

# Bird Photograph of the Year 2008

The judging of 'BPY' is always one of the highlights of the *BB* year. With more entries this year, and a clutch of unfamiliar names on the leader board, it is satisfying to know that this competition continues to go from strength to strength. This does not make the judging any easier, though; in fact, with so many top-class entries to choose from, judging this year was perhaps the closest for many years.

A concern voiced by the judges in recent competitions was the relative lack of routine post-processing carried out by photographers,

perhaps owing to a misunderstanding of the rules. On behalf of the judges, David Tipling prepared a short article on digital manipulation techniques (*Brit. Birds* 101: 39–42), suggesting some of the simpler techniques that can be employed to improve images, and which would be appropriate if carried out on entries for this competition. One of the characteristics of digital photography is that the initial results tend not to be as crisp and contrasting as their conventional counterparts. This is readily overcome by using a digital manipulation program, such as Photoshop, which modifies brightness, contrast and sharpness and allows the photographer to crop an image to bring out the best composition. David's article has undoubtedly resulted in improvements in the quality of the images we received.

A total of five slide images were received for the 2008 competition but we have decided that, from 2009, only digital images will be accepted. We are also investigating means by which images can be submitted via our website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk) in order to simplify the entry process. Details will be announced in the January 2009 issue.

In previous years, this competition has encouraged and promoted digiscoping as a means of documenting interesting aspects of bird behaviour, beyond that possible using a conventional lens. Our 2007 winner, depicting the unusual begging behaviour of juvenile Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*, illustrates exactly what is achievable. And to encourage digiscopers to submit their best work for judging, The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust has made a generous cash prize available. In 2008, however, the judges felt that although the images entered included several extremely attractive portraits, none met the aims and goals set for this award. Consequently, and with the agreement of The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, the judges decided not to award the digiscoping prize this year.

As in previous years, the judging procedure followed the traditional format. Each image was viewed twice, and a shortlist of 20 images was

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*for an adventure  
called life*

**The Eric Hosking  
Charitable Trust**



**198.** BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR 2007 Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, near Aviemore, Scotland, April 2007  
(Canon EOS 1D3; Canon 300-mm lens; 1/3200, f3.5, ISO 125). Philip Newman

1st	Common Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	(plate 198)	Philip Newman
2nd	Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	(plate 199)	Harri Taavetti
3rd	Snow Buntings <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	(plate 200)	Ernie Janes
4th=	Little Ringed Plovers <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	(plate 201)	Bill Baston
4th=	Wryneck <i>Jynx torquilla</i>	(plate 202)	Philip Mugridge
6th	Sooty Falcon <i>Falco concolor</i>	(plate 203)	Jens Eriksen
7th	Common Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i> , King Eider <i>S. spectabilis</i> , Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i> and Steller's Eider <i>Polysticta stelleri</i>	(plate 204)	Harri Taavetti
8th	Steller's Eiders <i>Polysticta stelleri</i>	(plate 205)	Bill Coster
9th	Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	(plate 206)	Hugh Harrop
10th	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	(plate 207)	Roger Tidman
11th	Common Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>		Steve Young
12th	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>		Philip Newman
13th=	Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>		Richard Steel
13th=	Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i>		David Edge
15th=	Willow Grouse <i>Lagopus lagopus</i>		Markus Varesvuo
15th=	Puffin <i>Fratercula arctica</i>		Rebecca Nason
15th=	Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> and Common Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		Mike Lane
18th	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>		Markus Varesvuo
19th	Avocets <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		Roger Tidman
20th	Common Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquatus</i>		Tom Wylie

(eventually) selected. At this point, the photographs were examined even more closely, the judges looking for sharpness and clarity of reproduction, as well as any telltale indications of over-sharpening or other signs of excessive digital manipulation. Because there were so many outstanding images, judging was exceptionally difficult this year and there was no clear contender for first prize. But after spending a total of five hours pouring over some wonderful images of both common and widespread and rare and exotic species, the votes were cast to produce the results shown above.

First place this year goes to Philip Newman, who produced this outstanding image of a cock Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* in full display. When seen like this, with the soft morning light highlighting the iridescence of the greens, bronzes and purples, you realise just what an attractive bird the Pheasant really is. Philip commented that he had previously noted that Pheasants were quite common in the Highland Wildlife Park near Aviemore, where they can regularly be seen displaying among attractive open birch woodland. With this very image in mind, he returned in April 2007. 'For once I was in the right place at the right time because the first Pheasant I slowly drove up to immediately walked onto a nearby mound and started to display, giving me just enough time to rattle off a few images. I did not have any time to

adjust camera settings and consequently the RAW file is a little dark and this has been recovered in Photoshop.' The judges felt that although Philip had frozen the movement of the body to reveal the plumage to perfection, the slight blurring of the wing-tips enhanced the sense of action within the image, and said so much more, as this frisky male demanded to be noticed by his females. This is the first occasion that Philip has won this competition, but we hope that it will not be the last. Philip will receive a telescope from Zeiss, books of his choice from Collins and A&C Black and a cash prize, as well as the traditional inscribed salver for the competition's overall winner.

