



THE **IRIS**

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

Issue No. 139 / Spring 2021

RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting 45th Annual General Meeting Opening of the Annual Exhibition

Saturday 24th April 2021

The format of the Spring Meeting will depend upon any Covid-19 restrictions in place on the 24th April. If possible, the Meeting will follow the format of previous years and be held at Smethwick Photographic Society in the West Midlands. If not, it will be held on Zoom.

The Meeting will start at 1030hrs and the morning will be taken up with a presentation by an eminent nature photographer. The AGM will be held after a lunch break to be followed by the Presentation of the Awards and the showing of the accepted images from the Exhibition.

Further details will be published nearer the time on the Group Section of the RPS website.

Reminder: Nature Group Committee Elections 2021

The Nature Group Committee is elected to serve for two years. The next election will be at the AGM on the 24th April 2021 for the 2021 – 2023 Committee.

Would YOU like to join the Committee?

We are keen to hear from Group Members who want to join the Committee and help to run the Group. The Committee meets on-line about every six to eight weeks so Committee Members from all parts of the UK and beyond can attend meetings without travelling. Please feel free to contact any of the present Committee Members listed in The Iris and on the Group Section of the RPS website if you want to know more about what is involved.

If you like to get involved in helping to run your Group, or if you wish to nominate another Group Member, then please complete the Nomination Form below and return it to the Honorary Secretary by Saturday 27th March 2021. We would like to hear from you!

Nomination Form for RPS Nature Group Committee Elections 2021

**Nominees, Proposers and Seconders must all be Current Members of the RPS Nature Group.
Closing Date: Saturday 27th March 2021 (note revised date from that published previously).**

I wish to nominate: RPS Membership No.

For the Post of:

Name of Proposer:

RPS Membership No. Signature:

Name of Secunder:

RPS Membership No. Signature:

If elected I agree to serving on the RPS Nature Group Committee in the above Post:

Signature: Date:

After completion by all three persons, the form should be returned to:

Duncan Locke LRPS, RPS Nature Group Honorary Secretary

E-mail: duncan.locke@btinternet.com Tel: 07989 494232

Photocopies and scans of this form are acceptable and may be returned by post or e-mail

Publication information

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All contributions should be submitted to the Editor. Items covering any aspect of nature photography and/or natural history are welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books. The Editor can be contacted at: iris_editor@griff45.com

Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or wetransfer.com. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied on CD or via WeTransfer.com as flattened 8bit sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Please do not send larger images. Larger files may be needed for the cover.

No payment will be made for material used and whilst every care will be taken, neither the Editor, the Nature Group or the Printers can accept liability for any damage that may occur to photographic material submitted.

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

Distribution:

'The Iris' is forwarded to members using address labels produced by the RPS Membership Dept in Bath. Any member not receiving their copy should contact that department so that their name appears on a label in the future. The Secretary will be pleased to post single copies to members who have failed to receive them.

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Editorial

I hope that all our readers had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year in spite of the restrictions. During this latest lockdown I have been digging out my pictures from my visit to Australia last year as you will see in one of the articles! I hope you enjoy the varied pieces in this edition and I thank all of the contributors. Please contact me if you have an article in preparation and I will be pleased to give you any help you need.

Talking of helping others, I recently had an e mail from Trevor Parsons, who I interviewed for The Iris two years ago. Trevor uses wildlife photography to help overcome his mental illness and is promoting this therapy far and wide. An exhibition of his photography ran for several months over the summer in the New Forest to wide acclaim. He has been interviewed on national and local television and features in an article in the magazine, Country Life. I applauded his efforts to help others who struggle with mental issues and I wish him well.

Once again I am indebted to Dawn Osborn FRPS for her sterling work in editing and proof reading.

Stay safe and well and enjoy your Spring photography.




Cover image

Hoverfly (*Rhingia campestris*)
on Water Avens by James Foad LRPS.

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Vice-President of the Society;

Director General of the Society;

Hon. Treasurer of the Society;

Chairman of the Nature A & F Distinctions Panel

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, details above.

Communication Within the Nature Group - Please Don't Be Left Out!

Like all organisations, the Nature Group has to adapt continually to changes in methods of communication. The Iris is our longest serving communication and the only item sent by post to ensure that it reaches all Members. Rest assured, we have no plans to change either the format of The Iris or how it is sent out.

RPS Broadcast E-mails and our section of the RPS website are well established and in September 2017 we introduced our Electronic Newsletter, eNews, that provides information on the Group's activities to supplement The Iris. Our Facebook page became active in early 2020 and we now have the Nature Group Galleries; both of these provide Members with opportunities to show and receive comments on their work.

Let us have your e-mail address please

How do we send out information to ALL Members that is too urgent to wait for the next issue of The Iris? Broadcast E-mails only reach about 93% of our Members so a small, but significant number, are left out. It is not practical or economic to post information to those without e-mail addresses, so if you do have an e-mail address and it is not registered with the RPS, then please do so otherwise you may not hear about Group activities. We will only use your e-mail address to inform you of Group activities and not share it with any other organisation.

Also – and this applies to all Members – please keep looking at the Group Section of the RPS website for the latest information on Group activities.

Duncan Locke LRPS

Honorary Secretary RPS Nature Group

From the Chair - Thomas Hanahoe FRPS

WIRELESS CONNECTIONS

Many of us will have seen television football games or perhaps tennis matches with a row of cameras lined up alongside the goals or net. The cameras are equipped with wide angle lenses to record the action across the full width of the area of action. The cameras are also fitted with a wireless file transmitter so that the photographer in charge of the camera can press the shutter and control all the camera settings from a remote location using a computer (laptop, tablet or phone). As the photographs are taken, the image files are sent via a Wi-Fi network from the camera to the photographer and, more often than not, to a remote computer on a press editor's desk so that the pictures are available for immediate publication.

This technology provides wonderful opportunities for wildlife photographers. It is possible to photograph animals wild and free in their natural habitat with the camera located close to the animals and with the photographer controlling it from a temporary hide or similar structure. There is no human disturbance to the wildlife. The camera is controlled from the computer and all of the relevant parameters such as shutter speed, aperture, ISO, focus etc. can be altered via the computer.

Some years ago, having received permission from the appropriate authority, I set up a project using this technology to photograph large flocks of birds as they roosted. The camera support was submerged in the ground and the camera was disguised with camouflage scrim before the birds arrived. By the time they came to the roost I was equipped with a laptop and located in a hide about eighty metres away from the camera. I really enjoyed that project and learned a great deal.

Wireless connections between camera and computer

In order for the camera and the computer to communicate with each other it is necessary to set up a Wi-Fi network to which both can connect. There are two different types of network which may be used: these are ad hoc and infrastructure networks.

Ad hoc network

An ad hoc network connects the camera directly to the computer through a local network created by the computer. Most DSLR cameras have menu

settings to enable an ad hoc local network. For the ad hoc network to function, the camera and the computer need to be in close proximity (a few metres) and the appropriate software from the camera manufacturer needs to be installed on the computer.

For example, to connect my Canon camera to a computer via an ad hoc network I need to access the Camera Menu:

Menu > Communication Settings > Enable > Network Settings > ConnectionSettings
EOSUtility > Connection Wizard > Wireless > Select a Network > Camera Access Mode
Point > Easy Connection.

Then on the computer, I select the camera name from the list of available wireless networks. This generates a dialogue box which requests a password (Encryption Key) which is shown in the camera window. When the password is typed into the computer the camera enables communication between the camera and the computer via Pairing Devices and asks that the EOS Utility Software is started on the computer. Then to control the camera remotely by the computer I access the main page on the Canon EOS Utility software and select the EOS Utility Remote Shooting section. The camera and the laptop can now communicate and I can take pictures, receive the resulting images and control all the camera settings from my laptop. However, an ad hoc network connection is limited to 11Mbps and is therefore slow. And because it requires close proximity between the camera and the laptop, it has in my view somewhat limited use for wildlife photography.

Infrastructure network

An infrastructure network connects the camera and computer together via a wireless router. We routinely use wireless routers at home to distribute the signal from our internet provider to our computers and other wireless devices. DSLR cameras are able to communicate with wireless routers. When the camera joins the local Wi-Fi network image files may be sent directly from the camera to a computer on the same network and, if the network is connected to the internet, they can also be sent to other computers located anywhere in the world.

