



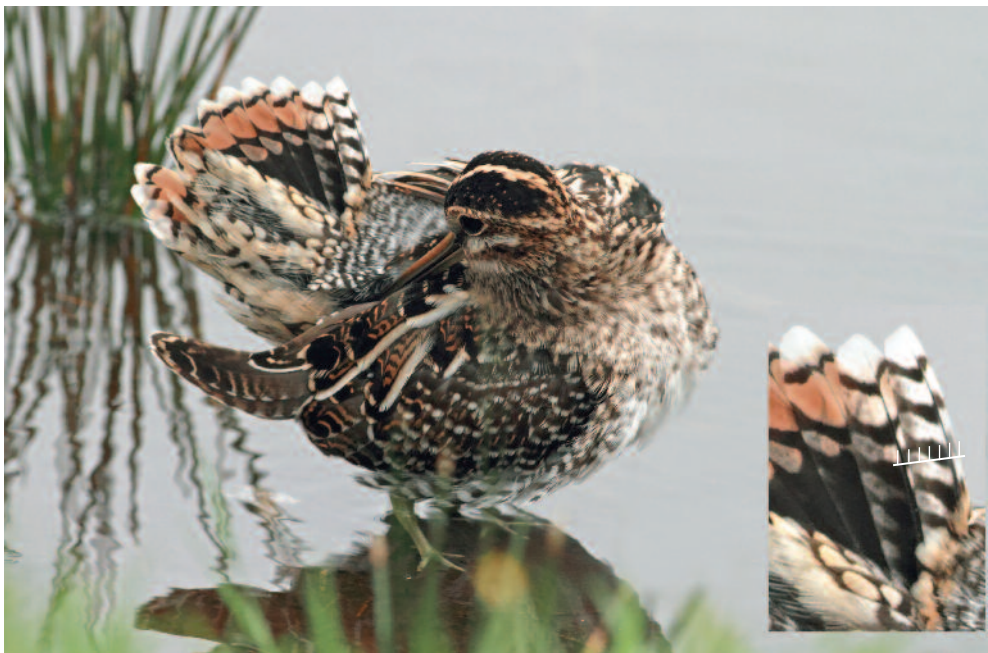
# The Carl Zeiss Award 2012

The Carl Zeiss Award, which has been running since 1991, is awarded for the photograph or set of photographs judged to have been the most instructive in the BBRC's assessment of rarities during the previous year. Once a final shortlist had been agreed, voting members of BBRC selected this year's winner and runners-up: each member simply ranked all the contenders in the list, and the one with the most points was the winner. A very strong shortlist this year reflects the still-increasing value of photographic documentation to the record-assessment process. As usual, the list included a mixture of images that were instructive in terms of the identification of difficult or poorly known species and subspecies together with those that simply provided categorical proof in support of a record that otherwise might not have been accepted.

Photographs that made it through to the final shortlist but were not in this year's top five included Mike Gould's images of a putative 'Eastern' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus*

*ochruros phoenicuroides* in Kent; a ringtail harrier photographed by Martin Goodey on Scilly (submitted as a Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* but the photos provoked a useful discussion of potential hybrid features); Rob Martin's photos of the Norfolk Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans*; Brydon Thomason's shots of a female Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* in Shetland; and Alison Duncan's images of a Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in Orkney.

Martin Goodey's name also appears in our top five this year, with his second shortlisted entry from Scilly being some stunning images of the Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata* at Porth Hellick, on St Mary's, in autumn 2011. Clinching the identification of this species still requires photographic documentation to ensure that the key features have been determined correctly. In cases where we need this level of detail to support the record, the quality of the images available can sometimes lead to subjective judgements (is that outermost tail feather *really* parallel-



Martin Goodey

259. Fifth Juvenile Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*, Porth Hellick, St Mary's, Scilly, autumn 2011.



Steve Arlow

**260. Fourth** Putative adult Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*, Pitsea landfill, Essex, February 2011.

sided and narrow-looking, with the right pattern of barring?), but the 2011 Porth Hellick bird was extremely well described in a comprehensive written submission that was supported by a wealth of high-quality images from a number of photographers. This enabled a critical analysis of the salient features and made the assessment relatively straightforward. The spread tail in Martin's

shot of the bird preening shows the pattern and shape of the outer tail feather perfectly and impressed all the judges.

