Drum roll... Welcome to the

BBC COUNTRYFILE MAGAZINE AWARDS 2017

Our illustrious experts have looked back over the past 12 months and nominated five contenders in each category. Now it’s up to you to decide which of the nominees win the titles, from National Park of the Year to Book of the Year...

Voting opens from 19 January until 28 February. You can vote online at countryfile.com/awards, or send in the postal form on page 72.

Who are our experts this year?

Bill Bryson
Author and humorist

Brett Westwood
Naturalist and BBC Radio 4 presenter

Anita Rani
BBC Countryfile presenter

Dame Fiona Reynolds
Former director-general of the National Trust

Naomi Wilkinson
BBC Countryfile presenter

Joe Swift
BBC Gardeners’ World presenter

Pete Brown
Author and beer aficionado

Sheena Harvey
BBC Wildlife Magazine editor

Hermione Cockburn
BBC Coast presenter

John Craven
BBC Countryfile presenter

Dixe Wills
Outdoors writer

Fergus Collins
BBC Countryfile Magazine editor
HOLIDAY DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

Nominated by BBC Countryfile presenter Anita Rani

MALHAMDALE YORKSHIRE
Yorkshire is in my blood, and it’s the most beautiful county, in my admittedly biased opinion. Malhamdale in particular is my favourite place on earth, and has been since childhood. It’s like a piece of Middle Earth, with the huge limestone rockface of Malham Cove rising out of the earth, and breathtaking Gordale Scar, an enormous gorge in which you feel humbled by nature. It suits everyone, whether you’re a hardcore walker or on a family day out.

ISLE OF MULL SCOTLAND
The second largest island of the Inner Hebrides, this wildlife wonderland is a haven for white-tailed eagles, red deer, otters, seals, dolphins, minke whales – and even the lesser-spotted Tom Heap, who is a frequent visitor. I love remoteness and this is my dream destination. Mull has a stunning landscape of beautiful bays, rugged coast, rocky peaks and green slopes, as well as pretty Tobermory harbour, with its charming multicoloured houses. It’s the ideal place for anyone wishing to get away from it all.

THE NEW FOREST HAMPShIRE
The New Forest is gorgeous – you can get to it from London quickly and disappear into the middle of nowhere. The first time I saw wild ponies, it took my breath away. I’ve stayed in a range of places, from a hobbit hole in a garden, to treats such as Lime Wood, which offers amazing food, spa and sauna, and The Pig in Brockenhurst, with its kitchen garden and fine fare. Wherever I am, I’ve always had a wonderful time.

NORTHERNBERLAND COAST
The beauty of Northumberland’s coast just blows me away. It’s a hidden treasure of Great Britain. The shoreline is incredibly dramatic, with wide expanses of sand interspersed by majestic castles, such as Dunstanburgh, Lindisfarne and Bamburgh, giving it a beautifully mysterious quality. There are pretty harbour villages too, such as Seahouses and Craster, and the rum-producing market town of Alnwick. I can’t sing the praises of this glorious stretch of coast enough.

BRECON BEACONS WALES
A simply stunning part of Wales. The highest peak in South Wales, Pen Y Fan (886m) offers a lovely and achievable climb. I stayed in a cottage at the base of the mountain with a group of friends, and made everyone get up after a late night to walk up to the summit. They called me names at first – but they did it and loved it. It’s a beautiful part of the world that feels wild and remote, with sensational views from the hills.

BEACH OF THE YEAR

Nominated by BBC Coast presenter Hermione Cockburn

BALEPHUIL BAY INNER HEBRIDES
A stunning and remote expanse of fine white sand and turquoise sea on Tiree’s southwest coast, flanked by low dunes and machair habitat home to wildflowers and corncrakes. Your only company is likely to be free-roaming cattle or hardy surfers hitting the Atlantic waves.

EMBLETON BAY NORTHUMBERLAND
This immense sandy beach, dominated by the majestic remains of Dunstanburg Castle at its southern tip, is perfect for family days out or long walks. The Ship Inn in Low Newton is great spot for a pint and there’s good birdwatching at Newton Pool Nature Reserve behind the dunes.

CHARMOUTH BEACH DORSET
With its characteristic dark grey, slumping cliffs, Charmouth on the Jurassic Coast is ideal for fossil hunters. Exciting finds, such as ichthyosaur skeletons, are still made, and even first-timers can find the remains of ancient sea creatures such as ammonites in rocky pools at low tide.

SEACLIFF NEAR NORTH BERWICK, EAST LOTHIAN
A real gem with outstanding views of Bass Rock’s huge gannet colony as well as the ruins of Tantallon Castle. Red sandstone rocks sit at either end of this unspoilt sandy beach with a remarkable little harbour carved out of the raggy foreshore. Great for family swimming and water sports.

PORTHCURNO CORNWALL
High granite cliffs around a bay of pure white sand make for a beautiful secluded spot. Steps to the coastal path give access to the open-air Minack Theatre and garden perched on the clifftop. Porthcurno Telegraph Museum reveals the area’s history. A great place to spend the day.
PUB OF THE YEAR
Nominated by Pete Brown, author of The Pub

THE EARLE ARMS NORFOLK
This foodie destination in a private village is a shared secret among its patrons, who will hate me for divulging it. With chickens roaming outside, foxes stuffed inside and a lifetime's dedication to horse-racing filling the walls, it's a gentle rural idyll.
The Green, Heydon, Norwich, NR11 6AD. earlearms.vpweb.co.uk

THE STEIN INN ISLE OF SKYE
Right on the waterside, the location of this wonderful inn is heartbreakingly beautiful. It would be difficult indeed to do something mundane in these surroundings, and Skye's oldest pub lives up to its billing, all stone and wood, malt and seafood, served up with pride and warmth.
Macleods Terrace, IV55 8GA. steininn.co.uk

THE TY COCH INN GWYNEDD
The perfect coastal pub? Ty Coch means 'red house' and it's a distinctive building right on the beach of this tiny harbour clinging to the north-western tip of Wales. In summer, the beach becomes an addendum to the pub. In winter, the pub is battered by mighty waves. Porthdinllaen, Pwllheli, LL53 6DB. tycoch.co.uk

THE CROSS KEYS INN ANTRIM
A former 17th-century coaching inn, this is a must for those who want to experience pubs as they once were. It still has a thatched roof above the whitewashed walls. That can sound a little flat in print, but it fills you with pleasure when seen with your own eyes. 40 Grange Rd, Toomebridge, BT41 3QB

THE STRINES INN YORKSHIRE
It's amazing how quickly you can get to this silent spot in the majestic moors from the centre of Sheffield. An ancient coaching inn, the Strines acquires new adornments as needed and gets rid of old ones as it feels. A perfect country inn. Bradfield Dale, Bradfield, S6 6JE. thestrinesinn.webs.com/

HERITAGE SITE OF THE YEAR
Nominated by Bill Bryson, author of The Road to Little Dribbling and former head of the Campaign to Protect Rural England

SKARA BRAE
Orkney has the greatest concentration of archaeological sites in Scotland, but none is more arresting than this miraculously preserved neolithic village. The eight stone dwellings, uncovered by a 19th-century storm, are roofless but otherwise intact. They are older than Stonehenge and the Great Pyramids of Egypt and yet they feel as if they were vacated only yesterday.

DURHAM CATHEDRAL
I have a sentimental attachment to Durham because I was chancellor at the university for seven years, so was constantly in and out of the cathedral. Almost 1,000 years old, it is unquestionably one of the supreme achievements of the architectural world, and the most thoroughly satisfying building I know – a wonder to behold from every possible vantage point, inside and out.

RUTLAND WATER
The middle of England is full of delightful attractions that few outsiders visit, but Rutland Water is my favourite because it is lovely, transfixing and a joy to walk around. It is so natural-looking that it can come as a surprise to realise that it was built only in the 1970s as a reservoir. It would be hard to think of a more successful large-scale enhancement to the landscape anywhere.

TENBY
When I first came to Britain 40 years ago, the country's seaside resorts were thriving, but now all too many wear an air of abandonment and decline. Tenby is a glorious exception. It is the quintessential old-fashioned seaside resort, with pretty pastel-coloured buildings, cheery cafes, sprawling beaches and stunning views. Perfection.

STONEHENGE
Its importance as a heritage site hardly needs explaining, but for decades it was one of Britain's great disappointments because facilities were so charmless and shabby. Now, a wonderful state-of-the-art visitor centre and a terrific café perfectly complement the ancient stones. If you haven't been to Stonehenge for years, visit now and prepare to be joyfully surprised.
COUNTRYFILE AWARDS

CANVEY WICK ESSEX
An old oil refinery on the Thames estuary’s shores doesn’t sound like a wildlife haven, but the wildlife thinks differently. This glorious, post-industrial reserve hums with rare bees and other insects: it bristles with brownfield biodiversity and is an outstanding example of why we should value such places.