To use this system in the field, away from any mains electricity supply, the wireless router needs to be powered by a battery source (usually 12V, 1.5A). Many of us have old routers from our previous internet providers and these should work fine in the field. To operate my router in the field, I use a rechargeable Powergorilla Battery (Lithium Polymer, 24000mAh, 88Wh) which provides electricity at 5V, 12V, 16V, 19V or 24V. It is supplied with numerous connectors and charges a wide range of electronic devices. Even though the wireless router is isolated and not connected to the internet, it emits its own wireless signal which will be detected by both the camera and the computer. This creates a local area network (LAN) which can be joined by the camera and the computer. This enables the camera and the computer to communicate with each other through the router. In-doors, wireless routers transmit over a range of up to 50m but outside without obstructions the maximum range is about 100m.

Some DSLRs cameras have an internal wireless file transmitter (WFT) fitted by the manufacturer (e.g. Canon EOS 6D) and Canon also has a Wi-Fi adapter which fits into an SD card slot in some dual card cameras to enable wireless capabilities. Other cameras use an external WFT device which attaches to a terminal on the camera. The range of the WFT is usually about 100m.

In the field the wireless router, along with its battery source, is best placed in between the camera/WFT and the laptop. Thus the distance from camera to router can be up to about 100m and the distance from the router to the computer can be up to c100m, giving a total working distance from camera to laptop of about 200m. The connection speed is usually up to a maximum of 300Mbps.

Once the router is powered up by the battery it will begin to transmit a Wi-Fi signal. Use your camera menu (with Canon usually under 'Communication Setting') to join the router network. The router has a name (SSID or Service Set Identifier) and a password and both of these are usually identified by the manufacturer on the router label. You will need to input this information into both your camera and your computer to enable them to join the router's local network. It is best to set up the network connections between the camera and computer close to the wireless router; connect the three devices within a few metres of each other.

Normally in the field, after setting up your network and retiring to your hide, during the shoot period it will not be possible to have access to the camera or router without disturbing the wildlife.

Consequently, it is advisable to ensure that:

- the camera Auto power Off is set to Disable otherwise the camera will turn itself off after the specified time and will be removed from the local area network
- the computer is prevented from going to sleep
- the computer firewall is turned off
- and bearing in mind the British climate, it is advisable to protect both the router and the camera from adverse weather.

Once all is set up and the camera and the computer are communicating satisfactorily and you can take pictures and see them with the computer, you can depart the scene with the computer and go to your hide. You will now be able to activate the camera shutter and all the other camera parameters from your hidden location.

Many DSLRs allow the recording of two separate image files for each photograph. If your camera has such a facility then it is advisable to record your images in raw or large JPEG format and also to record the images as separate small JPEG files. You can then arrange for the sJPEG can be transmitted from camera to computer so that it will be available on your computer screen immediately after you take the photograph via your computer. The raw/large JPEG file will remain on the camera card. You can review your images on the computer screen and make any necessary adjustments to the camera settings via the camera's software program on the computer.

It is sensible to practice these methods at home before heading off to photograph a major project. For example take some photographs from inside your home of the activity around the bird feeders in the back garden. Great fun!

Best wishes to you all,



EXPERIMENTING WITH MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY DURING LOCKDOWN

Ann Miles FRPS



For some time now my standard photogear for macrophotography has been a Fuji XT-2 camera with either a 50mm f2.8 Zeiss macro lens or an 80mm Fuji macro lens depending on the likely distance of my subject. Both are designed to give high quality 1:1 (life-size) images.

Spending more time around the house and garden during lockdown has encouraged me to experiment with different lenses and lens setups to see if I could get greater and better magnification of my subjects.

The first step was to try an extension ring on my 50mm lens (16mm). This gave me a closer focus point and around 1.5:1 (one and half times life size)

I could also have tried the extension ring on my 80mm macro but this has the disadvantage that the lens cannot be used for more distant shots as it no longer focuses at infinity. I therefore decided to experiment with extenders, in particular, a 2X

extender, which gives 2:1 magnification at its closest point but still works well for more distant subjects such as butterflies and dragonflies.

I then turned my thoughts to constructing an alternative close-up lens system and remembered a trick from many years back of reversing a lens to get a cheap macro. I constructed a reversing ring from a redundant T2 lens mount and ring and used an Olympus 50mm lens from my film camera. This resulted in a lens with around 1.5:1

The next step was to connect two lenses together to give extreme macro. The set up included gluing two filter rings together with the screws to the outside to allow the two lenses to be connected lens to lens. I used the Olympus 50mm at F1.8 and a 10-24mm Fuji lens. The Fuji needed to be used at 24mm zoom length to give sufficient circle of view. It was mounted onto a focusing rail over a lightbox.



