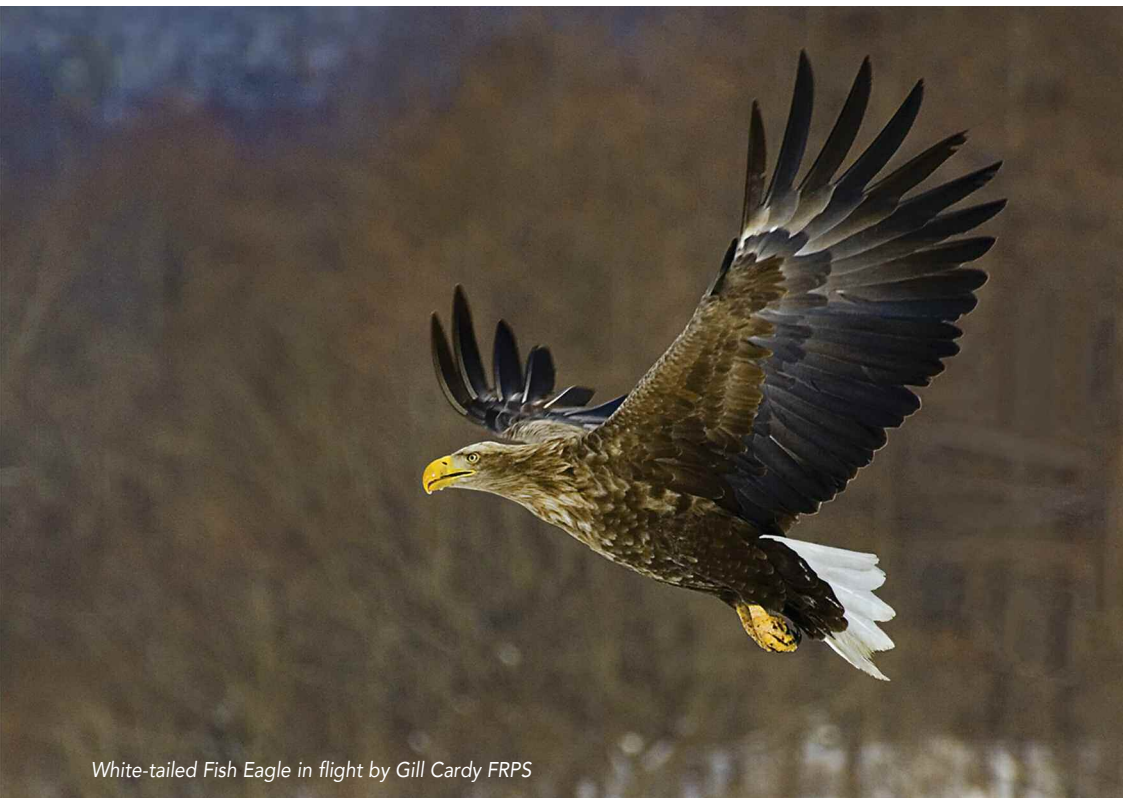


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THE RPS
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
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White-tailed Fish Eagle in flight by Gill Cardy FRPS

THE IRIS



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

Issue No. 121 / Spring 2015

David Osborn FRPS invites you to join him on one of his

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January 2016 - Yellowstone in Winter

Explore the splendor of Yellowstone National Park in winter.

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Email: poppyland3@btinternet.com

Web: davidosbornphotography.co.uk

Chairman's Day 2015

Saturday 24th October 2015

10.30 hrs - 16.00 hrs

The Old Schoolhouse

Oldbury, West Midlands (nr Junction 2 of the M5)

Speakers:

Mike Lane FRPS

Roger Hance FRPS

Chairman, Richard Revels FRPS

Recent successful Associateship and Fellowship panels will be on display

Full details and a Booking Form will be in the Summer edition of The Iris.

Publication information

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Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD. 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 as sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). If your image is selected for use on the cover of The Iris you will be requested to supply a file size with dimensions approx 3000 x 2000 pixels.

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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.

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by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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Cover shot: *White-tailed Eagle in flight*
by Gill Cardy FRPS

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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.