STUDLAND HEATH DORSET
The wild and wonderful delights of Thomas Hardy’s heathland make this one of my favourite places. Here at the mouth of Poole Harbour are heather-lined paths where sand lizards and adders bask: all six British reptiles live here, along with insect-eating plants such as sundew and butterwort. Winter brings rare grebes to feed offshore.

GILFACH FARM POWYS
Gilfach is the best of Welsh wildlife distilled in one glorious and accessible reserve. Swift-flowing otter streams where dippers and grey wagtails flirt course through old meadows bright with mountain pansies. Redstarts and pied flycatchers flit through oakwoods and dark green fritillaries speed across heathery moors as red kites glide like wraiths.

FARNE ISLANDS NORTHUMBERLAND
For hard-hat wearers, the Farne Islands provides the closest encounters of the bird kind you could wish for. In summer, puffins throng cliff tops as razorbills and guillemots line the rock-ledges like back-and-white skittles. Once I helped a shag build its pathside nest. And those hats? Essential when walking through the Arctic tern colony.

ABERNETHY FOREST NNR
As if the light filtering through ancient Caledonian pines wasn’t enough, here are turkey-sized capercaillies, pine martens, red squirrels and the must-visit shrine of conservation: the Loch Garten ospreys. Blaeberry-carpeted woods overlooked by the snow-topped Cairngorms ring with the purring of crested tits and metallic calls of crossbills. Simply unmissable.

THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER KENT
These iconic cliffs represent, for many, the essence of England. Never mind Dame Vera Lynn’s ‘bluebirds over’; the sight of the cliffs stirs all our hearts. Yet recent research shows they are eroding faster than thought: losses have accelerated from 2-6cm/year to 22-32cm/year in the last century and a half.

LUNDY DEVON
This small island with its flat top and jagged cliffs offers visitors a magical mystery tour. Above ground are stupendous views, a unique atmosphere and fascinating history; below water, one of our most wildlife-rich sea coasts in the UK led to the establishment of the first British marine nature reserve.

THE LAKE DISTRICT CUMBRIA
The birthplace of the conservation movement, the Lake District is up for consideration as a World Heritage Site, breaking new ground as it establishes the value of cultural landscapes internationally.

CONWY FALLS SNOWDONIA
Having visited every waterfall in Snowdonia as a child when it was too wet to be dragged up mountains, it’s the Conwy Falls and the Fairy Glen I remember as the most magical of all. Drenched with spray hovering in the air, sunbeams and shadows dancing around, these forces of nature are irresistible and irreplaceable.

THE HOWGILL FELLS CUMBRIA
Caught between the Lakes and the Dales, these beautiful, velvety, hump-backed hills are seen more often from the M6 motorway than from within. At last they have been recognised as being of supreme landscape quality and have been added to the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Enjoy them for their solitude and majesty.

NATURE RESERVE OF THE YEAR
Nominated by naturalist and BBC Radio 4 presenter Brett Westwood

BOOK OF THE YEAR
Nominated by BBC Countryfile Magazine editor Fergus Collins

THE OUTRUN Amy Liptrot finds salvation from alcoholism in her Orkney homeland. “Liptrot writes beautifully about her appreciation of and affinity with the wild islands of her origins.”

BEING A BEAST Charles Foster recounts his experiences of living like a badger, otter and urban fox. “Fascinating, complex, highly entertaining reading.”


FINGERS IN THE SPARKLE JAR Chris Packham’s memoir of his boyhood. “Extraordinarily vivid and utterly unique.”

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST COUNTRY Comedian Tony Hawks moves to Devon. “A warm, amusing and bonkers read.”

LANDMARK OF THE YEAR
Nominated by the master of Emmanuel College Fiona Reynolds, former National Trust director and author of The Fight for Beauty

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HAUSER AND WIRTH SOMERSET

The newest on this list, completed in 2014. Dutch designer and leading figure in the New Perennial movement Piet Oudolf has created a garden that is simple, beautiful, clever and romantic. Paths provide a choice of routes through oval mounds of grass that bring definition to the design while connecting it to the rural landscape beyond. hauserwirthsomerset.com/garden

TREBAH CORNWALL

A classic Cornish valley garden and a great family day out. Meandering paths wind through over-scale plants that enjoy ideal growing conditions. Carnellias, magnolias, bamboos and a fabulous giant gunnera jungle lead you to a lake within the hydrangea valley. Beyond the garden is a private beach with local Cornish ice cream, heaven! trebahgarden.co.uk

