

The Carl Zeiss Award 2005



Bryan Thomas



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379–381. Carl Zeiss Award 2005 winner: 'Scopoli's Shearwater' *Calonectris diomedea diomedea*, 10 km south of Scilly, August 2004.

One of the most enjoyable tasks in the working year of the BBRC is judging the Carl Zeiss Award for the most instructive photograph, or series of photographs, of a British rarity assessed during that year. The photographs that we receive as part of rarity submissions are often aesthetically pleasing but, more importantly, almost always a key source of information. In recognition of their importance, Carl Zeiss Ltd, who sponsor BBRC, awards a pair of binoculars to the photographer judged to have taken the most instructive photograph or set of photographs.

This year's judging meeting was unique, for two reasons. As alluded to in last year's report, the digital revolution is now almost complete, and this year we had only four photographs in traditional format (of two birds, neither of which made the shortlist). Almost all the digital photographs were stored on a series of CDs, packed in a bag to be brought to the meeting; however, like the accompanying *BB* Editor, the bag had the misfortune to encounter the British Airways dispute at Heathrow in mid August. It took almost two weeks for the bag to resurface, and so we carried out the judging based largely on a trawl of photographs published in magazines and on websites. Secondly, we arrived at a top three of which, remarkably, none has yet been accepted as a rarity (and one never will be).

Our initial shortlist contained photographs of three birds which narrowly failed to make it to a podium finish. Nonetheless, in each case, the images undoubtedly helped in the accep-

tance of the rarity involved and demonstrated key identification features. The adult Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* at Brockholes Quarry, Lancashire, on 25th July 2004, was photographed, by Bill Aspin, in difficult conditions, and neither of the two observers was sure of the identification at the time. It was only later, when the photographs were examined closely, that key identification features (including the obvious webbing between the toes) confirmed that this was indeed a 'Semi-p', and the first for Lancashire to boot.

Richard Campey's set of photographs of Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* on Lundy, Devon, on 26th April 2004, showed a suite of characters that BBRC members felt made this non-calling bird acceptable. We now intend to re-examine all photographed Bonelli's warblers which have not been assigned to species. Finally, Ben Lascelles' photograph of the Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, taken from a boat some 15 km west of St Mary's, Scilly, on 6th September 2004, would perhaps have won in another year. It is possible to see clearly the structural features, especially the thick, stubby bill, that specifically identify this bird as a Fea's.

Of the top three entries this year, third place was awarded to the photographs of the 'Eastern' Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, thought to be of one of the races *halimodendri* or *minula*, in Aberdeen, in December 2004. From the file submitted to BBRC, we have selected images by Ian Barnard, Raymond Duncan and Harry Scott. It may be several years before we can decide



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382 & 383. Juvenile Common Swift *Apus apus*, Filey, North Yorkshire, September 2004.



Ian Barnard



Ian Barnard



Harry Scott



Raymond Duncan

384–387. 'Eastern' Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca halimodendri/minula*, Aberdeen, Northeast Scotland, December 2004.

exactly what to do with birds such as this, because the taxonomic position is still murky. The race *halimodendri* is currently regarded as part of the *curruca* group by some (e.g. *Sylvia Warblers*, Shirihai *et al.* 2001), but as more likely to be part of the *minula* group by others. While BBRC believes that *minula* itself is different enough from *curruca* for us to consider it as identifiable, whether as a race or as a species, none of the British records of eastern Lesser

Whitethroats examined so far have definitely involved *minula*; even those which have been trapped and measured fall within the overlap zone between *minula* and *halimodendri*. It may be that the sensible approach will be to accept such birds simply as 'Eastern' Lesser Whitethroats, for the time being at least. If that does indeed become the case, then photographs like these would be invaluable.

Tony Collinson's photographs of a Common

Swift *Apus apus* are the first pictures of a non-rarity to make the final shortlist. Many observers of this bird, at Filey, in North Yorkshire, on 22nd September 2004, felt that it was a Pallid Swift *A. pallidus*. However, Tony's photographs clearly show it to be a juvenile Common Swift with striking pale crescents on the feathers, making it seem perhaps atypically pale. That the juvenile plumage of Common Swift is poorly known is perhaps a pitfall in the identification of Pallid Swift that we had not fully realised previously. Had it not been for these photographs, it is possible that this bird would have been submitted as a Pallid Swift and may even have been accepted as such – even though BBRC does take a hard line with this species.

There was a clear winner this year, however: Bryan Thomas's series of photographs of a putative 'Scopoli's Shearwater' *Calonectris diomedea diomedea*, taken some 10 km south of Scilly, on 2nd August 2004. This record is currently in circulation with BBRC and, if accepted, will then need to go to BOURC as there has been no previous accepted record of this, the Mediterranean form of Cory's Shearwater, in Britain. The photographs seem to show the appropriate underwing pattern, slim bill and generally slender shape of Scopoli's, and they will be fundamental to the decision that must be made about this record. If this bird is accepted as Scopoli's, it will be almost totally on the basis of these photos; if it is not, then, given the quality of the images, we are effectively saying that a bird needs to be measured (i.e. either trapped or a specimen obtained) to

Colin Bradshaw, Chris Bradshaw, Chris Kehoe and Roger Riddington
c/o 9 Tynemouth Place, North Shields, Tyne & Wear NE30 4BJ



Tim Loseby

388. Presentation of the Carl Zeiss Award, at the *British Birds* stand at the British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water, August 2005. As described above, Bryan Thomas was hard at work photographing seabirds in August 2005, and his binoculars were accepted on his behalf by fellow resident Scilly birder Will Wagstaff. Presenting the binoculars on behalf of Carl Zeiss Ltd is the TV Wildlife Presenter Simon King (right).

categorically exclude small individuals of the Atlantic race *C. d. borealis*.

Bryan is a worthy winner of the Carl Zeiss Award, having come second, third and fourth in this competition in the past five years! When we telephoned him to let him know of our decision, he was, appropriately, on a pelagic trip off Scilly photographing seabirds! Bryan chose as his prize the superb 10x42 Zeiss FL binocular. We are grateful to Carl Zeiss Ltd, as always, for their sponsorship of BBRC and of this competition.



The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd