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BRITISH BIRDS

EDITORIAL

MANY KIND THINGS have been written in the Press about the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of *British Birds*, including a leading article in *The Times*, an editorial in *The Field* and appreciative notes in *Country Life*, the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*. Birthday wishes were also sent over the air by the B.B.C.

We are all the more grateful for these and other appreciations because in the nature of things the Editors, Publishers and printers are accustomed to receive more criticism for their real or supposed failures than praise for their achievements. Nevertheless, our readers may be assured that we are still some way from succumbing to complacency, and in this we are ably assisted by our candid critics, especially when they point to faults of which we are only too well aware.

One of these is the *Sussex Bird Report* for 1956 which complains that some of the more unusual county records have been in our hands for over a year without decisions to accept or reject having been notified, and that consequently it has been necessary to devote a good deal of space to descriptions which are redundant if they are afterwards to be repeated in *British Birds*. There is much justice in this reproach, and we are making special efforts to overcome these delays. At the same time we feel bound to call attention to some of the factors responsible for them which it is in the power of some of our readers to remedy.

Recently there has been a tremendous increase in the number of records of rarities sent forward for publication, in the number of observers concerned, and in the number of ornithologists who have to handle these records editorially. At the same time there has been a great and successful effort to raise standards of discrimination against incorrect or doubtful records and to ensure the fullest consultation and co-ordination before records are published. We have sought to meet this flood of material by concentrating on the more critical identifications and on those of the utmost rarity while

relying increasingly on the capable and experienced editors of local reports to sift and adjudicate the great mass of less unusual records and those requiring special local knowledge. Unfortunately, despite the great efforts and achievements of many editors of local reports, the residue of unsifted and unsatisfactory records coming directly to the Editors of *British Birds* is still unmanageably voluminous.

The causes of this are varied. Some editors appear to mistrust their own powers to the extent of referring to us many records which they might reasonably be expected to settle for themselves according to perfectly familiar and straightforward principles. Too many parts of Britain are still not covered by any local report and for these we are to some extent compelled to step into the breach until local ornithologists can undertake the editing and publication of their own local records. Too many ornithologists add unnecessarily to the burden by sending forward records in a form entailing considerable correspondence in order to elicit necessary information which should have been included in the original account. If our task could be narrowed to considering only records which we should properly consider, submitted always in satisfactory detail, it would be manageable, but it would still be burdensome. We ask, in the interests of all, for further co-operation towards this end. It will not be easy, but rare efforts must be expected of those who would be credited with having seen rare birds.