SCAMPSTON HALL YORKSHIRE

The second on my list by Piet Oudolf. At Scampston Hall, he’s reinvented what can go into a Victorian walled kitchen garden. A path leads you halfway around the outside edge to build up expectation before all is revealed; wide meadows of grasses, sumptuous perennial planting, garden rooms with simple topiary pieces as well as a viewing mound. scampston.co.uk

GREAT DIXTER EAST SUSSEX

Christopher Lloyd developed this garden over his lifetime and his friend Fergus Garrett now keeps the spirit of horticultural ideas and adventure alive. The gardens lie around the house, parts of which date to the 15th century, and include an exotic garden, sunken garden, long borders, topiary pieces and fabulous meadows. greatdixter.co.uk

INVEREWE GARDENS WESTER ROSS

A 49-acre lush sub-tropical garden created in the 1860s by Osgood McKenzie, home to exotic plants that enjoy mild temperatures brought in by the Gulf Stream. It’s a fabulous garden that proves determination and hard work can overcome a difficult site. The curved walled garden faces south with stunning views over Loch Ewe. nts.org.uk

EURASIAN BEAVER

These riparian architects were hunted to extinction in Britain 400-500 years ago. Now, thanks to the success of a trial on the Knapdale Estate in Argyll, they’ve been given leave to stay and Government protection, making them the first mammals to be officially reintroduced to the UK landscape.

CIRL BUNTING

This classic bird of West Country fields and natural grasslands had suffered badly from hedge removal, pesticide use and autumn planting doing away with stubble fields for foraging. By 1989, it had dwindling to 118 pairs in Devon. Thanks to wildlife-friendly farming schemes, numbers have risen to 1,078 pairs in Devon and 65 pairs in Cornwall.

SHORT-HAIRED BUMBLEBEE

The loss of species-rich grasslands and consequent decline in vital pollinators has caused concern. So the project to return this native bee species to the southeast of England and re-establish suitable habitats for it to prosper has been welcomed.

HAZEL DORMOUSE

Although not out of the woods yet – in a manner of speaking – the star of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is the subject of an action plan that has slowed its decline. Wildlife Trusts in southern England and Wales are providing nestboxes and managing woodland to increase numbers of this slow-breeding rodent.

BITTERN

In 1997, only 11 known booming males of this specialist reedbed bird were left in Britain, due to the loss of coastal wetlands. Thanks to a conservation collaboration between the RSPB and others, there are now around 150 issuing their foghorn call over wetlands in Norfolk, Suffolk, the Fens and Somerset.

WILDLIFE SUCCESS OF THE YEAR

Nominations by BBC Wildlife Magazine editor Sheena Harvey

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NATIONAL PARK OF THE YEAR

Nominated by BBC Countryfile presenter John Craven

YORKSHIRE DALES
Last year it grew by almost a quarter and now covers 840 square miles. I’ve known these dales since boyhood, their waterfalls and caves, drystone walls and hay meadows, limestone and rolling valleys. A few years ago I discovered the Norber erratics’s amazing rock formations – huge boulders perched atop much smaller, younger rocks as a result of the Ice Age melt. Well worth a visit.

PEAK DISTRICT
Britain’s first national park, set up in 1961. Almost 20 years earlier the trespass on its highest peak, Kinder Scout, kickstarted the campaign for public access; now 2,000 miles of trails criss-cross the park. Starkly beautiful, the landscape is also a quarrying site. Semi-precious fluoride, known as Blue John, is mined near Castleton with jewellery crafted at Blue John Cavern (not a misprint!).

LOCH LOMOND AND TROSSACHS
Stretching from lowlands to Highlands, this offers some of Scotland’s finest scenery. Within Britain’s fourth biggest park are 21 Munros, 50 rivers, 22 larger lochs and two forest parks. I’ve stood on the bonny banks of Lomond with the distant hills capped in snow – it is breathtaking. The West Highland Way passes through and wildlife is abundant, from capercailies to seals and porpoises.

SOUTH DOWNS
Our newest national park was first proposed in 1947 but it didn’t open until 2011. Much of it is gently rolling chalk grassland ending with the Seven Sisters sea cliffs, but more than 20% is wooded Weald. It attracted Turner, Austen, Kipling and Elgar and millions still enjoy its timeless beauty. Home to ancient yew trees, it is one of the few UK sites with every native reptile and amphibian species.

