



**\*\*Strictly Embargoed until 00:01 BST on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July\*\***

## JUDGING PANEL FOR 2020 ROYAL SOCIETY SCIENCE BOOK PRIZE ANNOUNCED

**“Science holds the key to the time-critical global challenges that we face, of ensuring food security, health, and environmentally sustainable ways of living.”**

**– Professor Anne Osbourn, 2020 Chair of Judges**

### **#SciBooks**

The five-strong judging panel for this year’s Royal Society Science Book Prize, sponsored by Insight Investment, is revealed today, Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

The Prize – which celebrates the very best in popular science writing from around the world – will be chaired in 2020 by biologist and poet, **Professor Anne Osbourn FRS OBE**. She will be joined on the panel by representatives from across the worlds of science and culture: Blackwell's Trade Buying Manager, **Katherine Fry**; journalist, **Katy Guest**; Royal Society University Research Fellow, **Dr Kartic Subr** and actress and author **Sophie Ward**.

The Prize exists to promote the accessibility and joy of popular science books and, for 32 years, has celebrated some of the very best in science writing, with topical subjects tackled by the Prize winners ranging from gender stereotyping (*Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado-Perez, 2019, and *Testosterone Rex* by Cordelia Fine, 2017) to works exploring humanity’s impact on the environment (*Adventures in the Anthropocene* by Gaia Vince, 2015, and *Six Degrees* by Mark Lynas, 2008). At a time when science communication forms a central part of our daily discourse, the judging panel’s search for books that make science writing compelling and accessible to the public is more relevant than ever.

Chair of judges, **Professor Anne Osbourn OBE, FRS**, commented: “It is a real honour and a privilege to be chairing the judging panel for the Royal Society Book Prize 2020. Science is an integral part of our lives. It is beautiful, diverse and vast. Science holds the key to the time-critical global challenges that we face, of ensuring food security, health, and environmentally sustainable ways of living.”

“Over the last few months, we have seen COVID-19 spread across the planet and we have all experienced cleaner air and more audible birdsong as cars and planes went temporarily quiet. We have the world’s best scientists at the forefront of tackling the virus, to whom we are very grateful. My hope is that this pandemic has awakened the general public’s curiosity to learn more about the very pertinent issues we face but also a desire to unlock the wonderful mysteries of our world through science. The books that will be shortlisted and the ultimate winner of the Royal Society Book Prize 2020 will be those that make science a meeting place for all - adventures, stories, journeys, explorations that inspire, excite and open up new ways of thinking. I am very much looking forward to wallowing in the books and working with the panel to find the winner.”

Brian Cox OBE, FRS, The Royal Society Professor for Public Engagement in Science, added: “This year, more than ever before, COVID-19 has reminded us of the important role that science plays in our lives and in finding solutions to big, global challenges. It has also become increasingly clear that it’s never been more important that as many of us as possible are scientifically literate. In the context of this pandemic, it is vital that we are equipped to understand how to weigh the scientific information and advice being presented to us daily and to identify trusted sources of information in an uncertain world.

“Popular science writing certainly has an important role to play in developing our understanding of how science works. The books the Royal Society Insight Investment Science Book Prize champions every year embody the very best of science communication and engaging science storytelling. I look forward to discovering the books this year’s judges choose.”

A shortlist of six titles, selected from over 172 submissions published between 1 July 2019 and 30 September 2020, will be announced on 22 September 2020. The winner of the 2020 Prize will be announced via a virtual awards ceremony in November. The winner will receive a cheque for £25,000, with £2,500 awarded to each of the five shortlisted authors.

**David Chellew**, Head of Marketing at Insight Investment, sponsor of the Prize, said: “It takes discipline and courage to write a science book, whilst the process of encouraging science writing both highlights and improves knowledge around important topics as well as encouraging open collaboration on some of the world’s greatest challenges. These books bring a broad spectrum of scientific topics to life for so many people, providing an opportunity to learn in a thoroughly enjoyable way. Scientific outsiders are given an opportunity to understand the debate and the significance of research and data which is a truly wonderful thing. This prize celebrates the pursuit of knowledge, continuous improvement in science and raises awareness of issues where more progress is needed.”

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

### 1. About the Royal Society:

The Royal Society is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society's fundamental purpose, reflected in its founding Charters of the 1660s, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.

Follow the Royal Society on Twitter (@royalsociety) or on Facebook ([facebook.com/theroyalsociety](https://facebook.com/theroyalsociety)).

### 2. About the sponsor:

Insight Investment is a leading global investment manager, founded in 2002 and headquartered in London. Insight primarily manages money for pension schemes by providing liability-driven investment strategies and investing in fixed income and currency and multi-asset.

[Insight takes responsible investment seriously](#). It was a founding signatory to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and has been integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into decision-making processes for more than a decade. Insight's approach is underpinned by the belief that ESG issues are important drivers of investment value. In 2019, Insight was awarded A+ ratings across most of the relevant categories in the PRI survey, a reflection of its ongoing commitment to integrating responsible investment practices across all aspects of its business.

More information about Insight Investment can be found at: [www.insightinvestment.com](http://www.insightinvestment.com)

### 3. About the judges (in alphabetical order):

**Professor Anne Osbourn** is a Project Leader at the John Innes Centre and Director of the Norwich Research Park Industrial Biotechnology Alliance. She is also an honorary professor at the University of East Anglia, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 2019. Her research focuses on plant-derived natural products with potential importance for the development of drugs and other compounds useful for medicine, agriculture or industry. Anne is also a poet, and has developed and co-ordinates the Science, Art and Writing (SAW) Initiative, a cross-curricular science education outreach programme ([www.sawtrust.org](http://www.sawtrust.org)).

