Rather like the proverbial teenager who can’t wait to be a grown-up, I remember wishing that I could say I had been birdwatching for 20 years. It sounded so full of maturity and experience. Multiply those twenty years threefold, and you are left with a far more exclusive club. One of its few extant members is the engaging, accessible, controversial and undeniably inspiring Ian Wallace. Living legend might sound sycophantic, but Wallace is one of the very few to whom the birdwatching community can consider applying the title.

So comes the task of summing up this book, dubbed Wallace’s own life review of birdwatching in Britain, and originally to be called The Magic Carpet Ride, but for now entitled, Beguiled by Birds. Personally, I think that the title undersells the book. It is much more a history of British birdwatching, albeit from a personal perspective, rather than simply being one man’s odyssey. I hope that the cover is eventually changed to engage a wider audience.

This is easily the most difficult book I have yet had to review, since it is extremely pithy and jam-packed with original history, information, anecdotes, challenges and stories. Not only can Wallace draw on a vast reserve of six decades of experience, but his breadth of interest is greater than most. The passion is unimpaired as he waxes lyrical on breeding birds, migration, conservation, identification, local, national and international studies. He is the only artist/author in the monumental BWP; in fact, I’m left wondering who his rivals are.

All this is crammed into 272 pages, beautifully starlit with his own colourful illustrations. He seems to have been everywhere, the array of people photographs, remind me of the apparent omnipresence of Forest Gump. There are some 27 chapters in chronological order, from a look at the pre-history of birds, through the gradual observation, shooting, cataloguing, and illustrating that led into the twentieth century. Some of the personalities of birding folklore were quite new to me, and fascinating. For example, I suggest you look up the exploits of one E. C. Stuart Baker of whom Wallace writes ‘Look upon such men and their works ye twitchers and quail.’ There were others, such as Boyd and Coward, who I knew about from my native Cheshire, of whom I gained a fuller picture. It is clear to me that some of the works of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ornithologists, while not generally familiar to my generation, are quite outstanding, and Wallace helpfully fills in background for many of these ornithological giants. The progress in development of bird books, bird art, recording and rarities committees, local bird clubs and personalities, is spelt out as the chronology of the chapters progresses. Scilly fans will particularly enjoy the accounts of St Agnes in the early days. The role and effectiveness of the RSPB is subject to a piercing review of its strengths and weaknesses. The various contributors to modern birdwatching, right up to the variety of stalls and products at the British Birdwatching Fair, get comment and attention. And, with snippets from the responses by his peers to a survey scattered throughout the book, there is added colour and a check to this becoming a one-man monologue.

The reason I found the book so hard to review is that there is really so much purposeful (to highlight the author’s favourite word) information that it requires slow and deliberate reading if one is to engage fully with all the subjects covered. Wallace is not slow to be self-effacing and you cannot help but feel for him as he bares his soul over his troubled discipleship under Meinertzhagen. He is a great wordsmith, and eloquent and expressive phrases (such as the ‘hydra-headed development in dynamic taxonomy’) are frequently used to describe his take on some aspect of ornithology, though I found myself reaching for the dictionary on some occasions.

I felt that with the recent plethora of identification and photographic guides, it was about time that we had a really good read. I hoped that this book was going to be it, and although much more dense than his seminal Discover Birds (Whizzard Press, 1979), it will be one that I enjoy picking up and chewing on, purposefully, for a long, long time. It is vital reading for anyone interested in the greater story in which we find ourselves, in terms of the heritage of birdwatching in Britain. Finally, this is another Wallace book which leaves the reader utterly inspired to get back out into the field, and confirms his colossal contribution to British ornithology.

Martin Garner
It is only just over 20 years since the last *Birds of Dorset* was published. The main impetus for this new work was the Dorset Bird Club’s (tetrad-based) breeding bird survey, undertaken between 1987 and 1994. This book presents the results of that survey and is an altogether more thorough and comprehensive volume than its predecessor. It has been written by an author who has clearly made a major contribution to the study of birds in his adopted county.

And from a birder’s point of view, what a fabulous county it is – containing the migration watchpoints of Portland, Durlston Head and Christchurch Harbour, the second-largest natural harbour in the world at Poole, the shallow estuarine lagoon known as The Fleet, a large proportion of the nation’s remaining lowland heathland, chalk downlands, ancient woodlands and the floodplains of the rivers Frome and Stour. Little surprise then that Dorset boasts a county list (405 species) matched by few others in the country.

