

PREFACE.

THE question may naturally suggest itself to some of my readers, what object I had in view in publishing a work on the Birds of Great Britain, when I had already completed a similar publication on the avifauna of Europe. My reasons are simply these:—Before the latter was completed the entire edition was all or nearly all sold; and very many persons interested in this department of science were disappointed in not being able to procure a copy of a work which they saw in the hands of so many others. Consequently, on the completion of my 'Birds of Australia,' at the solicitation of a large number of private friends and others, and influenced by the increased taste for natural history that had sprung up in the interim, I "returned to my old love" by publishing the British Birds, excluding those of the continent, thus complying with the wishes of those persons who have especially paid attention to our native ornithology. I also felt that there was an opportunity of greatly enriching the work by giving figures of the young of many of the species of various genera—a thing hitherto almost entirely neglected by authors; and I feel assured that this infantile age of bird-life will be of much interest for science, to my subscribers, and to readers generally.

That my efforts to render this publication a standard work have been successful is evidenced by its sale being double that of any other work I have given to the public. Many of the numerous ornithologists who have arisen within the last few years have rendered me much valuable information—a kindness which I duly acknowledge, and trust that, although not specially mentioned in this short Preface, they will take it for granted they have not been forgotten, and that their names have been generally associated with the various subjects to which their communications have reference.

Many of the public are quite unaware how the colouring of these large Plates is accomplished; and not a few believe that they are produced by some mechanical process or by chromo-lithography. This, however, is not the case; every sky with its varied tints and every feather of each bird were coloured by hand; and when it is considered that nearly two hundred and eighty thousand illustrations in the present work have been so treated, it will most likely cause some astonishment to those who give the subject a thought.