SNOWDONIA
Standing on Snowdon’s summit is an awesome experience. Last summer I had panoramic views across stunning mountains to the sea. You don’t have to be as strenuous as Edmund Hillary – the historic railway can get you to the peak. There are also other mountains to climb, gorgeous valleys, sandy beaches, welcoming villages and the world’s first inland surfing lake at Dolgarrog.

OUTDOOR BRAND OF THE YEAR

Nominated by outdoors writer Dixe Wills

PÁRAMO
Eco-friendly, hard-wearing and pretty darn cool, Páramo products tick a lot of boxes. Waterproofing comes courtesy of the excellent Nikwax, and 80% of Páramo’s products are manufactured by a charity that employs ‘at risk’ women from the streets of Bogotá. paramo-clothing.com

SPRAYWAY
Particularly known for their brilliant range of hi-tech jackets, British company Sprayway also produces top quality ethically sourced sleeping bags and tents, while its recycled-plastic fleeces feel so good you could almost forget how awful 2016 has been. sprayway.com

PATAGONIA
With a reputation for making high quality long-lasting clothing, Patagonia makes everything from climbing clobber to swimsuits. It’s a US-based ‘benefit corporation’, which means it is legally obliged to strive for a positive impact on the environment, workers and society. eu.patagonia.com/enGB/home

VEGETARIAN SHOES
Founded in 1990 by Robin Webb as a one-man operation in Brighton, East Sussex, Vegetarian Shoes are now the makers (in nice worker-friendly factories in Britain and Europe) of some of the most comfortable, ‘breathable’, and vegan-friendly walking boots known to humankind. vegetarian-shoes.co.uk

VAUDE
A byword for high quality, technically advanced gear, Germany’s Vaude make a massive range of products including walking boots, backpacks and their wonderful tailored fleeces. However, they’re probably best known for designing some of the niftiest lightweight tents on the planet. vaude.com/en-NL/
READER PHOTO OF THE YEAR

Nominated by Countryfile presenter Naomi Wilkinson, and selected from the best of our monthly winners of 2016

▼ GANNET GLORY
BY KEN LEWIS, BASS ROCK
Having paddled in a kayak at this very spot, I've seen the incredible speed with which the gannets hit the water and have felt the chaos of this feeding frenzy as the birds divebomb. I think Ken's photograph has captured that excitement perfectly. It takes great skill to take such a clean shot while contending with so much action. Wonderful.

▼ STEEPED IN RAYS
BY TIM GRAHAM, CHEDDAR GORGE
If ever a photograph encapsulated the pure beauty of the British countryside, this is the one. The winding road weaving its way through the gorge under that magnificent sunset, and the rocks and wildflowers in the foreground both bring superb depth to this image. A photograph that really does a terrific job of showing off this glorious, scenic spot. Note to self, must revisit Cheddar Gorge again very soon!

▼ LIGHT RESPITE
BY KAI DEAN, SOUTH STACK LIGHTHOUSE
To me, this photograph oozes serenity and calm. I love many aspects: how the footpath pleasingly leads your eye to the lighthouse; the gorgeous, tranquil colours of the sunset over the quiet sea; the relaxing sense of stillness around the lighthouse. Everything about this image makes me feel at peace.

▼ TOWERING STORM
BY NIGEL HODSON, PORTHCawl
Seriously, wow. Just wow. What an astonishing moment to capture on camera. The drama in this picture is off the scale, as is the size of that crashing wave dwarfing the onlookers. The choice to use a monochrome print gives this picture an even more powerful and ominous feeling: it is a really breathtaking shot.

▼ OWL ON THE PROWL
BY RON BABER, HEARTWOOD FOREST
Hats off to anyone who manages to photograph a bird in flight, in focus and framed this beautifully. To catch an owl slap bang in the middle of the shot with its fixed stare pin sharp, but the wings slightly blurred, mid-beat, illustrating the speed behind this hunt, is so impressive. The photographer had a split second to snap this thrilling moment, but Ron has totally nailed that tremendously tough task.

AWARDS VOTING FORM
To vote in the BBC Countryfile Magazine Awards 2017, go online to pick your winners at www.countryfile.com/awards
Or simply fill out this form and send it to: BBC Countryfile Magazine, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN by 28 February 2016. Only one voting entry per reader.

Name
Address
Tel
Email

Holiday destination: Nature reserve: Wildlife success:

Beach: Book: National park:

Pub: Landmark: Outdoor brand:

Heritage site: Garden: Reader photo: