Introduction

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199217519.003.0001

Abstract and Keywords

This Introduction discusses the reasons for writing this book and problems encountered. It mentions how the database of archaeological sites and bird records and the EndNote database of relevant literature came about, the information gathered from both are summarized in the book.

Keywords: database, archaeological sites, bird records, EndNote, history of birds

In writing this account of the history of birds in the British Isles, it was intended to draw to the attention of the ornithological world the extensive archaeological information that is available, and to draw to the attention of the archaeological world the wider importance and interest of the results that are so often hidden away in supplements and appendices to accounts of archaeological excavations. There is an obvious parallel here to The History of British Mammals. However, the historical constraints are less severe on birds, for which the isolation of Great Britain from continental Europe, of Ireland or Man from Great Britain, and the isolation of the northern and western islands do not assume the
importance that they do for mammals; nor does intentional or accidental Human introduction. As a consequence, this account does not adhere so strictly to a historical layout, though the march of time is an underlying theme.

A major problem in writing it is the obscure and scattered nature of much of the archaeological record. ‘Grey literature’, unpublished but publicly available reports to those commissioning excavations (especially English Heritage reports), are a particular problem. In an effort to overcome this, a partial set of records was supplemented by a more systematic trawl of the literature available in the John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester. The Leverhulme Trust granted D. W. Yalden a research grant that allowed RobCarthy to be employed for 6 months specifically to garner much of the information summarized here. He set up the database of archaeological sites and bird records, as well as an EndNote database of the relevant literature. I am very grateful to both him and the Trust for their invaluable support. It is intended that the database will be made freely available to the scientific community once this account is published. These immediately available sources were supplemented by records that Umberto Albarella had compiled for central England, and a similar archive for the north of England assembled by Keith Dobney. A number of others have generously helped with commenting on parts of this account, supplied extra records (sometimes as yet unpublished) or sent reprints on other sites; among them are Sheila Hamilton-Dyer (Southampton), the late Colin Harrison (London), Gil Jones (Leeds), Roger Jones (Hertfordshire), Matthew Rogers (Bristol), Cecile Mourer-Chauviré (Lyon), Dale Serjeantson (Southampton), Catherine Smith (Perth), Sue Stallibrass (Liverpool), John Stewart (London), and Tommy Tyrberg (Kimstad, Sweden).

A separate line of relevance concerns placenames, and we are grateful for the advice offered by, among others, Richard Coates (Sussex), Margaret Gelling (Birmingham), Carole Hough (Glasgow), and Peter Kitson (Birmingham).

A major contribution came from various undergraduates who conducted B.Sc. projects in their third year under my supervision; it was a mutually advantageous partnership, and I am grateful for their enthusiastic contribution to this account, even if they did not realize (p.2) that I would end up exploiting their efforts. They include Simon Boisseau
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(placenames for ravens, raptors, and cranes), Steven Bond
(extinction rates of some raptors in the nineteenth century),
Rajith Dissanayake (passerine humeri), John Heath
(identification of passerine bones), Christopher John
(archaeological record of birds), Iain Pickles (placenames for
domestic birds), Richard Preston (passerine tarsometatarsi),
James Whittaker (eagle placename), and David Younger
(variability of bird bones). Between them, they established
what might be possible and interesting in this field.

The account was initially written in 2004–05 by D.W. Yalden. It
was then sent to U. Albarella, who had intended to be a co-
author, in January 2006. Other work then diverted our
attention until late 2007. U. Albarella has read the whole text,
adding comments and contributions throughout, but in the
event had been left little to do. The form of authorship on the
title page is intended to reflect this. D.W. Yalden takes full
responsibility for opinions and errors contained here, and is
grateful to have been spared worse errors by U. Albarella’s
additions.

K. Dobney was also to have been a co-author. In the event,
pressure of other work prevented his full participation, but we
thank him for his thoughts on the project, and his
contributions to the data-base.

The value of Dr A. J. Morton’s DMAP programme for
generating the distribution maps is gratefully acknowledged.

During the period 1966–90, D. W. Yalden had the good fortune
to join the Peakland Archaeological Society in excavating
Foxhole Cave in the Peak District, under the direction of the
late Don Bramwell. At a time when very few others had an
interest in bird bone identification, he had developed an
expertise, and the reference collection to support it, which was
sought by many other archaeologists (as the reference list
makes clear). We shared many zoological stories as we
attempted to extract rodent bones and identify larger mammal
bones, and he passed on much accumulated wisdom and
knowledge to me. He had been working on a book of his own
at one time, and I inherited many of his notes. I hope this
account bears some comparison with what he would have
written, and I acknowledge his friendship and tutelage. Other
members of the Peakland Archaeological Society, including
Roger Jones, the late Ken Holt, Sonia Holt, and the late
Norman Davenport are also fondly remembered and thanked. Foxhole was a cool and draughty classroom at times, but some of its lessons reappear here.

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24 December 2007