**Katharine Fry** is the Trade Buying Manager for Blackwell's, where she is responsible for the promotional activity across all genres of publishing. Katharine has over 20 years' experience of buying across a wide range of subject areas from specialist non-fiction through to Children's titles. She has also served as a judge on The British Book Awards or Nibbies for the Narrative Non-Fiction Book of the Year category. Katharine organises Blackwell's Book of the Year award, now in its fifth year.

**Katy Guest** is a freelance journalist, reviewer, writer and editor who also works part time as senior commissioning editor and new business lead at the crowdfunding publisher Unbound. Katy worked at the *Independent* newspapers for 18 years, becoming literary editor of the *Independent on Sunday* until 2016. She was contributing editor of the online literary magazine *Boundless* from 2017-2020. Books she has commissioned for Unbound include: *Mud, Maul, Mascara* by the former England rugby captain Catherine Spencer; *The Tango Effect: Parkinson's and the Healing Power of Dance* by Kate Swindlehurst and *Girl With a Gun: Love, Loss and the Fight for Freedom in Iran* by Diana Nammi and Karen Attwood, which was recently seen on Boris Johnson's 'to be read' pile at 10 Downing Street. Katy currently reviews books and writes features and columns for publications including the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *TLS*, *Financial Times*, *The Bookseller* and *Mslexia*. She has judged prizes including the Desmond Elliott Prize, Fiction Uncovered and the Aesthetica short story prize, hosted panels at book festivals including Oxford, Wimbledon, Bath, Guildford and Kew, and appeared as a regular book fanatic in the 'Must Reads' slot on BBC Radio 5's *Phil Williams* and *Sarah Brett* shows.

**Dr Kartic Subr**, a Royal Society University Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, researches models and algorithms for rapid approximation of solutions to computationally challenging problems. His group develops and applies fast approximations of physically-based simulation to enable exciting applications in robotics, computer graphics and computer vision. Kartic has a PhD in Computer Science from University of California Irvine. His research has been shaped by his experiences in diverse academic institutions including INRIA-Grenoble and University College London as well as companies such as Disney Research, NVIDIA and Rhythm and Hues Animation Studios.

**Sophie Ward** is an actor and writer who has worked extensively in film and television since her feature debut in Steven Spielberg's *Young Sherlock Holmes*, and in theatre, most notably with the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. Sophie's first degree was in literature and philosophy and she has a PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London on The Use of Fictional Narrative in Thought Experiments in Philosophy of Mind. Sophie has previously been a judge on the Costa Book Awards in 2012 and the Green Carnation Prize in 2015. Her non-fiction book, *A Marriage Proposal: the importance of equal marriage and what it means for all of us*, was published by the *Guardian* in 2014. Sophie won the Royal Academy and Pin Drop short story award in 2018. Her first novel, *Love And Other Thought Experiments*, was published in February 2020 by Corsair.

#### **4. About the prize:**

Set up in 1988 as the "Science Book Prizes", The Royal Society Science Book Prize sponsored by Insight Investment, was named the Rhône-Poulenc Prizes for Science Books from 1990 - 2000, the Aventis Prizes for Science Books from 2001 – 2006, the Royal Society Prize for Science Books from 2007 – 2010 and the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science Books from 2011 – 2015.

#### **5. Complete list of past winners of the Prize:**

- 2019: *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* by Caroline Criado Perez
- 2018: *Inventing Ourselves* by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore
- 2017: *Testosterone Rex* by Cordelia Fine
- 2016: *The Invention of Nature* by Andrea Wulf
- 2015: *Adventures in the Anthropocene* by Gaia Vince

- 2014: *Stuff* by Mark Miodownik
- 2013: *The Particle at the End of the Universe* by Sean Carroll
- 2012: *The Information* by James Gleick
- 2011: *The Wavewatcher's Companion* by Gavin Pretor-Pinney
- 2010: *Life Ascending* by Nick Lane
- 2009: *The Age of Wonder* by Richard Holmes
- 2008: *Six Degrees* by Mark Lynas
- 2007: *Stumbling on Happiness* by Daniel Gilbert
- 2006: *Electric Universe* by David Bodanis
- 2005: *Critical Mass* by Philip Ball
- 2004: *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson
- 2003: *Right Hand, Left Hand* by Chris McManus
- 2002: *The Universe in a Nutshell* by Stephen Hawking
- 2001: *Mapping the Deep* by Robert Kunzig
- 2000: *The Elegant Universe* by Brian Greene
- 1999: *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers* by Paul Hoffman
- 1998: *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond
- 1997: *The Wisdom of Bones* by Alan Walker and Pat Shipman
- 1996: *Plague's Progress* by Arno Karlen
- 1995: *The Consumer's Good Chemical Guide* by John Emsley
- 1994: *The Language of the Genes* by Steve Jones
- 1993: *The Making of Memory* by Steven Rose
- 1992: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* by Jared Diamond
- 1991: *Wonderful Life* by Stephen Jay Gould
- 1990: *The Emperor's New Mind* by Roger Penrose
- 1989: *Bones of Contention* by Roger Lewin
- 1988: *Living with Risk* by the British Medical Association Board of Science