

Part 2

You are going to read a review of a book about ornithology – the study of birds. Seven sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences **A–H** the one which fits each gap (9–15). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

The Wisdom of Birds by Tim Birkhead

Review by Stephen Moss

You wait for one history of ornithology to come along and a whole flock appears over the horizon. **9** However, in the past few years a clutch of scientists, journalists, taxonomists and birders (including myself) have turned their attentions to this fascinating and complex topic.

One of the most exciting things about the study of birds is that it is not yet complete. We may smile at the beliefs of our ancestors – such as the notion that swallows spent their winter hibernating underwater – yet there is still so much that we don't know. Writing almost a century ago, the German-American ornithologist Paul Bartsch drew attention to our ignorance about many aspects of bird behaviour: 'There are still many unsolved problems about bird life. Little, too, is known about the laws and routes of migration, and much less about the final disposition of the untold thousands which are annually produced.' **10** For, despite great progress, modern bird studies often give rise to new and even more complex inquiries.

Tim Birkhead is well qualified to examine the ways successive generations have tried to answer the fundamental questions about birds. A professor at the University of Sheffield, he specializes in two very different disciplines: the study of animal behaviour and the history of science.

11 In it, he ranges from Aristotle to modern scientists such as Peter Berthold, whose migration studies have revealed much about how birds migrate round the world.

Unlike other histories of the subject, *The Wisdom of Birds* does not take a chronological approach. **12** In other hands this might have been confusing, but Birkhead steers his narrative through this complex structure to tell a compelling story.

He is clearly passionate, not just about the birds themselves, but also about the people who have studied them, and the works they have produced. So *The Wisdom of Birds* is lavishly illustrated with examples of bird art, including many from the early works of ornithology.

13

If the book has a hero, it is an unlikely but deserving one. Birkhead begins and ends with a challenge to his colleagues: who is the greatest ever ornithologist? **14** But Birkhead's own choice is an often neglected seventeenth-century Englishman, John Ray. He launched the revolutionary concept of studying living birds in the field, rather than dead ones in a museum.

15 John Ray travels through time to be the guest of honour at an International Ornithological Congress. As Birkhead says: 'He would be amazed by how much we know and, of course, by how much more there is still to learn about birds.' This is a fitting ending to a book that is one of the most entertaining, informative and enthusiastic accounts of the history of ornithology, and of the many different ways in which we have observed, studied and wondered about birds.

- A These two interests come together in *The Wisdom of Birds*.
- B *The Wisdom of Birds* concludes with a striking image.
- C Much the same could be said today.
- D Some of them come in for particular criticism in the book.
- E These, and the fine production of the book itself, add immensely to the reader's satisfaction.
- F The subject was neglected for decades.
- G The names they come up with are strong contenders.
- H Instead, Birkhead explores ornithological themes such as birdsong, the breeding cycle and migration, moving back and forth across the centuries.