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Every summer I hear the Swifts screeching as they race across the sky above my garden and every summer I promise myself that I will make the time and (attempt) to photograph them in flight. For a variety of reasons, none of which I can bring to mind, I have never found the time - until this year. I'm not suggesting that these are good images but these fast flying summer visitors are certainly a challenge. They're not here for too long either - the Swifts especially will be gone before the end of August. While waiting for Swifts I captured the image of the Swallow (above). Buzzard, Red Kite, Jackdaw, Rook, Starling and Partridge were amongst others that flew over but the strangest was definitely a Peahen!

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Welcome to Issue 16 of Nature Group eNews.

Once again I would like to thank all those members who have supported eNews with articles, images, reviews & news during all the periods of Lockdown. Your contributions have been very much appreciated.

It would be really wonderful if more members would share their nature experiences and images with their fellow members in eNews. All offers - trip reports, kit reports, book reviews, observations, lock-down projects, etc., will be welcomed provided that they are of interest to nature photographers.

In this issue of eNews Andrew McCarthy ARPS shares his experiences of photographing a very challenging subject indeed - Bats!

Overseas Member, Grahame Soden ARPS is a new member living in the far north of Sweden. Grahame has contributed an article about the wildlife that is found around his home in Swedish Lapland.

More news in this issue from our Programme Co-ordinator, Ann Miles FRPS, of Field Meetings that will be going ahead this summer.

The next issue of eNews will be in the late Summer. Whatever your plans, I wish you a very pleasant season filled with opportunities to photograph the wildlife in your area. Bye for now.

Dawn Osborn FRPS,
eNews Editor

Photographing Bats in flight

by Andrew McCarthy ARPS

As a bat-licensed ecologist and nature photographer I have long aspired to photograph bats in flight, but for various reasons this project had, until 2020, spent too long on the 'one for later' pile. If I am honest, it is probably because I knew that photographing such a fast-moving and unpredictable subject in complete darkness was going to be a major photographic challenge. However, the Covid19 lock-down in March finally gave me enough impetus to make a start, and this article summarises my photographic journey over the six months of the 2020 summer 'bat season'.

The novice faces several problems. The first is that flash photography of bats close to roosts (which is where bat flight paths are most predictable) requires a special licence from Natural England, which can take several years of training to obtain. Another (photographic-related) issue is that information is scattered widely across the internet. In order to get to a point where I could begin, I spent a great deal of time undertaking background reading and exchanging emails with knowledgeable bat photographers - in particular the very helpful Paul Colley in the UK.

Eventually I was ready to make a start. I am lucky enough to have a small 'night roost' for Lesser Horseshoe bats at the rear of our Devon house; whilst numbers here are low, the site is perfect for experimentation, since it is possible to shoot during most nights with suitable weather.

Initially my equipment consisted of a tripod-mounted Olympus EM1x body with telephoto zoom lens, two Cactus RF60x speed-light flash units, a v6 II radio transmitter and a Cognisys 'Sabre' trigger, along with cables, light stands, various clamps, waterproof covers and a power-pack to enable all night photography.

The simplest technique for capturing images of bats in full darkness is to allow a Laser/Lidar trigger to fire the flashes directly whilst the shutter is open. This avoids problems of shutter lag and makes predicting the focus point simpler. The length of time the shutter needs to be open depends upon the number of bats anticipated - large numbers passing through the frame in a short time can result in multiple ghosted images, but the low number of bats using my house roost meant that repeated 30 second exposures would be fine.



1. Lesser Horseshoe bat - one of my first successful images and the shot that persuaded me to continue with this project! Olympus EM1x.

The first challenge was the size of our roost entrance (a doorway) which meant that bat flight paths were unpredictable. The small number of bats using the roost compounded the problem and the success rate was initially very low. I largely resolved the issue by reducing the size of the entrance. I had been meaning to do this for several years anyway under my licence (in order to increase its suitability for bats by making it darker and increasing thermo-stability) but the secondary effect was to direct bats through the zone covered by the trigger beam / camera frame. This approach increased the number of successful images to an acceptable, although still low, level.

The second challenge was how to consistently focus. Taking into account the Sabre's fast response time (10ms) and probable bat flight speed (between 3ms-1 and 5ms-1) I estimated that the point at which I would need to pre-focus would be between one and three cm beyond the beam, in order to take into account distance travelled by a bat before the flashes fired. Focus was hit or miss for the first few months, until I eventually worked out a more consistent system using a carbon fibre rod at 1.5cm from and exactly parallel to the Sabre beam.

