



# Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society

Registered Charity No. 702484  
[www.cawos.org](http://www.cawos.org)

## **Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society submission for the Marsh Local Ornithological Award**

*Birds in Cheshire and Wirral; a Breeding and Wintering Atlas* was published in November 2008 by Liverpool University Press on behalf of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society. This Atlas project, covering the years 2004-2007, was intended to document the many changes on the County's birdlife since fieldwork for our first breeding bird atlas finished in 1984. We decided to expand the scope of the first atlas by surveying breeding and winter distribution, and including a BTO habitat code for each record – a novel feature, we believe, for an atlas, which greatly increases its conservation impact.

Over 350 surveyors, many of them new to systematic bird recording, covered the whole county in three years; new volunteers found this an enjoyable experience while seasoned birdwatchers enjoyed the challenge of studying a patch in detail. We received much assistance from several local groups and societies within the County and especially from the British Trust for Ornithology, who not only allowed us to use material from some of their long-running surveys but worked with us to use Breeding Bird Survey data to estimate county breeding populations for 65 of the commonest species, the first time this has been done for an area as small as a county. In addition, with their help, abundance maps for 35 species were produced, again a first at county level.

The Atlas shows the expected sharp decline of some species, though most of the commoner species held their own. This was balanced by increases in several others, notably the small resident insectivores, raptors and most waterfowl. The winter surveys highlighted especially the value of land in Countryside or Environmental Stewardship for species of conservation concern.

We are very pleased to have achieved our goal of publishing the book in the year following the end of fieldwork, but that is not the end of the project. Support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and several other major and individual sponsors is enabling CAWOS to work with the Cheshire

Wildlife Trust and Halton Borough Council in using the Atlas material to produce educational programmes for schoolchildren. That for 7-11 year-olds, *Primary Feathers*, has already inspired more than 1,200 youngsters and introduced a new generation to the wonders of bird life and the value of recording. CAWOS is also following up Atlas results with in-depth surveys and the data are being used for assessing targets for local Biodiversity Action Plans and for identifying and monitoring Sites of Biological Importance as well as for responding to requests from environmental planners. Some of the Atlas data has already been analysed in depth for a refereed scientific publication that shows the positive response of breeding birds to the cleaner air and water, and increased woodland cover, in the industrial Mersey valley.

The Atlas book has been well received by readers and reviewers and it was adjudged fourth in the *British Birds/ BTO Best Bird Book of the Year* competition. We hope that this project and publication sets the standard for other counties in their own atlas projects, and will act as a marker for the next generation of birdwatchers in Cheshire and Wirral when they carry out repeat surveys later in the century.

David Cogger

Secretary of CAWOS during the production of the Atlas.