written to include all the records for the old county of Cambridgeshire up to, and including, the year 1986. Despite the local government re-organisation of 1972, most naturalist societies have retained the old boundaries in order to use comparable data and although a strong case was made to produce a book which included old Huntingdonshire this proved too great a task. Throughout the book the references to Cambridgeshire therefore refer to the old county. Likewise, there may appear references at times to Huntingdonshire, a county which is no longer in existence for government administrative purposes.

Certain abbreviations have been employed for the various organisations mentioned in the text. These are:

BTO—British Trust for Ornithology

CWT—Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust

RSPB—Royal Society for the Protection of Birds