

The *BB/BTO* Best Bird Book of the Year 2010

British Birds and the British Trust for Ornithology announce the winner of the Award for Best Bird Book of the Year. All books reviewed in *BB* or the BTO publications *BTO News* and *Bird Study* (and on the BTO website www.bto.org) during the year 2010 were eligible for consideration for this Award.

We gathered, as usual, on the Friday afternoon before the BTO's Swanwick conference to judge this award. What was not quite so typical was the deep snow lying in Derbyshire and challenging travelling conditions en route to the meeting. Perhaps that made a table of books that included stunning photographs of sub-Saharan Africa and Saudi Arabia's Empty Quarter, as well as magical birds from around the globe, that much more appealing. It was certainly a compelling focus for an afternoon, a means to shut out the dreary weather – and, after all, one of the key attributes of a

good book is to be able to grip the reader's attention and transport him or her to another place. We feel confident that each of our top six will have that effect.

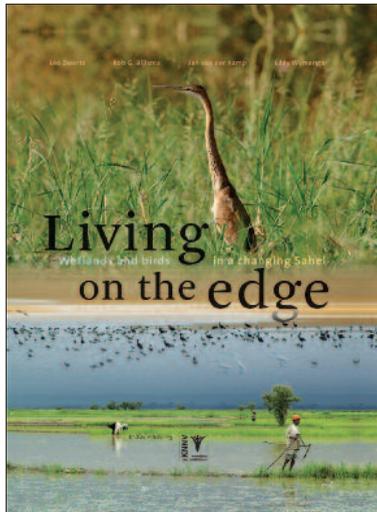
As ever, there is no great science to this selection, no blizzard of rules to abide by – we simply aim to highlight books that we feel are of special merit to readers of *BB* and members of the BTO. This year, we seemed to settle on a consensus remarkably quickly – the impressions from reviewers and our own experiences quickly resolved into a clear winner, and a similarly well-defined clutch of deserving runners-up.

Winner

Living on the Edge:
wetlands and birds in
a changing Sahel

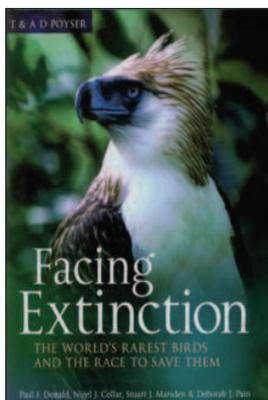
By Leo Zwarts, Rob G. Bijlsma, Jan van der Kamp and Eddy Wymenga.
KNNV Publishing, 2009.
Reviewed in BB by Ian Newton (*Brit. Birds* 103: 197–198).

This terrific book ties in well with the BTO's 'Out of Africa' appeal, although that was not one of the main reasons for voting it our winner this year. It is a tremendous book in every department. It marks a step-change in our knowledge of the ecology of this critically important region in the European–African migration system and of the many species (familiar to us on their breeding



grounds) that winter there. It presents a massive amount of information in an accessible and attractive fashion – it is thoroughly well written, beautifully illustrated and superbly produced. The wealth of coloured graphics has been particularly well thought out and encourages readers to delve into the figures and learn more about the region, rather than having the (all-too-common) opposite effect.

It is not cheap, but birders who shell out for this tome are unlikely to be disappointed. We noted also the significant financial support from the Dutch Government – a fine example for other western governments to follow.

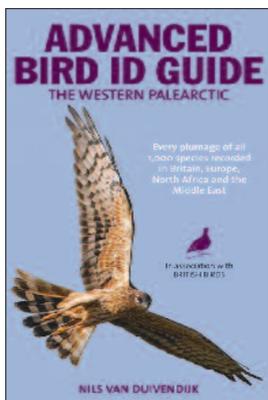


2nd Facing Extinction

By Paul Donald, Nigel Collar, Stuart Marsden and Deborah Pain. Poyser, 2010.

Reviewed in BB by Simon Aspinall (Brit. Birds 103: 739–740).

Like our winner, this book also takes a wider theme, well beyond the shores of Britain (or indeed the boundaries of the Western Palearctic). It achieves its aim – drawing attention to the key conservation issues related to birds – particularly well. As the *BB* reviewer observed, it does this in a refreshingly clear, uncomplicated (yet scholarly) style, unfettered by statistics, in a way that will draw readers in to focus on the issues in hand. As a statement of where we stand at the moment on key conservation issues relating to birds it is hard to see how it could have been bettered. Unlike the *BB* reviewer, we felt that it was not an unreasonably expensive book, and the fact that all proceeds go to BirdLife’s Preventing Extinctions Programme is an extra reason to buy it. It is nicely illustrated and produced, and we recommend it unreservedly to anyone interested in birds.

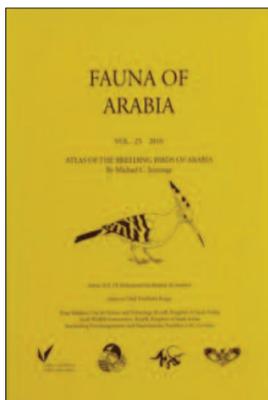


3rd Advanced Bird ID Guide

By Nils van Duivendijk. New Holland, 2010.