Northern Norway is a wonderful destination and, as no fewer than four of this year's top ten images were taken here, it is clear to see why: exciting birds, breathtaking scenery, superb light, obliging birds and always the opportunity for that unexpected bonus shot. Our second prize this year goes to Harri Taavetti, who took this unusual picture of a Little Stint *Calidris minuta* at Höyholmen, Tana River delta, on 4th June 2007, which embodies much of the urgency of the brief Arctic summer. Harri commented that 'on the site there were many shallow, sandy pools with insects forming a mattress around the water. A flock of Little Stints was feeding on the insects, and when the stints ran along, the insects took off making a



199. SECOND Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Tana River delta, Norway, June 2007 (Canon EOS 20D; Canon 300-mm f2.8 lens + 2.0x converter; 1/1250, f5.6, ISO 200). Harri Taavetti



**200. THIRD** Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis*, Salthouse, Norfolk, February 2008  
(Canon EOS ID Mark II; Canon 16–35-mm lens set at 29 mm; 1/1000, f8, ISO 320, remote exposure). Ernie Jones

“clear” area around the birds.’ The judges felt that this picture told a fascinating story: the dashing behaviour of the newly arrived Little Stint eager to stock up on depleted fat reserves before heading east to breed in Arctic Russia, and the innate behaviour of the insects, keeping just out of harm’s way and re-settling behind the bird when the danger had passed. As our second-placed winner, Harri will receive an outdoor jacket from Sprayway, a selection of books from Collins and A&C Black, and a cash prize.

Just occasionally, the BPY judges say that they wished they had thought of that. In this particular case, both the location and the birds were very familiar to the judging panel, most of whom had visited Salthouse, Norfolk, and come away with pleasing shots of the wintering Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis*. But Ernie Janes looked at the photographic possibilities from a different angle (literally) and came up with this unique shot. To achieve this striking image, he set up his camera with a 16–35-mm wide-angle zoom lens, and used a remote shutter release. By using a short-focal-length lens, Ernie has not only achieved a considerable depth of field, freezing the birds as they descended to feed, but has also managed to include an attractive sky-scape and the well-known shingle bank behind. While perhaps this technique may not be to everyone’s taste, the judges felt that the combined artistic and technical aspects of the photograph merited a well-deserved third place. Ernie will receive a selection of books from Collins and A&C Black, and a cash prize.

Bill Baston’s delightful picture of a family of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* has it all and fully deserves its fourth-placed position. This is a crisp portrait in superb light with an appealing youngster that almost seems to be pleading with its parent to be ‘let in’, plus the novelty of a ‘six-legged’ adult! Bill commented that ‘this family of Little Ringed Plovers was feeding on the edge of the Alikes saltpans on the Greek island of Zakynthos. Being in a rather exposed area, prone to disturbance from locals, tourists and the local dog and cat population, the chicks would run to the calling adult birds and seek sanctuary under their feathers. In this photo, two chicks have already disappeared, leaving just their legs showing, and a third chick looks as if it is asking if there is room for one more!’

Also in fourth (equal) position comes Philip

Mugridge’s shot of a Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* at its nest in Bulgaria. Usually, a photograph of a bird at the nest would not make the top ten in this competition, as these tend to be repeating what has gone before, when nest photography was often the only means of obtaining a good-quality photograph of many species. In this case, though, the judges felt that the Wryneck’s cryptic plumage blended so well with the gnarled and cracked bark on its nest tree that it has become difficult to see where the bird ends and the tree begins, particularly towards the tail-tip. As the nest was in shade, Philip has used fill flash to bring out the plumage detail to good effect, as well as capturing a highlight in the bird’s eye, and illuminating one of its favourite foods: ant pupae.

In sixth place, Jens Eriksen’s action-packed shot of a Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* scything through the air evokes both the power and the beauty of this rare falcon. As the bird looks directly into the lens, enhancing the drama of the moment which Jens’s chance shot has frozen, it is almost possible to feel the fear which this bird would instil into a hapless migrant passerine about to make landfall.

Seventh place goes to Harri Taavetti for his attractive portrait of four of northern Norway’s most colourful sea ducks, which he has entitled ‘the Arctic handsones’: Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, King Eider *S. spectabilis*, Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and Steller’s Eider *Polysticta stelleri*. Harri commented: ‘While I was sitting on a floating pontoon, many King, Steller’s and Common Eiders and Long-tailed Ducks were swimming around at close range. As this flock swam past the pontoon, I realised the unique situation and I set a small aperture to get a decent depth of field with all the birds as sharp as possible.’ The result was this stunning, well-composed image, which the judges felt fully deserved a place in the top ten.