Editorial

Is it just me, or do you also find that time passes much quicker than it used to? Already it is March, winter is more or less behind us and signs of spring are everywhere. I find that photo trips seem to take up quite a bit more time than the actual time you are away from home. The preparation and packing takes up time, as does the laundry and putting it all away again when you return home, not to mention the downloading and sorting of the images one captures. Then there is the work at home that needs catching up on. At least holidays in the winter, especially if they are to somewhere in the southern hemisphere, make the British winter seem shorter with the added benefit that the garden hasn't gone berserk while you have been away. Certainly preparation of The Iris seems to come around very quickly.

The Iris needs articles for both the Summer and Winter issues. Reports of trips to places both at home and on distant shores are welcome, as are reviews of kit or books. Several people who said they would provide articles have yet to deliver and more are required otherwise there will be little to include in the next edition other than the award winning images from our 2015 Annual Exhibition.

On that subject, please do try to attend the Spring Meeting, AGM and Annual Exhibition Opening on Saturday 11th April. It will be held, as usual, at The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, home of Smethwick Photographic Society. There is no charge to attend this day and you will see some excellent photography too. Full timetable given on page 4.

Congratulations to Gill Cardy whose successful Fellowship submission is shown in this issue. (See page 10). If you have recently succeeded with an Associate or Fellowship distinction in Nature, we would love to publish your images and story within the pages of The Iris.

By the time you read this the Spring Equinox will have passed and maybe the clocks will have been put forward an hour. I sincerely hope that you will all find plenty to focus on this spring.



From the chair

It was good to see so many members at my Chairman's Day, including many new faces. I received many favourable comments during the day and following by letter and email. From the many animated discussions taking place during the breaks it was clear that many members were taking the opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones. The only snag was that it was difficult to persuade them to break off and resume their seats in the meeting room! My thanks go to the presenters and the Smethwick PS team who kept us well fed and watered.

Meanwhile the trials and tribulations of the open exhibition scene rumble on. From the 1st. of January all exhibitions receiving PSA, FIAP, RPS, PAGB or BPE sponsorship will be subject to the Definition of Nature Photography. To understand this you need to have read the expanded definition which was published in the September edition of the PSA Journal and in the previous edition of *The Iris*. As noted by Fiona Mackay, the expanded version is all about regulation. And yet of all the potential entrants to the Nature sections of exhibitions all over the world the only people who will have read this will be members of the PSA and yourselves. I wonder how many exhibition organisers and entrants are aware that the removal of a single blade of grass could result in disqualification. And how are organisers expected to police the acceptances? Do they have the resources? It does not take much thought to see that this is unworkable. I think that either the new structure will eventually be ignored or that many exhibitions will realise that they cannot meet the requirements of patronage and drop the Nature section as is happening with Travel. Fortunately there is a refuge for you in that as the Group does not receive patronage from anyone we are free to adopt our own rules. As you may have noted from the previous edition of *The Iris*, for our 2015 Annual Exhibition we have kept faith with the rules which have evolved over the years and have served us well. We did so in the belief that this was in the best interests of you, our members. And I repeat that in one respect, titling, we are more stringent than the Definition. If nature photography is to be taken seriously by naturalists, ecologists and academics we need to do better than give our images titles such as "Nice Lunch".

The three year survey of waxcaps on the West Pennine Moors is which I have described in previous editions of *The Iris* is now finished. My site, the cricket field, had eight species in November which is not enough for SSSI designation. Until the final report is issued I do not know whether any of the other sites will qualify either. Still, I remember the words of the late Derek Turner Ettlinger, FRPS and ex RAF who used to say that "time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted". The waxcaps did better than the larger fungi which in my area were a disaster due to the extremely dry September.

This is the last 'From the Chair' from me as I hand over the chairmanship into the capable hands of Richard Revels at the AGM. When I assumed the chairmanship at the 2013 AGM a previous chairman who will remain anonymous to avoid embarrassment promised me "two years of hassle!" Well it has not been entirely free of this but I have been proud to tell all and sundry that I am chairman of the Group.

Membership at the 2013 AGM stood at 768. I am composing this on New Years Eve, 2014 with the membership standing at 933. I take no credit from this as it is due to the collective efforts of all the members of the committee. I hope that you will continue to give the new committee your full support.

Tony

NATURE GROUP

39th Annual General Meeting, Spring Meeting and Annual Exhibition Opening

Saturday 11th April 2015

Smethwick Photographic Society,

The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands, BA69 2AS

(for directions see below)

Timetable

10.30hrs - Assemble for 10.45 hrs start

11.00hrs - 'Nature Photography Through the Year' a digital presentation by Jill Packenham FRPS

12.00hrs - Break for lunch.

Please bring a packed lunch as lunch will not be available as in previous years.

There is a dining area available. Tea, coffee, drinks, etc. will be available at the bar.

13.00hrs - 39th Annual General Meeting

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 38th AGM 2014, printed in issue 119 of 'The Iris'.
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's Report
5. Treasurer's Report.
6. Secretary's Report
7. Any Other Business
8. Date and Venue of the 40th AGM 2016

13.45hrs - Opening of the 2015 Exhibition

Presentation of the Awards

followed by a showing of the accepted projected images.

Accepted Prints will be on display for the duration of the day.

DIRECTIONS:-

Leave the M5 at Junction2 and get into right hand lane. At the roundabout (with traffic lights) approximately 200 yards from motorway take A4034 right towards West Bromwich and immediately get into left hand lane of dual carriageway. At first traffic lights (approx 1/3 mile) turn left into Park Street. After a hundred or so yards turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac). The Old Schoolhouse is the last but one building on left.

Field Meetings 2015

Date: Saturday June 13th 2015

Time: 09.00 hours

Location: Lakenheath RSPB Reserve
Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk,
IP27 9AD

Meeting: The Visitor Centre.

Directions: From Lakenheath village, travel north on B1112 for about 2 miles (3.2 km). Go over the level crossing and after 200 m, turn left into reserve entrance.

From Hockwold village, travel south on B1112 for nearly 1 mile (1.6 km), go over the river bridge and after 200 m, turn right into reserve entrance

Leader: Ann Miles (ann@pin-sharp.co.uk)
Tel: 07710 383586

Cost: Non-members: £4 per motor vehicle.
RSPB Members can park for free but please display your membership card on your dashboard on arrival.

Subjects of interest: Marsh Harriers, Hobby, Bittern, Kingfisher, Bearded Tits, Warblers, Dragonflies, fenland landscape and marshland plants.

Items to bring: Stout shoes, waterproofs, drink and packed lunch (limited refreshments at the site). Sun protection - site is very exposed.

Additional Information: The reserve covers a large area so be prepared for walking and carrying lunch. Visitor centre has hot drinks and good toilet facilities. The RSPB has converted an area of arable farmland into a large wetland, consisting mainly of reedbeds and grazing marshes. The new reedbeds have attracted hundreds of pairs of Reed and Sedge Warblers, as well as Bearded Tits and Marsh Harriers. Bitterns have been seen increasingly in all seasons of the year and Cranes also nest on the reserve. In early summer, dozens of Hobby catch insects high over the marshes. The Golden Orioles that bred in the remnant poplar woods on the reserve for many years were not sighted last year but there are abundant Blackcaps, Garden Warblers, Cuckoos and Woodpeckers. Barn Owls and Kingfishers are regularly seen.

Website:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/seenature/reserves/guide/l/lakenheathfen/about.aspx>

Date: Saturday June 6th, 2015

Time: 10:00 hours.

Location: The Ainsdale Discovery Centre,
The Promenade, Shore Road,
Ainsdale-on-Sea, Nr Southport, Lancs.
PR8 2QB

Main subjects of interest: Orchids and other dune flora, amphibians, reptiles and insects etc.

