



The Carl Zeiss Award 2010

The Carl Zeiss Award was established in 1991 and is traditionally presented for the photograph or set of photographs considered to have been the most instructive during BBRC's assessment of rarities over the previous year. In 2009, the Award became the focal point of BBRC's 50th anniversary celebrations, and was combined with a review of the best rarity images of the Committee's first half-century (*Brit. Birds* 102: 451–458), but

for 2010 we return to the familiar format. After Chris Batty and Nigel Hudson had prepared an initial shortlist, six voting BBRC members formed the judging panel to select the winner and runners-up. This proved, as ever, to be an enjoyable exercise with no small amount of debate and a variety of opinions. All the shortlisted images were instructive and played a significant role in confirming the identification features for the

species and subspecies concerned. The key criteria that the judges deployed in making their final decisions were the degree to which the photographs were fundamental to the assessment process and the skill and good fortune of the photographers in capturing the images.

The phenomenon of rarities being identified from images posted on the internet is not new. The Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix* that was the runner-up for this award in 2007 provided a memorable precedent (*Brit. Birds* 101: 89), but no fewer than four of the top five birds this year may well have been overlooked or failed to pass the credibility barrier had it not been for the photographs obtained. The top two in 2010 involve birds that are still subject to formal acceptance to the



Richard Ford

273. Carl Zeiss Award 2010 fifth place: Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*, Pagham Harbour, Sussex, May 2009.

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British List at the time of writing (though both have been accepted by BBRC), but there is a precedent for previous winners of this Award that had yet to complete the full assessment process when the judging was carried out: Bryan Thomas's iconic images of a Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea diomedea* off the Isles of Scilly, in 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 600–603).

Beyond the final top five, other images that were considered in the initial shortlist included those of the Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* in North Wales in June 2009; the Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* off the Isles of Scilly in September 2009; the Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* in Greater London/Surrey from October 2009 to January 2010; the Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* in Cornwall in November–December 2009; plus records of three taxa which are

still under consideration by the Committee: 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus michahellis atlantis* in Oxfordshire in October–December 2009, Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* in Cornwall in November 2009, and 'Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler' *Sylvia cantillans moltonii* in Shetland in June 2009. These three join one other for which the Committee's decision is also still to be finalised at the time of writing: Glaucous-winged Gull *L. glaucescens* in Greater London/Surrey, which made the top five after



Ian Lewington

274. Carl Zeiss Award 2010 fourth place: Juvenile American Black Tern *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*, Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, August 2009.



Garry Messenbird

275. Carl Zeiss Award 2010 third place: Putative Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*, Beddington Sewage-farm, Greater London/Surrey, April 2009.

the votes were cast. The fact that the Committee has yet to make a decision on the identification in these cases does not detract from the value of the images as a central part of the assessment process. It is a testament to the dramatic advances in photography that any one of the images considered might easily have been a winner in previous years.

And so to the top five. In fifth place, Richard Ford's stunning images of the Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* at Pagham Harbour in Sussex in May 2009

Rowlands

allowed the identification to be confirmed beyond doubt, and a bird that had been identified originally as a Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola* was thus confirmed as the sixth British record of Oriental. The occurrence of the same or another individual in Lincolnshire in May 2010 has enabled another series of stunning images to be obtained, and has reduced the enigmatic character of this species in a Western Palearctic context even further.

In fourth place, Ian Lewington's pictures of the juvenile 'American Black Tern' *Chlidonias niger surinamensis* he found at Farmoor Reservoir in Oxfordshire in August–September 2009 must rank alongside the best photographs of this subspecies ever taken. They were a winning set of images for a couple of judges and the instructive quality of the image reproduced here, together with others in a series submitted to the Committee, represents the ideals of this award. Despite the assertion from one of the judges that the photographer definitely needs a new pair of binoculars, Ian's moment of glory was not to arrive this year...

In third place, Garry Messenbird's photos of the putative Glaucous-winged Gull at Beddington Sewage-farm, Greater London/Surrey, in April 2009, were extremely important in the assessment of this tricky individual. A number of other images were submitted and all have played their part in the identification process, but the one reproduced here was considered to be that which best captured the critical features. Our

knowledge of this species and potentially confusing hybrid individuals is still evolving, but now that Glaucous-winged Gull is an established vagrant to our shores any potential claim must be taken seriously and any quality images of likely candidates taken in the UK will assist our emerging knowledge of vagrant identification.

Murray Wright's image of the Tufted Puffin *Lunda cirrhata* on the Swale estuary in Kent in October 2009 almost scooped the top prize. It topped the list for three of the six judges and it was the quick thinking and swift actions of the photographer that delivered this favourable response from the judges. Without these photos, we felt that the identification of such an apparently unlikely vagrant would perhaps have remained indeterminate. As one judge said: 'For what was essentially a fly-by seabird, a photograph would always seem an unrealistic request, but here it is – instantly making the unbelievable believable'.

The almost unbelievable puffin was only just pipped at the post by Dougie Holden's winning photograph of the Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* at South Shields in County Durham, in October 2009. This cracking picture shows all the key criteria which established this as the first record for Britain of a Siberian waif that had been high on the wish-list of British rarity finders for many years. Without the publication of Dougie's images the record would presumably have remained as just a Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* (which is what it was

assumed to be when the shutter was pressed). The fact that it represents a fantasy rarity come true is purely down to this excellent photograph, which led to the bird being identified correctly after it was posted on the web, and then appreciated by the crowds who came to pay homage over the subsequent days. Dougie Holden's good fortune will be rewarded with a pair of



Murray Wright

276. Carl Zeiss Award 2010 second place: Tufted Puffin *Lunda cirrhata*, Oare Marshes, Swale estuary, Kent, October 2009.

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Dougie Holden

277. Carl Zeiss Award 2010 winner: Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus*, Trow Quarry, South Shields, Durham, October 2009.

10 x 42 Zeiss Victory FL binoculars, which he will be presented with at the Birdfair on Friday 20th August 2010.

Acknowledgments

BBRC remains grateful to all those observers who submit their photographs for consideration or who post images on websites (especially BirdGuides www.birdguides.com and Rare Bird Alert www.rarebirdalert.co.uk) and in so doing help the

Committee in assessing records. It is a pleasure to review these images, both during the assessment process and for this competition, and they continue to improve our collective knowledge of rarity identification. Chris Batty and Nigel Hudson were instrumental in compiling the initial shortlist of images to be considered, while Chris Batty, Chris Bradshaw, Nic Hallam, James Lidster, Richard Millington and Mike Pennington cast the votes. We are extremely grateful to Carl Zeiss for their continued support of the Committee and this award.

Adam Rowlands on behalf of BBRC, East Walks Bungalow, Minsmere RSPB Reserve, Westleton, Suffolk IP17 3BY



BBRC
British Birds Rarities Committee

BBRC is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd

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