Sticking with the Norwegian seaduck theme, Bill Coster successfully captured a remarkable aspect of Steller’s Eider behaviour when he came across this tightly knit group of wintering birds at Varanger Fjord in early April 2007. Documenting unusual behaviour as well as producing an artistic image will never fail to impress the judges. In this shot, Bill has captured the contrast between the brightly patterned males and duller females, which adds to this attractive portrait; this image may have



**201.** FOURTH equal Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius*, Alikes salt pans, Zakynthos, Greece, May 2007 (Canon EOS ID Mark II; Canon 500-mm lens + 1.4x extender; 1/320, f9, ISO 200). *Bill Baston*

**202.** FOURTH equal Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Bulgaria, May 2007 (Canon EOS ID Mark II; 500-mm lens + 1.4x extender; 1/80, f5.6, ISO 400 with fill flash). *Philip Mugridge*



achieved an even higher place if the right-hand-most male had not been cropped. Bill commented that this flock of eiders crowded together on the sea to form a densely packed group, quite unlike the behaviour of other duck; a truly remarkable sight. The judges thought the same and awarded Bill's superb image eighth place.

Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* are always delightful birds to photograph, being both approachable and highly photogenic. So for an image of this species to make the top ten, it really needs to be something special. We felt that Hugh Harrop had achieved this with his action shot of a male in flight at Båtsfjord Fjellen in northern Norway, which takes ninth position. Hugh commented that he came across a party of incredibly active Red-necked Phalaropes on a roadside pool, constantly chasing each other in flight and on the water. With so many opportunities, he spent several hours working with these delightful birds, concentrating on trying to capture a sharp in-flight image. Hand-holding a heavy 500-mm lens and camera combo amidst armies of mosquitoes was not easy but persist-

ence paid off and as this bird flew up off the water directly towards him, he captured this stunning image, the subject being enhanced by the softness of the late evening light.

Last year, Roger Tidman won this competition with his image of a Common Swift *Apus apus* drinking. This year, he returns in tenth position with his crisp image of a Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* frozen in flight, complete with a mouthful of mud. This is behaviour we observe routinely, but which is rarely captured so well. It also makes one wonder how the poor bird ever gets the taste of mud out of its mouth! Roger's efforts to obtain this image seemed all the more outstanding when we realised (after the judging) that he had a badly dislocated knuckle and his arm in a sling, preventing him from wielding his camera for this action shot, and so he had to achieve it by resting the lens on his car window and waiting!

As mentioned above, the judges were again disappointed that relatively few images were submitted for the digiscoping prize. For this year's competition, the images received failed to convey the benefits which digiscoping holds over conventional photography, and which this

category is hoping to promote. We know that there are many avid digiscopers out there who produce some outstanding work and we encourage them to enter this competition next year. Many birders routinely carry a small camera and opportunistically take 'digiscoped' and 'digibinned' images, many of which are of high quality and depict interesting behaviour. It is these images, some of which appear on websites such as BirdGuides ([www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)), that we are hoping to attract. This competition remains committed to promoting and extending the benefits of digiscoping.

The prizes for the overall winner, second and third places will be presented at this year's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water, in August. We wish to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors, Zeiss ([www.zeiss.co.uk](http://www.zeiss.co.uk)), A&C Black ([www.acblack.com](http://www.acblack.com)), Collins ([www.collins.co.uk](http://www.collins.co.uk)), Sprayway ([www.sprayway.com](http://www.sprayway.com)) and The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, once again for their support, without which this competition would not continue. The rules for next year's competition will be announced in the January 2009 issue of *BB*, and on our website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk).

*Richard Chandler, Tim Appleton, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking, Peter Kennerley and David Tipling, c/o 4 Kings Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4AX*



**203.** SIXTH Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, Ras As Sawadi, Oman, September 2007  
(Canon EOS 5D; Canon 500-mm lens; 1/4000, f4, ISO 200). *Jens Eriksen*





**204.** SEVENTH Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, King Eider *S. spectabilis*, Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri*, Båtsfjord, Norway, March 2007. (Canon 20D; Canon 300-mm f2.8 lens + 2.0x converter; 1/250, f22, ISO 400). Harri Taavetti

**205.** EIGHTH Steller's Eiders *Polysticta stelleri*, Varanger Fjord, Norway, April 2007. (Canon EOS ID; Canon 400-mm lens with 1.4x converter; 1/500, f16, ISO 400). Bill Coster





**206.** NINTH Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, Båtsfjord Fjellen, Norway, July 2007  
(Canon EOS 1D Mark II; 500-mm lens; 1/2000, f4.5, ISO 200). *Hugh Harrop*

**207.** TENTH Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Spain, May 2007  
(Canon EOS 1D Mark IIN; Canon 500-mm f4 lens; 1/1600, f7.1, ISO 320). *Roger Tidman*