The bulk of this book, quite rightly, comprises the systematic list. The history of Dorset ornithology and the county’s location, climate, geology and landscape, and its major habitats are well covered in other publications, and the short chapters devoted to these subjects in the present work are just right. The species accounts (well-defined subspecies are also given full accounts) are accurate and well written, if a little dry, and are packed with data. Where relevant, a map showing the breeding distribution by tetrad is given. While it is entirely appropriate to dedicate most space to those species for which the county has important breeding or wintering populations, I suspect that some readers would have hoped for more expanded versions for the rarities. Here, an opportunity to bring a more personal and lighter tone to the proceedings has perhaps been missed. Tables are a prominent feature of the species accounts and, where relevant, cover log data from key migration watchpoints, Wetland Bird Survey data from key wetlands, and a range of breeding and other information. I think that much of this information could have been presented more effectively in the form of graphs (those that have been drawn work very well), while space could have been saved too, as occasionally the accompanying text duplicates what has already been displayed in the table. These are but minor criticisms though, and the author is to be commended for bringing all these data together in one place. It is also evident that the species texts were completed initially in 1999, as an additional three years’ worth of data is bolted on as a postscript where relevant. While this is perhaps not ideal, it is an almost inevitable consequence given the enormity of the task facing just one man. My biggest disappointment is that pre-1974 records from that part of Dorset which, until the local government reorganisations in that year, was part of Hampshire (most significantly, the Christchurch Harbour complex, including both Stanpit Marsh and Hengistbury Head) are relegated to an appendix, although a full explanation of why this decision was taken is given. Further appendices list all the significant records for 2003, bringing the book as up to date as possible, and provide details of species in Category D.

The author’s expressed aim was to use local photographers and artists to give the book a real Dorset flavour and this should be applauded. The book has certainly not suffered as a consequence. There are 40 pages of colour photographs and these offer a good balance, capturing the county’s key habitats and sites well, and covering a mix of breeding birds, migrants and rarities (the latter including the Durlston Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum* and the Winspit Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*). The quality is generally excellent, although some shots are rather too blue to my eye. It is a shame that the photos were not used to break the text up rather more, but I assume that the cost of this was considered prohibitive by the publisher. I am not a big fan of vignettes but those used here, all of them by Lawrie Chappell, are generally superior to many I have seen. Their spacing could, perhaps, have been better planned to break up some very lengthy runs of text.

Publication of this book was aided financially by the Dorset Bird Club and I am sure that they will be very pleased with the outcome. It must have all but dominated George Green’s life for some 12 years and he is to be congratulated on producing a county avifauna that compares favourably with any of those published recently. The Dorset Bird Club and the county’s resident and visiting birdwatchers are indebted to him, and most of them must surely own a copy by now.

*Paul Harvey*
Also worth looking out for Beguiled by Birds by Ian Wallace which covers a lot of the same areas but with a much more personal slant, especially the history of birding in the 40's and 50's. Moss's account is vanilla plain (no bad thing) and non controversial. Wallace's account isn't. Also a very good design for Wallace with lots of pix and some interesting marginalia. I like Wallace's paintings - they may not be the most technically proficient but they capture the essence of birdwatching better than almost anyone. Likewise, Wallace's prose usually captures the joy of birding, but I've found the text rather hard work at times. Not because it is more erudite or scientific than Moss, just because it is rather convoluted. BRITISH BIRDWATCHING. By Ian Wallace. Christopher Helm, A&C Black, London, 2004. So comes the task of summing up this book, dubbed Wallaceâ€™s own life review of birdwatching in Britain, and originally to be called the Magic Carpet Ride, but for now entitled, Beguiled by Birds. Personally, I think that the title undersells the book. It is much more a history of British birdwatching, albeit from a personal perspective, rather than simply being one manâ€™s odyssey. I hope that the cover is eventually changed to engage a wider audience. This is easily the most difficult book I have yet had to review, since it is extremely pithy and jam-packed with original history, information Beguiled By Birds book. Read reviews from worldâ€™s largest community for readers. See a Problem? Weâ€™d love your help. Let us know whatâ€™s wrong with this preview of Beguiled By Birds by D. Ian M. Wallace. Problem: Itâ€™s the wrong book Itâ€™s the wrong edition Other.