In fourth place came the Greater London/Essex (putative) Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*. This bird continues several themes that were apparent in last year's competition (*Brit. Birds* 104: 462–465): a record of a difficult gull from southeast England,



Steve Gantlett

**261. Third** First-winter Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, Cley, Norfolk, January 2012.



Brian Cox



Brian Cox

**262 & 263.** Second Putative 'Eastern' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*, Dungeness, Kent, November 1981.

potentially a first for Britain, which is still in circulation with the Committee. The assessment process this time has been aided significantly by the large number of images and detailed descriptions submitted by a number of observers who encountered the bird during its sporadic appearances in the region. Several judges commented on the quality of the documentation submitted by the original finder, Dominic Mitchell. The value of the photos submitted by Dominic and others enabled us to get to grips properly with the more subtle aspects of the identification, such as the colour tones of the mantle, and this added significantly to the written descriptions. Steve Arlow's spread-wing shot secured fourth place this year, one judge calling this image a 'mastershot' as it shows the 'exact details of the secondary pattern and wing-tip (the gradation of black, the position of white 'pearls', the nature of the mirrors) from both below and above (and on both wings).' In last year's award, Steve took third place, with a different but similarly incisive series of images of a potential Thayer's Gull *L. (glaucoides) thayeri* that was sampling the delights of the landfills along the north shore of the Thames Estuary.

In third place was Steve Gantlett's series of photographs of the Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* at Cley, in Norfolk, from November 2011 to January 2012. Steve's images provided the catalyst for a range of

expert opinions from across the Atlantic (and the Irish Sea), which in turn highlighted the importance of individual feather patterns for clinching the identification. Combining these with a critical assessment of structure and moult enabled this difficult identification to be settled with confidence. This shows how really high-quality images can contribute to our collective knowledge and improve understanding of particular identification challenges – one of the key criteria of this award. Sometimes, these challenges are not pursued so assiduously in areas where the species concerned is more abundant (and where the importance of establishing one particular identification is perhaps not so great); in some cases at least, we can potentially learn things about identification from a well-studied individual vagrant in a rarely encountered plumage which have not been apparent in that species' normal range.

Second place this year was awarded for a series of images taken over 30 years ago! Following the debate over the identification of the potential 'Eastern' Black Redstarts in Kent and Northumberland in autumn 2011, Brian Cox dug out his slides of a bird trapped at Dungeness in 1981. That bird had previously been accepted by BBRC as the first record of a Black Redstart showing characters of one of the eastern races and it was recorded as such in the 1982 annual report (*Brit. Birds* 76: 507). However, the record was later removed

from the British List by BOURC when the potential pitfalls of a hybrid Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus* × Black Redstart became apparent (BOU 2002). The original documentation submitted to the two committees was insufficient to rule out that pitfall but Brian had the foresight to realise that his images of the bird in the hand, showing the spread wing and folded wing, allowed a much more detailed assessment of the wing formula and enabled the identification to be revisited. This is another record that is still in circulation at the time of



Ian Fulton



Ian Fulton

**264 & 265. Carl Zeiss Award 2012, winner** Putative Asian Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica dauricaljaponica*, Talisker, Skye, Highland, June 2011.

writing but so far the analysis supports the view that the record should indeed be reconsidered, potentially as a first for Britain. This illustrates once again just how important it is that rarities are properly documented, giving us the opportunity to return to old records as our understanding of identification criteria moves on. This is particularly true of races and 'cryptic' species and this leads nicely on to this year's winning images...

A confiding Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, seen on Orkney (and photographed by Roderick Thorne) and then on Skye, proved to be even more interesting than the observers realised initially. The photographs were sufficient to determine that the same individual was involved and that the record did not appear to be of the familiar European breeding form *C. d. rufula*. We felt that Ian Fulton's images from Skye provided the most informative record of the bird and enabled this individual to be assigned confidently to one of the migratory Asian races *C. d. daurica* or *C. d. japonica*. The vagrancy potential of these forms had already been identified by the Norwegians, but it was not on the radar of many British birders. However, articles in *Birding World* (Thorne 2011, Tveit 2011) were quick to highlight the credentials of this particular claim and, although the record's acceptance to the British List is still pending at the time of writing, there is no doubt that this potential first would have been completely overlooked

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**BBRC**  
British Birds Rarities Committee



### BBRC is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd and the RSPB

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in the absence of the photographs. Those photographs have alerted us to the suite of characters that separate the eastern forms and both records committees and rarity hunters should now be aware of this likely candidate for full species status. Ian Fulton will be presented with his prize, a pair of 8 × 32 Zeiss FL binoculars, at the British Bird-watching Fair on Friday 17th August 2012, at 4.00 pm in the Events Marquee.

### 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](http://www.birdguides.com) and Rare Bird Alert [www.rarebirdalert.co.uk](http://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk)), in so doing helping the Committee to assess records. It is a great pleasure to review the images, both for 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 for consideration and Chris Batty, Chris Bradshaw, Paul French, Martin Garner, Nic Hallam, Richard Millington, Mike Pennington, Richard Schofield and Steve Votier cast the votes. We are extremely grateful to Carl Zeiss for their continued support of the Committee and this award.

### References

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