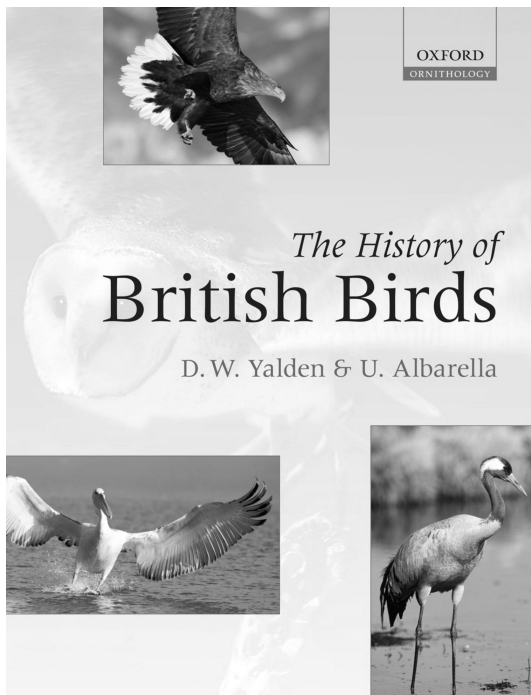


BOOKS RECEIVED:

D. W. YALDEN & U. ALBARELLA, 2008. **The History of British Birds**. Oxford University Press. 288 pages, 40 figures. Hardback, £55.00, ISBN 978-0-19-921751-9. Website: www.oup.com



From the back cover:

The History of British Birds reviews our knowledge of avifaunal history over the last 15,000 years, setting it in its wider historical and European context. The authors, one an ornithologist the other an archaeologist, integrate a wealth of archaeological data to illuminate and enliven the story, indicating the extent to which climatic, agricultural, and social changes have affected the avifauna. They discuss its present balance, as well as predicting possible future changes.

It is a popular misconception that bird bones are rarely preserved (compared with mammals), and cannot be reliably identified when they are found. The book explores both these contentions, armed with a database of 9,000 records of birds that have been identified on archaeological sites. Most are in England, but sites elsewhere in Great Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles are included.

Britain's most numerous bird is also the most widespread in the archaeological record, but some of the more charismatic species also have a rich historical pedigree. For example, we can say quite a lot about the history of the Crane, Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle and Great Auk. The history of many introduced domestic species can also be illuminated. Even so, there remain uncertainties, posed by difficulties of dating or identification, the vagaries of the archaeological record or the ecological specialities of the birds themselves. These issues are highlighted, thus posing research questions for others to answer.

From personal perspective:

When Umberto, one of the authors, sent me the book I flipped through it and found it difficult to decide where to start reading. That is because I have a rather broad research interest in birds and, depending on my current project, I can be best described as a palaeontologist, zooarchaeologist or ornithologist. The authors begin with a short introduction to the problems with the identification of bird remains which is followed by the story of archaeopteryx and other Cretaceous birds. Then we are taken on a guided tour through the history of the British birds and that is perhaps the best part of the book. We can see the avifauna of the British Islands during the Pleistocene, see how it developed and changed through time. A separate chapter deals with domestic species and we also learn about birds in place-names, literature and art. The authors elaborate on avian remains in the archaeological record, falconry, birds lost and gained, amongst other issues. The final chapter gives an insight

into the possible future of birds in Great Britain, and the appendix includes an annotated historical list of British birds – something very useful indeed.

Such a short history of nearly everything on birds in Britain may be somewhat risky because some subjects must be omitted and others treated superficially. Yet, the authors have managed to cope with the problem very well and the final result is a small piece of art. In addition the book is well written and carefully edited and I am sure it will be used by students as well as researchers.

Zbigniew M. BOCHEŃSKI