

Welsh Bird Studies

by *Peter Howlett*

One of the founding collections of the National Museum was the Cardiff Scientific Society's collection of birds, which were displayed, along with their nests and eggs, in small dioramic cases. This collection still forms the major part of one of the Zoology galleries today. The Museum's interest in birds was maintained over the years through links with the Cardiff Naturalists Society and I' ".



• *The best time of the day: sunrise at Kenfig N.N.R.*

especially with Col. H. Morrey Salmon until his death in April, 1985. The Museum, in fact, became the archive for many bird studies, such as the Red Kite – in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (R.S.P.B.) and the Nature Conservancy Council (N.C.C.)

With the appointment, however, in 1978 of a full-time ornithologist the Museum's involvement in bird studies, as an aspect of broader conservation issues, became firmly established. The areas requiring support were immediately apparent: studies in oil pollution; ringing and migration studies; and the Welsh bird archive. All of these have been developed in close cooperation with amateurs and societies. Close links have also been maintained with the N.C.C. resulting in the collection, storage and analysis of oiled seabirds following the Christos Baas and Bridgeness disasters in 1978 and 1985. The Museum subsequently obtained four cold stores and adjacent laboratories at 126, Bute Street, Cardiff for the storage and cleaning of specimens.



• *Kingfisher; an example of the new Welsh Ornithological Collection*

On its creation in 1988, the Welsh Ornithological Society asked the

Museum to act as the home of its archives and this link has resulted in the Museum taking over the collation and production of the annual report on bird ringing in Wales, which is published in the society's annual *Welsh Bird Report*.

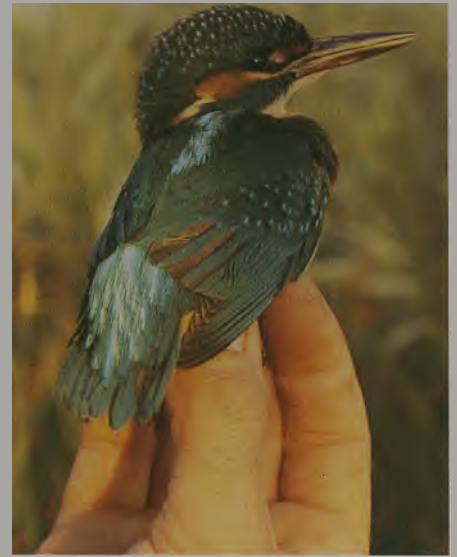
With the acquisition of a large freeze dryer the Department of Zoology has been able to develop the Welsh Ornithological Collection using a new style based on freeze drying rather than skinning. The birds are arranged as shown in the photograph, a layout which makes it much easier to examine plumage detail on the wings and tail in



• *Aquatic Warbler: a scarce migrant caught annually at Kenfig*

order to determine the age and sex of specimens. The collection is aimed at field ornithologists and artists alike and complements the existing skin collections in the Department. The primary source of specimens for this collection is Bardsey Island, where frequent visits have been made since 1990 to collect birds that have been killed by collision with the island's lighthouse.

The Museum has also had long-standing ties with Kenfig National Nature Reserve in Mid Glamorgan and has provided help in developing the studies of the birds of the reserve through bird ringing. This has culminated in the establishment of an intensive programme to monitor the warblers that use the reed beds surrounding the pool. The project was started in 1991 when, during August, a total of 600 Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler were trapped and ringed. Of these 8 have already been caught by other ringers in Britain, France and the



• *kingfisher: caught for ringing at Kenfig*

Channel Islands – a much higher percentage than in past years. Hopefully, continued work of this kind will help shed light on how these warblers choose and utilise their stop-over sites from year to year. Besides the main target species, several more unusual species were caught, such as Aquatic Warbler, Sparrowhawk and Kingfisher.

As part of this steady development, the Museum has become involved in an international project to monitor trans-Saharan migrants as they cross the Mediterranean, especially in the spring. A large majority of the birds that breed in Wales, Scotland and England comprise species that winter south of the Sahara, and the expansion of the Mediterranean Spring Island project to include Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean gives us a unique opportunity to monitor our breeding birds as they move north in the spring. Long-term monitoring of the kind in Wales and Europe may help show early effects of habitat loss, or even climatic change, on migrant populations and their migration strategies.



• *Sparrowhawk: caught at Kenfig*