Reviewed in BB by Martin Garner (Brit. Birds 103: 680–681).

This is a novel concept in the world of bird books related to identification – there is nothing quite like it available commercially – and that was a factor in us placing it on the winner’s podium in this award. It is a pretty simple idea – it’s an aide-mémoire for birders in the field, a checklist of the key things to look for when faced with something unfamiliar – but it has been executed very well indeed (it was initially published only in Dutch, so to some extent that may have helped the author to fine-tune the English version). Although it is essentially a compilation of well-known field ID criteria, there must be few birders who do not learn something new from virtually every double-page spread of this book. We also felt that the publisher’s decision to produce a relatively inexpensive softback version was refreshing and will add to the book’s impact by making it widely available. It represents amazing value for a RRP of less than £15.

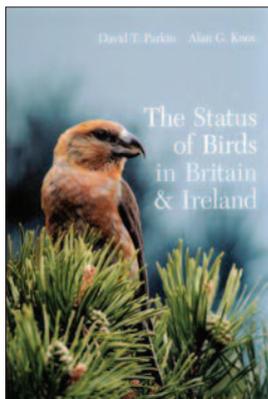


4th Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

By Michael C. Jennings. *Fauna of Arabia*, Vol. 25, 2010.

Reviewed in BB by Nigel Redman (Brit. Birds 103: 549–550).

This is in many respects ‘simply’ a traditional atlas. In terms of presenting and analysing data, it largely follows a well-trodden path rather than breaking new ground. But this is a simply monumental effort by the author, who has driven this project from the start and collected a lot of the data himself (or organised expeditions for others to collect it). The result is a thoroughly impressive atlas of a sizeable and (in atlassing terms) extremely difficult area of the globe. It’s a shame that the high cover price will prevent many more western birders having it on their bookshelves, because parts of the Arabian Peninsula provide some mouth-watering birding.



5th

The Status of Birds in Britain & Ireland

By David T. Parkin and Alan G. Knox. Christopher Helm, 2009. *Reviewed in BB by Paul Harvey* (Brit. Birds 103: 307–308).

This is a long-awaited update of the 1971 status and its purchase deserves consideration by every birdwatcher in these islands. As the *BB* reviewer found, it is stronger in some areas than others, but it is nonetheless a landmark volume that summarises a large amount of valuable information that is otherwise hard to come by.

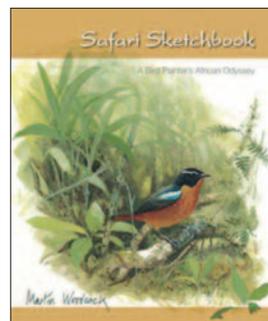
6th

Safari Sketchbook: a bird painter's African odyssey

By Martin Woodcock. The Esker Press, 2010.

Reviewed in BB by Robert Gillmor (Brit. Birds 103: 469).

In recent years, a number of what might be considered primarily 'art books' rather than 'bird books' have made it into our final shortlist. Given the freedom of the judges to highlight books that we believe birders will truly value owning or reading, we were happy to include another of the genre in this year's top six. Martin Woodcock's artwork (we considered the sketches to be a particular highlight) is complemented by a well-constructed text that, for example, gives readers a real insight into the production of plates for *The Birds of Africa* handbooks. We also admired the quality of this locally produced book, which in terms of design and reproduction scores very well indeed.



In addition to our top six, four other books scored points in the final round of voting. These were, in alphabetical order of senior author: **Helm Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names** (by James A. Jobling, published by Christopher Helm, 2010 – see *Brit. Birds* 103: 249); **Silent Summer: the state of wildlife in Britain and Ireland** (edited by Norman Maclean, published by Cambridge University Press, 2010 – see *Brit. Birds* 103: 738); **Bird Migration** (by Ian Newton, published by Collins as *New Naturalist* 113, 2010 – see *Brit. Birds* 103: 413–414); and **Birds of the Middle East (2nd edn)** (by Richard Porter and Simon Aspinall, published by Christopher Helm, 2010 – see *Brit. Birds* 103: 737–738). In each case, the *BB* review (as listed) will provide a useful reference.

Two of these books (the dictionary and the field guide) are revised versions of earlier works, and one (*Bird Migration*) is essentially a more popular synthesis of an earlier title (*The Migration Ecology of Birds*) that won this award two years ago. For these reasons, at

least some judges either awarded fewer (or no) points, preferring that we should have six truly 'new' books in our top six. Nonetheless, we are all entirely comfortable with mentioning these four titles in a second tier of acknowledgment; they are all excellent books. Finally, we mention yet again another gargantuan volume of *HBW*, the 14th in the series, which appears to be of the usual high standard (it would be a nasty shock if it wasn't!); and we also acknowledge the second edition of the *Collins Bird Guide*, which retains its position as the number one field guide for the Western Palearctic, and is probably the one book that more readers bought than any other in 2010.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the BTO for making facilities available for judging at Swanwick and especially to Carole Showell for sourcing books from the Chris Mead Library at Thetford.

Roger Riddington, Dawn Balmer, Peter Hearn, John Marchant,
Robin Prytherch and Peter Wilkinson, c/o Spindrift,
Eastshore, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS

