Another bumper crop of books (79 in total) were available for consideration in this year’s competition, seemingly a reflection that the bird-book publishing business remains buoyant, like the demand for their products from birdwatchers. Each of the six judges initially (and independently) compiled a ranked short-list of their six favourite titles, on the basis of the reviews published by BB and BTO, and their own experience. No formal criteria for judging are laid down, but we look for special merit in books that we consider will appeal to the readership of both BB and BTO News. An extraordinary 26 of the 79 made it to the initial short-list, which in particular reflects the difficulty of selecting just six books from the diverse array of high-quality books on show. The judging took place at the BTO’s annual conference in December 2005, where (thanks to the BTO library and Subbuteo Books) all the books on the first short-list were made available to us for the afternoon. After considerable debate, and settling on a final short-list of eight books, it became clear that we had two strong contenders for the top prize. It is often apparent before we vote for the final time what the winning book will be, but this year the vote was essential. And it revealed, for the first time in this competition, a dead heat between the top two. Given that each of the two books concerned gained three firsts and three seconds from the six judges, there seemed no point in a re-run, so we have decided to award the title of ‘Best Bird Book of the Year’ jointly in 2005.

JOINT WINNERS:

Birds Britannica


These are two completely different books but both are quite outstanding individual pieces of work. Birds Britannica is quite unique, and it merits special mention for that. It will appeal to an extremely wide audience, arguably more than any other book available to us this year. It’s the book to buy for even the most casual of birdwatchers, yet it will also appeal to ornithologists, rabid twitchers, patch workers, ringers and, well, any other category of birder you care to think of. Birds in England is a thorough, scholarly and more ‘conventional’ package of information and data about the birds of England. It is superbly written and researched, and will henceforth be the standard-bearer of this type of country avifauna that others will want to match up to. To sum up the differences, Birds Britannica is the book to go to if you want to explore the Common Raven’s Corvus corax ‘cultural baggage’; while Birds in England will
provide details of the current distribution, number and nesting habitats of Ravens in England, and the contraction of their range in the country through persecution.

3rd: Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America


In third place was this detailed treatise of gull identification from the Christopher Helm stable. Although not all reviews of the book have been wholeheartedly positive, this may to some extent reflect different perceptions of the importance or even existence of often extremely subtle identification characters, particularly colours (shades of grey!) and jizz, and the fact that there are many ways to approach the subject. It would be hard to argue that this book is not a major step forward, however, and it is likely to remain the gull-watcher’s ‘new bible’ for the foreseeable future. The fact that gulls are ubiquitous, and almost every birder in the country will have access to some gull-watching potential, added to our feeling that this book, although perhaps not perfect, represents a monumental effort by the authors and takes a worthy ‘podium finish’ in this year’s award.

4th: In a Natural Light: the wildlife art of Chris Rose


This is a sumptuous, large-format offering, quite different from any other in our final short-list, which provides the perfect platform for an enthralling selection of Chris Rose’s artwork. This is a book to lose yourself in; have it to hand when you sink into your favourite armchair to thaw out with a mug of tea on a winter’s afternoon after returning from the local gull roost (assuming that you don’t need to turn to our 3rd-placed book first). Simply marvellous, a treat for almost anyone in our view.
5th equal: Birds New to Britain

5th equal: Nature’s Music: the science of birdsong

Birds New to Britain is an update of the 1982 Poyser volume of (almost) the same name. However, the approach is sufficiently different from that of the first book (with the addition of readable summaries of the year’s highlights and a selection of personal accounts from various members of the current birding scene) that we felt it deserved a placing in this year’s award. It is both a useful reference work and a good read.

Nature’s Music is perhaps the most ‘scientific’ of the books to be placed in this year’s award, and may not be ‘bedtime reading’ for most BB readers. Nonetheless, it is an excellent treatment of an aspect of birdwatching that most of us would benefit from understanding more fully. The quite astonishingly poor selection and treatment of the photographs used to illustrate it did not help the final placing, however.

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

Two other titles also made the final short-list. The Birds of Blakeney Point (by Andy Stoddart and Steve Joyner, Wren Publishing, Sheringham, 2005) is a really excellent little book which provides comprehensive details of this, one of the most famous (infamous?) of all birding sites in the UK; it sums up the highs and lows of a regular slog to ‘The Point’ admirably. The Birdwatcher’s Companion (by Malcolm Tait, Robson Books, London, 2005) was championed by one panel member in particular as unputdownable and something to have by your bed. The Birds of Dorset and The New Birds of the West Midlands were two county/regional avifaunas of extremely high quality that would have made the final short-list comfortably in another year; both will have wide appeal, and not just to birders based in Dorset or the West Midlands. Ducks, Geese and Swans, edited by the late Janet Kear, was also a whisker away from the final short-list, although we felt that a price tag of £150.00 did it no favours (compare this with the eminently more reasonable £35.00 and £40.00 of our two winners). Finally, we must also mention another impressive volume of Handbook of Birds of the World, and also BirdLife’s Birds in Europe, a ten-year revision of a book that really should be on the shelves of most if not all BB readers.
Published six times a year, British Wildlife bridges the gap between popular writing and scientific literature through a combination of long-form articles, regular columns and reports, book reviews and letters. Subscriptions from £25 per year. Go to British Wildlife.

Eighteen years in the making, this outstanding work is available now. It is the winner of the BB/BTO Best Bird Book of the Year 2018 award. Click to have a closer look. Select version. Best Birding Books: Big Years and Listing (5 books). I think most of us dream of the day we can drop everything and spend the year trying to see as many birds as possible. Warning! Reading any of these bird books will only make you want to pursue a “Big Year” even more! #8. The Big Year by Mark Obmascik. This book was turned into a movie a few years ago. It’s a great way to get introduced to the crazy annual competition of who can see the most birds in a year. Trust me; it will get you thinking how you can accomplish your big year. #9. To See Every Bird On Earth by Dan Koeppel. This book details his many adventures along the way. I loved the fact he partnered with locals at every step of the journey to help.