

Prized raptors: Watson Raptor Science Prize for 2013

Two outstanding research papers on raptors have been recognized for their excellent science and awarded a prestigious European honour.

The paper winning the Watson Raptor Science Prize 2013 is by Professor Miguel Ferrer and colleagues based at the High Council for Scientific Research of Spain, Delegación del CSIC en Andalucía – Casa de la Ciencia, Spain. Entitled ‘Weak relationship between risk assessment studies and recorded mortality in wind farms’, and published in *Journal of Applied Ecology*, it reported on studies at 54 proposed and 20 constructed wind farm sites. In addition to finding some of the highest ever recorded bird collision rates, the paper made key recommendations for improving the siting of wind turbines and the research needed to assess bird collisions.

Dr Miguel Ferrer commented: “We are delighted with this prize. It is great to have this support for our research in applied ecology, which confirms our view that raptors are excellent to work on. Personally, this prize in the name of the Watson family is truly special.”

This annual prize has been established to recognize the most outstanding, peer reviewed scientific publication on raptor ecology, based on research undertaken in Europe. Established in the names of the late Donald and Jeff Watson, this award forms part of a unique initiative to establish the Watson Bird Centre, and St John’s Town of Dalry in Galloway, SW Scotland, as a bird town.

On reviewing a large number of publications in 2012 the selection panel, comprising Professors Des Thompson (Chair), Ian Newton FRS and Steve Redpath, was unanimous in selecting this paper.

In addition, the panel specially commended an outstanding paper by Richard Evans (RSPB), Phil Whitfield (Natural Research) and Lorcán O’Toole (Irish Golden Eagle Trust), entitled ‘The history of eagles in Britain and Ireland: an ecological review of place-name and documentary evidence from the last 1500 years’ and published in *Bird Study*. It ingeniously reconstructed the distribution and numbers of eagles in Britain and Ireland on the basis of historical place names.

Speaking on behalf of his team, **Richard Evans** remarked: “I am thrilled that our eagle history paper has captured the imagination of the Watson Raptor Science Prize panel, and has been rated so highly in comparison with so much other high quality bird of prey research published in 2012. Writing the paper opened some fascinating windows into the past, as well as potential future prospects for both of Britain and Ireland’s native eagle species, and it is a privilege for our work to have been recognised in this way.”

Commenting on the selection, **Professor Des Thompson** stated “Some excellent research on raptors is being carried out in Europe, and it was a special treat for our panel to read so many high quality papers. We offer our congratulations to Miguel Ferrer and his colleagues for painstaking field research, and to Richard Evans, Phil Whitfield and Lorcán O’Toole for a fascinating piece of scientific detective work.”

Director of the Watson Bird Festival, **Professor Roger Crofts**, commented: “Watson Birds is all about celebrating excellence, and the Watson Raptor Science Prize is a unique contribution. I thank the panel for their meticulous work. And I warmly congratulate the authors of both papers. All that remains is for as many people as possible to join us on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st September in Dalry to hear the talks by the authors and join in what is bound to be a stimulating debate on these crucial issues.”

Notes

1. **Meet the winners:** Miguel Ferrer will give a public lecture on his research at St John’s Town of Dalry on Friday 20 September at 6.00pm, and Richard Evans will present his work there on Saturday 21 September at 2.00pm. Details of the Watson Bird Centre and how to get to Dalry are found here: <http://www.watsonbirds.org/home>
2. The full details of the winning paper are: Ferrer, Miguel., Lucas, Manuela de., Janss, Guyonne F. E., Casado, Eva., Muñoz, Antonio R., Bechard, Marc J., and Calabuig, Cecilia P. (2012). Weak relationship between risk assessment studies and recorded mortality in wind farms. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 49 (1): 38-46. An abstract of the paper is found here: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2011.02054.x/abstract>
3. The full title of the specially commended paper is: Evans, Richard .J., O’Toole, Lorcán, and Whitfield, D. Philip. (2012): The history of eagles in Britain and Ireland: an ecological review of place-name and documentary evidence from the last 1500 years. *Bird Study*, 59 (3): 335-349. An abstract of the paper is found here: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00063657.2012.683388#previ>
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4. The Watson Raptor Science Prize is in its third year. This annual prize, established in the name of the late Donald and Jeff Watson, was set up to recognise the most outstanding, peer-reviewed scientific publication on raptor ecology, based on research undertaken in Europe. The **2012 Prize** was awarded to Dr Fabrizio Sergio for his paper: ‘Raptor nest decorations are a reliable threat against conspecifics’. [Science \(2011\), 331: 327-330.](#)

A paper by Dr Arjun Amar and colleagues at the RSPB on Orkney's hen harriers was specially commended:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2010.01896.x/abstract>.

The **2011 Prize** was awarded to Dr Jen Smart and colleagues at the RSPB for their research paper on persecution of red kites in the Scottish Highlands:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/smart_amar_sim_et_al_2010_tcm9-248263.pdf

Ends.