This leaf insect egg is only about 2mm and the focusing distance less than 1cm and to get light onto the top of the egg an LCD light was needed for illumination. The resulting image is a stack of 25 images processed using Zerene stacker software.

The photograph on page 8 of the Eyed Moth wing shows the individual scales in 3-4X magnification

I had always fancied owning a Lensbaby right from their initial introduction but somehow I had always found allocation of funds had gone elsewhere. I decided to construct my own! I call it the Hose Baby. It features a small length of hose from a dead vacuum cleaner and an old 50mm plastic kit lens from Canon.

The photographs

Previous page - Common Spotted Orchid Fuji XT-2 50mm Zeiss Touit 1/180 F14 iso 200.

This page- Hose Baby construction and stacked image of Leaf insect egg at 3-4 times magnification.

Opposite - Spider Fuji XT-2 80mm macro plus 2X converter 1/250 F22 iso400. Reversed lens set up.





As the hose is transparent it needs a black cloth sleeve to keep out extraneous light. The hose allows variable extension of the lens but, it can also move sideways or up and down, which gives some interesting effects.

In conclusion, after much experimentation, my standard carry-round setup is an 80 macro lens with a 2x extender allowing me to get 2:1 magnification on very small insects but also to photograph any more distant butterflies, dragonflies and even large passing birds.

Recently I have been combining this with a small compact camera with a 23mm lens which gives great images of subjects in their environment.

The photographs

This page - Eyed Hawkmoth Wing Fuji XT-2 50mm reversed 1/60 F?? iso800 and Couple Lens Setup.

Opposite page - Aphids, Fuji XT-2 50mm Zeiss Touit plus 16mm extension ring 1/180 F20 iso 1600, Chalkhill Blues Fuji XT-2 80mm macro plus 2X converter 1/250 F22 and iso640 coupled lens set up and Eupodes sp. Fuji XT-2 80mm macro 1/250 F18 iso400.









The photographs

Opposite page - Hoverfly with Hose Baby and another picture of Hose Baby construction.

This page - Red Damselfly Fuji XT-2 80mm macro plus 2X converter 1/250 F22 iso800 and Wasp Spider Fuji x100V 23mm 1/400 F8.0 ISO 200.

ON THE STEPPES OF GENGHIS KHAN

John Nathan ARPS

Mongolia- what does that conjure up for you? Probably hard fighting men on horses following in the footsteps of Genghis Khan, who in the 13th century ran the largest land based empire the world has ever seen. (The British Empire was the largest, but was sea based). At one time the Mongols ran an area stretching from Beijing to Vienna. They were portrayed as bloodthirsty and brutal. In more recent history the Mongols were absorbed into the Soviet empire and were brutally suppressed. In 1991 they gained their freedom and the country is now a democracy; in fact they were having an election when we visited in 2016. One extraordinary thing happened after the Mongolians regained their freedom; some of them reverted from Soviet established collective farms to the nomadic life that their forbears had been living for centuries.

Where is Mongolia? It is sandwiched between Russia and China. It is what used to be called 'Outer Mongolia'. Only a few tourists visit the area, but it is well worth a trip. The northern part is forest, the central area steppe (grassland). This gradually turns to desert in the south. It is one of the most sparsely populated countries on earth. It is the second largest landlocked country (Kazakhstan

the largest) and has a population of only three million. We travelled to Ulan Bataar, the capital, and then in 4X4 vehicles south across the steppe and finally into the Gobi Desert. Our journey was some 2000 miles, only a small amount of which was on paved roads. There were no signposts but amazingly our drivers knew precisely which road to take at every junction!

The people are almost born in the saddle, and can ride, often bareback, from childhood. Their very small horses are a common form of transport, and it is not difficult to see how Genghis Khan formed his empire; brilliant horsemen in leather armour on small highly manoeuvrable horses must have literally run rings round the Europeans decked in heavy metal armour on big, slow horses.

Surprisingly perhaps, there is a lot of wildlife in Mongolia. You often see groups of a dozen wild horses on the steppe, which has endless grass for them to eat. On our trip we also saw cows and yaks in the northern area, goats further south, and wild camels in the driest areas. On one day we saw a rare type of deer, a Goitred Gazelle, hunted almost to extinction in the past. On the steppe there were Demoiselle Cranes, and Golden Eagles.



At first our trip went south to Mandalgovand and Dalanzadgad. Next we travelled west along the Gurvan Sayan Uul, a low mountain range, towards the giant sand dunes. We turned south, where it was extremely hot. Then we were taken down one alpine style valley with a stream and melting snow in its base. Then we turned north again, staying in Karakoram, which was the base of the Mongol Empire, later completely destroyed by the Chinese, and finally back to Ulan Bataar. We lived in Gers; Mongolian yurts. These have been around as a dwelling in Asia for three thousand years and were very comfortable and surprisingly roomy.

Going south, the steppe gradually gets drier, with diminishing vegetation. Eventually it becomes akin to rubble, with interspersed green plants and a few flowers. We only saw one area where it was just sand.

I took a Canon EOS5D mk 3, with a series of lenses including a Canon 70-200mm f2.8, a wonderful lens which I have used extensively for wildlife. It is less important for flowers but can be used to throw backgrounds out of focus. In Mongolia the backgrounds were so fantastic that I wanted to keep them in focus! I had enough memory cards to take up to 100GB of information and used most of that. Every

night I backed up on to a small tablet computer.

I have found identifying the flowers very difficult and there are no definitive textbooks on flowers of the Gobi Desert. I contacted Kew Gardens and even plant photography experts for help, but with little success. Ultimately I have had to rely largely on internet photos showing flowers which look similar. So I will be grateful for anyone who can help with their identification.

If you ever go to Mongolia, which I would definitely recommend, I suggest you go to Nadaam while you are there. These are the national games revolving round the three main sports of wrestling, archery, and horse racing. They are held in July at Ulan Bataar, over several days, and are a wonderful sight and a demonstration of national pride.

j-nathanphotograph.co.uk

The photographs

Opposite page - Setting up the Gers.

*This page - Wild flowers, possibly *Pacelia* sp. in the Gobi Desert.*





The photographs

This page - Wild horses in the Gobi Desert, Ice from a snowfall in a deep ravine in the Gobi Desert and Saxaul bushes and desert animal in the Gobi Desert.

*Opposite page - clockwise from the top, Wild Wallflowers, Wild Rhubarb in the Gobi Desert and Coral lily (*Lilium pumilum*) in the Gobi Desert.*









The photographs

*Opposite page - top, Wild rhubarb (*Rheum officinale*) and bottom, Saxaul trees both in the Gobi Desert.*

This page - Wild camels, a deep ravine in the Gobi Desert near the Chinese border and Wild Cauliflower in the Gobi Desert.







The photographs

Opposite page - top, Thistle in the hottest part of the Gobi Desert and bottom, Unidentified wild flower also in the Gobi Desert.

This page- clockwise from the top, Possibly *Tulbaghia* sp. on red cliffs in the Gobi Desert, Unidentified succulent on sand dune in the Gobi Desert and *Cistanche tubilosa*.



SOME WILDLIFE OF AUSTRALIA

(plus a little from Hong Kong and Singapore)

Gerald Griffin

I guess that like most of you reading this, Covid-19 decimated our 2020 holiday plans. However, my wife Sally and I were luckier than most and did manage to get away in early January for a six-week holiday to Hong Kong, Australia and Singapore. This was not a wildlife holiday but we built into the schedule plenty of opportunities to see interesting plants and animals when and where we could. In Hong Kong we were just tourists. I took one wildlife shot; their national flower in bloom! Most of the wildlife I photographed was in Australia but we did visit the Botanical Gardens in Singapore and saw some wonderful orchids.

Our first stop in Australia was Adelaide. We arrived on Australia day and saw a colourful parade in the afternoon that reflected the diversity of the city's population and its many local interest groups. The Botanical gardens was a short walk from our hotel and during our morning's visit we saw many exotic plants

and several interesting birds. From Adelaide we flew to Kangaroo Island, most of which had been terribly affected by the well-reported recent fires. Fortunately for us the fires did not reach the farm that hosted us but they did restrict what we could see and do on the two days of excursions that we had booked. The first day provided some good wildlife viewing including our first sighting of Koala Bears. Our final stop that day was the Seal Bay Conservation Park on the island's south coast. Here the ranger told me that visitor numbers were 90% down due to the fires. The second day was less productive from a wildlife perspective but we did see our first Kangaroos and Wallabies.

After three more flights we landed in Ayers Rock or Uluru. Again we bought excursions for our three day stay there. Here we experienced at first-hand how bush fires start. We saw a lightning strike at the foot of Uluru followed by a small puff of smoke that quickly





The photographs

Opposite page - Rainbow Lorikeet.

This page - above Bauhinia blaeana, Hong Kong's national flower and right a snarling Tasmanian Devil.



developed into a huge fire that required the attention of the local fire brigade.

Melbourne was next on the itinerary, largely to see friends and the city sights before picking up a car and driving to Philip Island. The car gave us much more flexibility and scope to stop and see wildlife. We mainly went to see the Penguin parade, which was amazing. Of course we followed the strict rule of 'No photography', so no photographs to show! A ferry across Melbourne harbour took us and the car to the start of the Great Ocean Road for some walking and sightseeing. The walking got more serious in the Grampian Mountains, our next stop. Our cabin there was isolated and at dawn and dusk we were visited by many Kangaroos and Wallabies. One of the highlights was seeing a Joey in its mother's pouch.

When we were planning the trip, friends told us that they had enjoyed Tasmania and we decided to spend a week there using a camper van for transport and accommodation. The walking, scenery and wildlife on the island were excellent. I particularly wanted to see Tasmanian Devils and a guide that we used in the north found us their dung and said that we might hear them at night but seeing them was highly unlikely! We did, however, see, hear and photograph them in a breeding centre at Devil's

Mountain. I photographed other marsupials as well including the Duck-billed Platypus and Wombat.

In our final destinations in Australia, the Blue Mountains and Sydney, we were tourists again and the zoom lens stayed in its bag! Some of the mountain ridges had been devastated by the fires and many houses had been destroyed. Interestingly the heavily forested valleys had mostly escaped the lightning strikes and were verdant. There were already plenty of signs of new plant growth and re-colonisation by animals just a few weeks after the fires had finished.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to the three very different countries, meeting people, seeing sights and the wildlife when we could.

I usually take my Nikon D3 and Nikon 300mm f2.8 lens on wildlife holidays but I decided to leave these beasts at home for this trip because of their bulk and weight and use my Nikon D700 and Nikon 85-400mm zoom for wildlife photography. The zoom lens is almost as good as the prime lens and, as I was not expecting to do much action photography, the limited capabilities of the D700 when taking bursts would not be a major problem. I used my Nikon 24-120mm and a compact Canon for general photography.





The photographs

Opposite page - Galah Parrots, Koala Bear and Australian Fur Seals.

Above - Black Oyster Catcher, Straw-necked Ibis and a tree that has been sprayed with fire retardant. It seems to have worked!

Right - Australian Pelican and Pied Cormorant.

All taken on Kangaroo Island.







The photographs

Opposite page - Another Australian Pelican with a tasty snack and a Koala Bear, very unusually, moving!

Top - A very old Cycad Fern Tree taken in the "Garden of Eden" of Kings Canyon, Northern Territory.

Middle - A Crested Pigeon and Australian Wood Duck

Left - and a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.





The photographs

Opposite page - An Emu and a mother Wallaby with her Joey feeding from her pouch.

Above - A Pandemelon.

Left - A Kangaroo with a Joey in her pouch.

Below - Boxing Kangaroos with a very small audience.





The photographs

Left - Common Bushtail Possum

Middle - Duck-billed Platypus.

Bottom - left, Quall sp., right Echidna.

Opposite page -Tasmanian Devil and Wombat.









The photographs

Opposite page - Top, fresh shoots of unidentified plants growing on recently burnt trees just several weeks after the fires.

Bottom, Tree Ferns and Australian Magpie.

This page above - , Reindeer and Coral Lichen and two Orchids photographed in the Botanical Gardens, Singapore.

Below, a Tombolo on Tasmania. A Tombolo is a narrow strip of land with the sea on both sides. Chesil Beach is an excellent UK example.



FANCY LEADING A FIELD TRIP OR RESIDENTIAL?

James Foad LRPS

When I first joined the RPS Nature Group back in 2004, the late Robert Hawkesworth FRPS was the Chairman. In those days there were often 11 field trips to choose from and an annual residential weekend as well. The Nature Group still have a popular annual Residential weekend, there are sadly far fewer field trips and this is where you, the reader might be able to help!

During my early days in the group I made a point of attending one weekend in particular, a field trip to Kenfig Pool led by John Hankin LRPS on the Saturday, and the next day one led by Margaret Hodge FRPS to Oxwich Bay, on the Gower in South Wales.

On my first meeting with John, when I was new to nature photography, he advised me to get a cable release for my camera. I promptly did! The following year John led me onto a sand dune, to show me the locations of some Biting Stonecrop (Sedum acre), and Eyebright (Euphrasia). At our

second stop John helped me setup my camera and tripod but disaster struck; I could not find my £90 Canon cable release! In spite of all the efforts of my fellow participants, it was not found. On my journey back I wondered if I had dropped it at the start and that it was now keeping the Biting Stonecrop company. I decided to go back the next day to look but that meant an early start so I could retrace my steps before going off to Oxwich Bay. On arrival I left my camera in my car boot to speed up my hunt. I raced onto the dunes and, sure enough, there was my cable release nestled by the Biting Stonecrop. On my way back to the car park I spied a Fox with a rabbit in its mouth casually walking nearby. It stopped and looked at me. The light was perfect but alas on this occasion there was no photograph to be had. We must have stood there eyeing each other for 20 seconds before going our separate ways.



Getting back on track, I always remember the Nature group asking for volunteers to run field meetings in the past, so I thought to myself, "It cannot be that hard and they say that you do not need a detailed knowledge of the wildlife as there is usually someone there who does". I decided to take the plunge and in November 2007 I organised a trip to East Blean Woods in Kent to photograph Fungi.

I have attended every single Residential weekend since Joining the Nature Group. The first was organised by the late Kath Bull ARPS, at the Kingcombe Centre, in Dorset. In 2009 John Bebbington FRPS started leading the weekends but said that he was not able to organise one for 2011. Boyed by my field trip planning I decided to run it. It was at Kingcombe again, and I will be forever grateful to my good friend John Bebbington for all the help he gave me in its organisation. Since then I have been the principal organiser of our weekends, although others have gallantly stepped in from time to time when I needed a rest!

What are the benefits of organising a field trip or residential weekends? In part it is seeing others enjoying wildlife and developing their nature photography. Participants are always willing to share their experiences and knowledge. Each brings with them a wealth of wildlife knowledge to pass on; the names, behaviour, habitat and distribution of species. They are keen to show others the camera and shooting techniques that they have successfully used. Field trips and residentials also give people the chance to make some wonderful friendships with like-minded people.

So where do you start? For a field trip I stick to my local area because this makes planning easier. I use the RSPB, Wildlife trust, Natural England and the forestry commission to research information on Nature Reserves in my area.

Their websites and literature provide an abundance of information as to what can be seen at each site at different times of the year. Once a date has been chosen I undertake several reces to assess such matters as accessibility, parking, toilet facilities and ease of finding photographic material. This information will help planning and in the writing of the

The photographs

Opposite page - Male Marbled White on fading Oxeye Daisy.

Here, above - Eyed Hawkmoth larva.

below - Meadow Grasshopper.



Group Risk Assessment. Writing this can be can be worrying the first time but you can get plenty of help and support from our committee and the RPS office.

When I plan a residential weekend, I find accommodation that is handy for the field work. Field Study centres are good value for money. The price will have to be discussed along with the need for a meeting room.

When everything is finalised, an advert for The Iris, website and E-news needs writing. This explains the date(s), accommodation costs (if applicable) and any other charges along with the contact details of the leader and booking arrangements.

About two or three days before the event I re-visit the site(s) to check again for any potential risks and to look at what subjects are around and condition of subjects before writing and sending the itinerary to participants, I sometimes revisit the site(s) the day before if fungi are part of the day to make sure they are still there and to check condition!

On the day of the field trip or residential I arrive early to meet and greet members. When it's time to start the meeting, I go through the risk assessment and in the case of the residential's so that everyone knows the hazards and I make sure they have my mobile number in case there is a problem. I tell

everyone where and when the group will meet for a packed lunch and arrange a time and place to meet at the end of the day.

Afterwards, I reflect on the event's success to see if there was anything that could be improved. Finally I write a report for the Iris and also a shorter one for the website.

I hope this does not sound too daunting! Yes it is a bit 'scary' when you lead for the first time but, with experience and the benefits of hindsight, it gets easier. Running courses gives me lots of pleasure and satisfaction. So to all the members out there, why not try and run a field trip or even a residential? With more volunteers the Nature Group can have more field trips to more diverse habitats in different parts of the country. We might even get back up to 11!

The photographs

Below - Emperor Moth Lava 5th instar.

Opposite page top - Brimston necturing.

Opposite page botton - Gannet preparing to land.

Next page top - David Deer.

Next page bottom - Mycena sp.

All photographs taken on NG field trips.



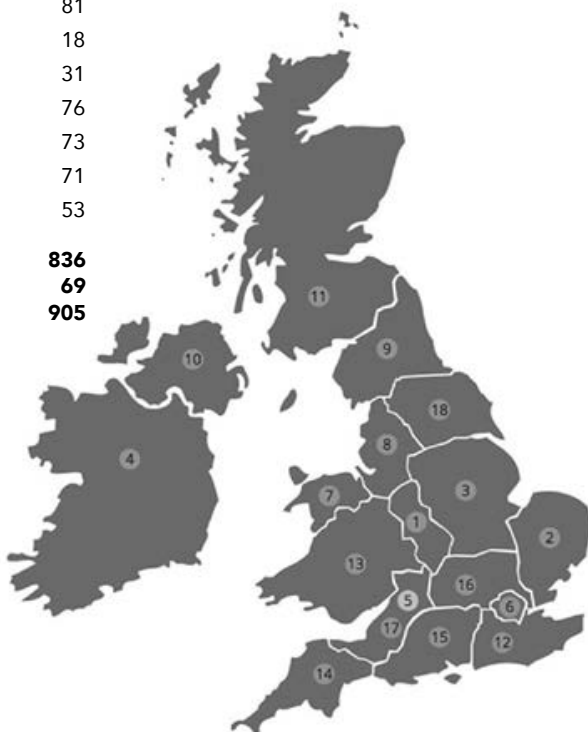




Membership and other Statistics

Shown below are Nature Group members per RPS region as at January 2021
(and January 2020) together with other statistics.

Regions	Jan 2021	Jan 2020	Distinctions	Jan 2021	Jan 2020
1 Central	61	64	Honorary FRPS	3	4
2 East Anglia	97	90	FRPS	63	69
3 East Midlands	50	49	ARPS	246	247
4 Eire	9	8	LRPS	229	217
6 London	68	80	No Distinctions	372	368
7 North Wales	12	10			
8 North Western	55	54			
9 Northern	27	29			
10 Northern Ireland	3	4			
11 Scotland	52	45	Total	913	905
12 South Eastern	86	81			
13 South Wales	18	18			
14 South Western	35	31			
15 Southern	73	76			
16 Thames Valley	71	73			
17 Western	79	71			
18 Yorkshire	53	53			
Total UK	849	836			
Overseas	64	69			
Total Membership	913	905			



These statistics are prepared from data by
the RPS Membership Department

Map courtesy of the RPS website



RPS Nature Group - Residential Weekend

FSC Blencathra Centre, Cumbria. Friday 25th - Monday 28th June 2021

In response to requests from RPS NG members in the North of England/Scotland, the annual summer Nature Group Residential Field Meeting is to be held at the FSC Blencathra Centre in Cumbria in June 2021. Potentially involves an additional trip to the Ainsdale Dunes on Thursday 24th June to photograph dune activity. An additional guide will be present on the day. Booking accommodation and meals for this activity are the responsibility of each attendee.

The weekend includes around 8-10 photographic sessions, evening speakers, three nights basic accommodation in single or twin rooms, all meals & soft drinks. Transportation to all sites will be provided though a small fee may be payable. The sessions will be based around macro photography though there may be additional opportunities to photograph birds or landscapes.

There are 16 available places: 10 in single rooms (£260 each) and 6 in twin rooms (£245 each). A deposit of £125 is required to secure your place. When booking, please state your preferred room type plus any dietary requirements.

See the RPS Nature Group website for online booking details or contact:

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