



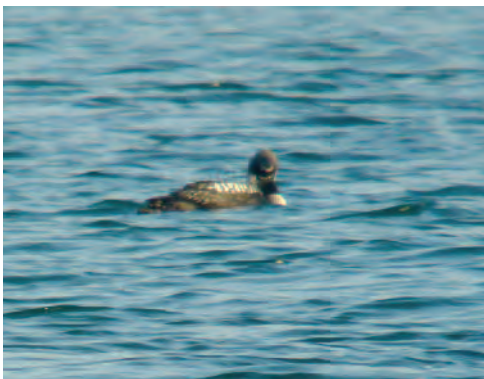
# The Carl Zeiss Award 2014

Introduced in December 1991 (*Brit. Birds* 84: 589), the Carl Zeiss Award is presented to the photographer who supplies the most helpful, interesting and/or instructive photographs of a rarity, taken in Britain during the year in question (in this case 2013). Defining 'helpful, interesting and/or instructive' frequently leads to an in-depth discussion among the BBRC voting members of what criteria should apply for selection and scoring. Ultimately it comes down to individual preferences among those members, but some common themes emerge. The shortlisted and high-scoring images are sometimes instructive, but just as often they provide a definitive record of a rare bird that would most likely have escaped the record books – sometimes because the identification was incorrect but much more often because there was insufficient documentation to prove the identification without that photographic evidence. Such images are extremely helpful to the Committee's work and should therefore be considered worthy candidates and potential winners. To this end, it is not important whether the photographer realised the importance of the image at the time they pressed the shutter. The critical thing is that they captured the image and that it was subsequently judged to be helpful, interesting and/or instructive.

The year 2013 was an exceptional one for extremely rare birds and some of the really

headline-grabbing records understandably made the shortlist. There is a real theme this year, with a number of images breaking a 'credibility barrier' for a species or plumage to be considered and accepted in Britain. Others involved records of taxa which are particularly difficult to identify, or birds showing characters that suggested potential hybridisation, and these challenge the Committee to determine where to set thresholds of acceptability. Given the challenges involved, the assessment process of several of the birds referred to in this article was completed a matter of days before this issue of *BB* went to press. It is understandable that high standards of photographic documentation of such difficult records should lend themselves as candidates for the award.

Among the shortlisted images, the Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* at Crossens Outer Marsh, Southport, Lancashire & North Merseyside, created significant debate following the publication of Craig Bell's images in November. In the past, bizarre, lookalike hybrids have masqueraded as Baikal Teals, but it quickly became clear that the apparently atypical facial markings of the Southport bird were not necessarily atypical after all. Craig's images were undoubtedly instructive in improving our knowledge in the variation of this rare vagrant from the east. James Hanlon's photographs of a juvenile 'Northern Harrier' *Circus cyaneus hudsonius* at the Ouse



Roger Riddington



Roger Riddington

**246. Fifth equal Adult Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, Grutness, Mainland Shetland, May 2013.**

Washes RSPB reserve, Cambridgeshire, in October provided pin-sharp resolution of the salient features of this still tricky-to-confirm plumage. They also helped to further our understanding of potential plumage variation and the criteria for acceptance. Mark Pearson's Brännich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* at Filey, Yorkshire, in December was definitely one of those birds that lifted the credibility barrier. With such good-quality images there was no doubt about the identification and the bird has duly been accepted as the first confirmed record for England since July 1977. There have been a number of 'close calls' submitted in recent years, but the circumstances of those observations caused the record to fall (just) short of an acceptable Brännich's. With a well-watched (and much appreciated) second Brännich's at Portland, Dorset, later in the same month, we wait with interest to see whether the suggestion that this species should be a more regular visitor to English waters will be proved correct (van Bemmelen & Wielstra 2008). Paul Rowe's skill in capturing the diagnostic pattern of the outermost tail feather of the Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* at St Brides, Pembrokeshire, in November was instrumental in assigning the Welsh bird to this recently split species. The images of the 'Caspian Stonechat' *Saxicola maurus variegatus* captured by Alastair Wilson on St Agnes, Scilly, in November were selected as being pivotal in the correct identification of this individual. Alastair's terrific image of the conveniently splayed uppertail leaves no doubt that this individual is a first-winter male of the northern form that breeds



John Bratten

**247. Fifth equal** Grey-morph Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*, River Humber, Yorkshire, November 2013.

around the northern Caspian Sea. It has recently been proposed that this taxon should be renamed *S. m. hemprichii* (Svensson *et al.* 2012, and see [www.bbrc.org.uk](http://www.bbrc.org.uk)), based upon the prior use of the name *hemprichii*.

And so to the final shortlist for this year's competition, which comprised six sets of images. There was a two-way tie for fifth place between the Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* photographed by BB's very own Roger Riddington at Grutness, Shetland, on 16th May, and a grey-morph Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* photographed by John Bratten on the River Humber in Yorkshire on 23rd November. The diver (found by former Committee man Paul Harvey) represents the first confirmed example of a summer-plumaged Pacific in Britain. Previous claims have been submitted, without photographic evidence, but the Grutness bird is another example where the credibility barrier was overcome by the grainy digiscoped photographs that accompanied the written description. The identification of grey-morph Gyr Falcons is



Tom Whitley



Tom Whitley

**248. Second equal** Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Pendeen, Cornwall, August 2013.



Steve Tomlinson

**249. Second equal** First-summer female Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*, Margate, Kent, May 2013.

notoriously difficult, the key complication being the possibility of escaped falconers' birds, which can involve a wide array of parental possibilities, but often incorporate Saker *F. cherrug* genes. While Gyr Falcons are not unexpected vagrants to the northern and

western islands and coast-lines of Britain, they are almost unknown on the east coast and there have been several notable false starts in previous years. The decision to accept the Yorkshire bird was largely dependent on John Bratten's high-quality images.

There was a three-way tie for second place between a Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* photographed by Tom Whiley at Pendeen, Cornwall on 18th August; the Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus* photographed by Steve Tomlinson at Margate, Kent, in May; and the Black-throated Thrush

*T. atrogularis* photographed by Hugh Adlesee at Banchory, North-east Scotland, in March. The tropicbird was something of an exercise in credibility. Anyone with an ear to the ground in the wider birding community will have picked up on the doubts



Hugh Adlesee

**250. Second equal** First-winter male Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*, Banchory, North-east Scotland, March 2013.

expressed by those observers watching from this renowned Cornish headline when they learnt that this bird had apparently flown past right under their noses! The votes in favour of this record were clearly in response to the fact that the record would have been too controversial to have been accepted without the definitive images that Tom secured. Voters commented that the initial images of both of the thrushes, which formed part of the subsequent record submissions to BBRC, were not as revealing as some of the later ones, which would also have been worthy of consideration. For the Dusky Thrush, the opportunity to examine the plumage tones and, in particular, the rela-

tively rich brown coloration to some of the underpart feathering in Steve's photographs had caused some discussion within the Committee (and the wider birding community) as to where the thresholds for hybrid influence should be drawn. For the Black-throated Thrush, the reddish feathering at the base of the tail led to similar concerns (this time whether the bird had some Red-throated Thrush *T. ruficollis* genes). For the Dusky Thrush, an examination of museum skins at Tring confirmed that the plumage tones were compatible with individuals collected in the north of the breeding zone and therefore the bird was likely to have been geographically isolated from the influence of the more



Jim Sim

**251. Carl Zeiss Award 2014, winner** Juvenile Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*, Bowmore, Islay, Argyll, July 2013.

southerly distributed Naumann's Thrush *T. naumanni*. The Black-throated Thrush has now been accepted as such, but the record will be published with a note to say that the plumage characters show some (albeit limited) evidence of Red-throated Thrush *T. ruficollis* genes.

The final set of images in the 2013 competition was a deserved winner. The first Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila* for Britain, found on Tiree, Argyll, in July 1953, lay in a museum tray, masquerading as a Magnificent Frigatebird *F. magnificens* for many years before former BBRC members Grahame Walbridge and Brian Small undertook some excellent detective work to uncover its true identity. The first record was amazing enough, but it is even more extraordinary that, almost exactly 60 years later, the same species turned up again on another island in western Scotland. The close proximity of a famous distillery may have caused some sense of disbelief in the claim – perhaps the observers had been slightly intoxicated and were therefore mistaken! – but the images captured by Jim Sim at Bowmore, Islay, on 5th July left no such doubt. The Islay frigatebird romped home by a large majority in this year's competition, to win Jim a pair of Zeiss binoculars as reward for his efforts. Voters felt that these images provided great documentation of a fantastic record, one that would otherwise so easily have been lost.

They were also instructive in confirming the identification criteria for vagrants of this species. The images were most definitely helpful, interesting and instructive in equal measure.

Jim will be presented with his prize, a pair of the fabulous new ZEISS Victory SF 8 × 42 binoculars (see pp. 481–482), at the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water on Friday 15th August. Further details will be posted on the BBRC website ([www.bbrc.org.uk](http://www.bbrc.org.uk)) in due course, where a selection of previous winning images can be viewed along with links to the previous competition write-ups in *BB*.

### Acknowledgments

BBRC is grateful to all those observers who submit their photographs for consideration, either directly to the committee or via our arrangement with websites (BirdGuides [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com) and Rare Bird Alert [www.rarebirdalert.co.uk](http://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk)). Chris Batty and Nigel Hudson were again instrumental in pulling together the shortlisted images and the voting members of BBRC suggested amendments to the shortlist and voted for their top five. We are extremely grateful to Carl Zeiss for their continued support of the committee and this award.

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British Birds Rarities Committee



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