By June, it was clear that the main obstacle to my further progression was the small size of our home roost, as well as some equipment limitations. More flash units and clamps were purchased, giving five in total to provide more powerful and even illumination. I also obtained an infra-red (IR) set-up to enable me to shoot

without disturbance at the sensitive roost sites I was undertaking paid survey work on. I opted for a full-spectrum converted Sony A7 body (since upgraded to an A7 III) supplied by Infra-Red Camera Conversions on the Isle of Wight, coupled with a cheap kit lens and home-made IR flash filters.

Several exciting photo opportunities presented themselves around this time. The first was a survey I was commissioned to undertake of a large Lesser Horseshoe roost in a former convent. The roost entrance here was very photogenic, consisting of weathered timber beams which I knew would render well in monochrome. The first few nights were disappointing; I captured many bat images but all were out of focus. I revisited the site repeatedly, adjusting equipment prior to each nights shooting and eventually, after a series of 'lash-ups' whilst perched precariously at the top of a ladder, I managed to get focus and exposure nailed, and finally obtained the shots I wanted.

A unique opportunity was also kindly provided courtesy of ecologist Tom Kitching at the Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT). The Trust manages a number of important roosts for such rare species as Greater Horseshoe bat, and the site I was given permission to access is home to a very large number of this species. At dusk in summer this site offers a true wildlife spectacular; I was privileged to regularly sit alone at dusk whilst over a thousand bats flew past me at head-height, before dispersing to surrounding farmland to feed. Despite high bat numbers,



2. Common Pipistrelle bat against a crescent moon - one of my first attempts at using 'strobe' flash settings. Olympus EM1x.



3. Greater Horseshoe foraging along a tree-line - taken with ultra-wide angle lens - the bat was only 1m above me! Olympus EM1x



4. Greater Horseshoe flying towards a hedge illuminated by four strobe flash pulses. Olympus EM1x.



the photography proved challenging. Roost entrances were high and very large, which made making compelling images difficult. Nonetheless, after extensive trial and error (including a period of six weeks when I experienced frustrating technical challenges with unsynchronised flashes and image ghosting) I finally managed to establish a system of photographing the emerging bats and also of bats flying through nearby woodland. The latter was very satisfying, since it required patient observation, followed by incremental refinement to framing, focus point and lighting over a period of weeks. I finally settled on regularly photographing the bats as they returned to roost at dawn through a wooded 'tunnel' where, at one particular location they would undertake 'wingovers' and

other aerial acrobatics, prior to changing direction towards the roost.

By early October, the cooler nights saw a significant reduction in bat activity and I made the decision to call a halt to the project until 2021. To say I had been hooked by this new genre of photography would be an understatement and, although there is great deal of room for improvement in my images, I have been really pleased with progress made during the six months since the project was conceived. Hopefully this coming year will see further progress and I already have pre-visualised many images that I hope to capture in the coming months. It should be another busy year!





7. *Strobe shot of Soprano Pipistrelle females swarming around a roost entrance prior to entering. I used dual infra-red flash for this shot so as not to disturb the returning bats. Full-spectrum converted Sony A7.*



8. *Greater Horseshoe in mid 'wing-over'. For such a large, fast-flying species, Greater Horseshoes are amazingly manoeuvrable! Full spectrum converted Sony A7 III.*

Choice of flash trigger

Unlike a laser trigger which requires a separate transmitter and receiver, the Lidar-based 'Sabre' from Cognisys in the USA fires when its integral sensor picks up the beam reflected back following interception by a bat. There are advantages and disadvantages to Lidar (the main one being cost) but the self-contained Sabre offers me a great deal of flexibility given the sites I have been photographing as locations are often well above ground and some are difficult to fix equipment to.

Flash power settings

With speed-light flashes, the lower the power output the shorter the flash duration; after some experimentation therefore, units were set manually to 1/16th power to give an 'effective shutter speed' of roughly 1/8000th sec. This duration enabled sharp images, whilst at the same time keeping equipment well away from the bat flight paths. At lower power settings I found that the flashes needed to be so close to the focus point (to provide adequate illumination) that they could block the flight path. Lighting was controlled by noting flash distances after each session. I progressively moved each unit closer to or further away from the point of focus until optimal illumination was achieved.



9. *Pair of Greater Horseshoes returning to their roost at dawn - shot with multiple IR flash and full spectrum converted Sony A7 III.*

Using strobe flash

From June onwards, once the basic static equipment had been set up and switched on (a 40 minute to 1.5 hour job depending on location) I would often spend a productive hour photographing bats against the darkening sky using a mobile setup. The camera was still tripod-mounted, but the rig incorporated a pair of bracket-mounted flashes set to 'strobe mode' (typically around 7 pulses at 14 pulses per second, coupled with a ½ second exposure) as well as an ultrasound bat detector and (on occasion) a hotshoe mounted mini IR lamp. The result was a more interpretive style of photography, in which I was attempting to show bat movement patterns, as individuals hunted and swooped around me. On one occasion I was lucky enough to capture the swirling chaos of large numbers of female Soprano Pipistrelle bats returning to their roost. One image on this occasion even included a number of bats carrying young, which to my knowledge is the only time this has ever been captured in a still image in the UK.



10. *Greater Horseshoe bat leaving the roost - full-spectrum converted Sony A7 with IR flash setup.*

Legislation

Whilst research indicates that bats are unlikely to be disturbed providing flash power settings / durations are kept very low, all the photography for this project was undertaken under an appropriate Class II licence from Natural England, which I have held since 2001.

To see more of Andrew's images visit:

www.andrewmccarthyphotography.co.uk

This article first appeared in the April 2021 issue of *Outdoor Photography* magazine

Life in Swedish Lapland

by Grahame Soden ARPS ABIPP



I've lived in Swedish Lapland for 7 winters. It is my favourite season; the ground can be white for four or five months, with a meter of snow and temperatures ranging from a mild -10°C down to -30°C which is really not mild! Despite this challenging climate, Sweden is home to a good variety of native wild animals, the largest of which is the Elk (*Alces alces*).

There are between 300-400,000 Elk in Sweden - about one Elk for every 30 to 40 humans - and the numbers are stable, despite around 100,000 Elk being culled each year.

An Elk can live for 25 years but the average, for a wild Elk, is around 10 years due to hunting and traffic accidents. A full grown bull Elk will weigh in at 500kg - although some sources say up to 800kg - and stand 170cm - 210cm at the shoulder. It is a very big animal indeed. In North America it is called Moose (and is even bigger) - their Elk is in fact a large Wapiti deer. It is gradually becoming acceptable to refer to our Elk as Moose too, to avoid confusion with overseas visitors.

Only the male (bull) Swedish Elk have antlers, which are shed every winter, and the bull is a solitary creature except in the mating season. Elk can do a short sprint at 60kph and sustain 30kph over a distance. So very big and quite nimble.

For some reason I have seen more Elk in my little village during January & February 2021 than I have ever seen before, and they are close - I have hoof prints 2-3mtrs

from my house some mornings. Also, I have been able to get much closer to them than usual - maybe 40 or 50 meters from the Elk, and it is a great experience to stand so close to a wild yet relatively harmless animal. The downside is they are most active early morning and evening when the light is poor, which makes photography difficult. I might take 100 shots and only have a handful of "keepers", but these are virtually the only photographs of an Elk that I have managed during my time here. You sometimes see Elk at the roadside, but they run off if you stop the car and open the door for a better look.





If you fancy some wildlife photography in Sweden (when the pandemic allows) you are well advised to use one of the specialised tour companies who know when & where you have the best chance of seeing your chosen animal. There's no guarantee that you will see any though - I spent three nights in a bear hide once but never saw a bear, although the experience of sitting silently in the wilderness was enjoyable - zen-like really.

In the winter you need appropriate clothing and for photography bring the fastest, longest lens you have. It is unusual to get within 100m of a wild animal unless you're in a hide. A monopod can be useful and it can double-up as a walking stick if there's deep snow!

Other native species in Sweden are Roe Deer, (*Capreolus capreolus*) which come to my bird table daily, Foxes, a few Musk Ox and Bison, and the predators - Bear, Wolf, Lynx and Wolverine - none of which I have ever seen in the wild. Given that all the predators can run a lot faster than me, I'm happy to keep it that way.

I am very lucky to live so close to nature and wildlife. There's so much to learn about the flora and fauna plus photographic skills to master.

It's always important to remember that you are in the animals' home and not to stress them for the sake of a photograph.





Take some time to just enjoy the view and remember the poem
"What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare ..."

©2021

The Elk and deer photographs (plus the snowplough!) were all taken close to my house. The other animals were photographed in our local wildlife park.

The most dangerous animal in Sweden? The wasp, which kills on average one person per year.

This article was first published by the RPS Germany Chapter in April 2021

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News from the Programme Coordinator

by Ann Miles FRPS

Upcoming Zoom Event

Wednesday July 28th 2021, 19.30 hrs **Nature Photography with the Olympus System** by David Smith

During this presentation David will speak about the options and features available for Macro photography using the Olympus OM-D mirrorless system.

After a brief showing of images taken using the system, he will give a live demonstration of more specialist 'in-camera' features such as Focus Peaking, Focus stacking and use of the Olympus 60mm f2.8 Macro lens.

Following the Live demonstration David will speak briefly on the High Tech and Exclusive Pro Capture feature that enables photographers to capture images before pressing the shutter button.

There will be an opportunity to ask any questions about David's images and the Olympus system. This talk will be of great interest to Olympus owners and also to those thinking of changing to a mirror-less system.
<https://rps.org/events/groups/nature/2021/july/nature-photography-with-the-olympus-system-by-david-smith/>
You are very welcome to share this event with friends who are interested in the Olympus system. The talk is free for everyone.

Field Events

See Nature Group Events at:

<https://rps.org/groups/nature>

With the current relaxation of restrictions, we have been able to add places to those outings that were full so please check on the events page and book if places are now available. If the outing is FULL when you try to book, please email me (annmiles70@gmail.com) and I will put you on a waiting list. If no place becomes available, we will try to fit in a second visit another date).

We are still looking to extend the number and range of outings so please consider sharing a visit to one of your favourite locations (contact Ann Miles).

Friday 2nd July 2021, 10.00 hrs **RSPB Snettisham, Norfolk**

The star species include Avocet, Bar-tailed Godwits, Knot, Redshank, Little Egret, Shelduck, waders and numerous woodland birds. There are several hides that hopefully should be available if you are wearing a mask. Car parking free to RSPB members.

No facilities available so bring your own packed lunch

Leader: Nick Bowman

Friday 16th July 2021, 10.00 hrs **RSPB Titchwell, Norfolk**

A wide variety of wildlife including Marsh Harrier, Bittern, Bearded Tit, Great White Egret, waders and woodland birds. There are several hides (mask wearing required in the hides). Beach watching on a rising tide is often very productive. Also plenty of subjects for macro workers. Free car park. Admission to RSPB members is free, non members will be required to pay. Facilities are available. Leader: Nick Bowman

New Outing: Friday 23rd July 2021
Bradfield Woods, nr Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
Bradfield Woods is a woodland National Nature Reserve owned and managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. It is situated about 7½ miles southeast of Bury St Edmunds. On sunny summer days the sheltered rides create the perfect habitat for butterflies, of which there are 24 species. Of special note are the White Admiral butterfly which can be seen sipping nectar from the flowers on bramble, Silver-washed Fritillaries and Purple hairstreak. Leader: Matt Clarke

Sunday August 1st - Monday August 2nd 2021 **Sharpenhoe Clappers, Bedfordshire**

Sharpenhoe Clappers is a classic chalk escarpment and also features the remains of an Iron Age Hill Fort and an impressive Beech wood. It is part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The main subjects will be butterflies, other insects and chalk loving flowering plants.

1st - 4th October 2021 Residential Weekend **Foxlease (New Forest area) - see page 12.**

There are five places remaining on this weekend. The cost for en-suite single room occupancy is £295.00. A deposit of £125.00 is required to secure your place. You will be contacted when the second payment is due. A waiting list will be operated in case of cancellations so please contact James if the event is showing as full. For further details please contact: James Foad LRPS
Tel: 07834- 810430 E-mail: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com

Distinctions Gallery

If you obtained an RPS Distinction in Nature recently, please send your Images, Statement of Intent and layout plan to: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com for inclusion on our NG Galleries website. They are a valuable resource for other members working towards their own distinction.

RPS Nature Group Residential Weekend 2021

Foxlease - New Forest

Foxlease Girlguiding Activities Centre, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7DE

Friday 1st to Monday 4th October 2021

Leader: James Foad LRPS



Foxlease combines the classic charm of a Georgian Manor House and the beauty of the surrounding area of the New Forest. All rooms are en-suite.

James Foad LRPS, the leader of this event, is now accepting bookings for the 2021 Autumn Residential Weekend.

There will be opportunities to photograph a wide range of fungi, plants, invertebrates and vertebrates.

A trip to Brownsea Island is also planned for which there will be an additional charge.

There are Sixteen places available. Please contact the leader by 'phone before booking through the RPS website, to check on availability. Once space is confirmed you will then be asked to book and pay your deposit as below through the Nature Group Events page on the RPS Website.

The Nature Group Committee is very keen for this Residential Weekend to go ahead mindful of any continuing restrictions due to Covid-19. A final decision will be made based on the best available information and discussion with Foxlease by Tuesday 31st August 2021. Deposits will only be refunded if the event is cancelled by either Foxlease or the Nature Group.

Final payments will be required by Friday 20th August 2021. After this date, deposits and final payments cannot be refunded, but can be transferred to another photographer. Members should consider taking out travel insurance to cover any financial loss if they cannot attend. In the event of the Weekend being cancelled by Foxlease at any time a full refund will be provided.

The cost for single room occupancy is £295.00

A deposit of £125.00 is required to secure your place

For further details please contact:

James Foad LRPS

Tel: 07834 – 810430 E-mail: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com

Dates for your diary

Entries Invited*

National Exhibitions with Nature sections:

Beyond Group

Closes: 25th July 2021 -

Digital Projection - 4 Classes

<http://beyondgroup.org.uk>

Dingwall National Projected Image Exhibition

Closes: September 2021

Digital Projection - 4 Classes

www.dingwallcameraclub.com

Shrewsbury Open Photography Exhibition

Closes: September 2021

Digital Projection - 4 Classes

<http://www.photocompentries.net/?org=ShropshirePS>

Frome Wessex Salon of Photography

Closes: October 2021

Digital Projection - 6 Classes

www.fromewessexcameraclub.com/salon.html

International Photographic Salons with FIAP patronage and Nature Sections:

14th International Contest of Photography

"Narava 2021" (Slovenia)

Closes: 29th August 2021

Digitally Projected Images

3 Sections: Nature, Open & Landscapes

More information about FIAP (The International Federation of Photographic Art) can be found at:

<https://www.fiap.net/en>

Information for entering individual Salons with FIAP Patronage can be found at:

<https://www.myfiap.net/patronages>

**Members are advised to check Salon websites for rules, closing dates & entry requirements before preparing their entry as image sizes & rules may differ.*

Covid 19 restrictions may require exhibitions to be selected using software like Zoom.

For Sale

LensCoat© 3Xpandable Long Lens Bag.

Holds a Canon/Nikon Pro size DSLR fitted with up to a 500mm lens with converter or 200-400mm lens. Internal dimensions: 8" x 8" x 19.75", 23.5" or 27.75" max.

Lots of useful features including folding flat for packing or storage and adjustable height for use with shorter lenses. Perfect for use in safari vehicles.



Never used
Condition: as new.

Bag price new	£330.00
plus Harness	£40.00
Total cost:	£370.00

For Sale	£200.00
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Moose Peterson MP3 v2 Back Pack by Mindshift



Used once only.
Excellent condition.

3 compartment layout holds up to 3 bodies with lenses attached plus other items of photo kit.

Large compartment dimensions:	46 x 17.3 x 17.3cm
Small compartments (each)	21.5 x 15 x 17.3cm

Price to buy new/unused	£200.00
For Sale	£100.00

Benro GH2 Carbon Fibre Gimbal head.

Boxed, brand new, as purchased, never used.

Price when purchased	£379.00
For Sale	£200.00

**Postage/delivery is not included.
Offers considered**

For more information contact Dawn Osborn:
naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com

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Late Summer	Copy deadline 31st August Published mid/late September.

All contributions should be submitted to the Editor at: naturegroup_eneews_editor@btinternet.com. Any item of interest to nature photographers is welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books. Copy should be submitted as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images should be supplied as flattened 8bit sRGB tif or jpg files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch. Please do not email larger images.

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The views expressed within Nature Group eNews are solely those of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or the Nature Group Committee.

Distribution:

eNews is available to members as a download from the Nature Group Members section of the RPS website. An RPS Bulletin advising members of its availability will be emailed to Members using addresses supplied by them to the RPS Membership Department in Bristol. Please update them if you change your email address.

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Chair of the Natural History Distinctions Panel**

* Members please note:

The Nature Group is seeking a new Honorary Secretary to take over from Duncan Locke before he becomes Group Chair in April 2023. If you have the necessary experience, please help your Nature Group by volunteering for this very important role. Please contact Duncan Locke for further information. Email: duncan.locke@btinternet.com

Nature Group Exhibitions:

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme. Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com



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