Leader: Trevor Davenport ARPS
Tel 01704 870284
Mobile: 07831 643844
Email: trevor.davenport@virgin.net
Dr. Phil Smith, MBE, has kindly agreed to join us again on this field trip; Phil is a noted expert on the Sefton Coast and author of 'The Sands of Time' and 'The Sands of Time Revisited'

Additional Information: The sand-dunes of the Sefton Coast provide the largest sand-dune complex in England covering an area of approximately 2100 ha. It is a fascinating and ever-changing habitat with many photographic opportunities throughout the seasons; however, early summer is usually a period when the dunes are richly rewarding for both botanic and entomological subjects. We should find Northern and Southern Marsh Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid, Bee Orchid and probably Marsh Helleborines plus the endemic Dune Helleborine although these last two may not be in full flower at this time. There are many other botanic specialties to be found in the dunes and on the "Green Beach" at this time of the year. Last year there was a spectacular irruption of White Satin moths near the Discovery Centre. We expect to find them again this year and the date should be peak time for caterpillars and emerging adults. If the day is warm we should find the Northern Dune Tiger-beetle - a superbly photogenic insect; and there should be a plentiful supply of early butterflies and dragonflies. The frontal dunes and the "Green Beach" are also well known for sightings of migratory birds and there may be some latecomers passing through. The area is also noted for having two increasingly rare species:

Field Meetings 2015

Ainsdale Dunes, continued:

the Sand Lizard and the Natterjack Toad.

As these are not easy to locate, some prior research into suitable locations will be done. In addition to the flora and fauna the Sefton Coast is itself very photogenic with sand, sea and dune landscape opportunities. The dunes are always changing, physically and with both subtle and dramatic lighting, and there are locations where 'sand blow' has scoured large 'Devil Holes' further down the coast.

There is plentiful accommodation in the nearby seaside resort of Southport.

This is a popular field trip with a maximum number of fifteen so early booking is essential.

Items to bring: There are few natural hazards but the area is exposed so light warm clothing and waterproofs are ideal in case of rain. Stout shoes or wellingtons are required. There are no charges but a packed lunch and something to drink is advisable.

Date: Tuesday 09 September 2015

Time: 11.00 hrs

Location: Risley Moss, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 6QS

Directions: From junction 11 of the M62 turn onto the A574 (Birchwood Way). Turn left onto Moss Gate and straight on at the next two roundabouts. Risley Moss is immediately after the second roundabout

Meeting : Car Park

Grid ref: SJ664920

Leader: Nina Agnew

Cost: None

Subjects of interest: Birds / insects

Items to bring: Stout shoes; Waterproofs; Packed Lunch.

Additional information: Free parking

Contact: Nina Agnew

Tel: 07811403125

E-mail: ninaagnew@yahoo.co.uk

Insect Photography Workshop

Preston Montford Field Centre, near Shrewsbury

Monday 3rd – Friday 7th August 2015

Course Tutor: John Bebbington FRPS

The course is designed to demonstrate techniques and solve problems for newcomers to insect photography whilst giving excellent opportunities for more experienced workers, in a region of exceptional species richness. Both digital and film workers are welcome, but we regret that facilities for film processing are not available.

We will examine the problems faced by the insect photographer in general and by group members in particular - points raised will be dealt with in some depth during the week. It is intended that everyone will finish the course with some practice and confidence in at least basic photographic techniques and ways of approaching potential subjects. A range of local habitats, all of which have proved rich in subject material, will be visited during the course.

Course members are encouraged to bring prints, digital images (ideally JPEGs, 1024 x 768 pixels) or slides for viewing and comment. There will also be the opportunity to review images taken during the course.

As a current member of the RPS Associate & Fellowship Distinctions Panel (Natural History) John is able to give advice on the suitability of images for submission for A or F awards.

If you would like to discuss the course content you can contact John by email: john.bebbingtonfrps@btinternet.com

For more details or to make a booking contact FSC Preston Montford directly.

Tel: 0845 330 7378

E-mail: enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org

Web: www.field-studies-council.org/prestonmontford

Field Meeting Reports

RPS Nature Group Residential weekend 2014

Eight members of the nature group joined me at Arne RSPB Reserve ahead of the start of the residential weekend. Most of us arrived at Arne at around 9am but a couple of us set our satnavs and ended up about eight miles away from the reserve. It was nice meeting old friends as well as making new ones.

There were many subjects to keep us all busy for the morning! The species photographed included Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) butterflies, Sika deer and quite well behaved Grasshoppers; there was also plenty for the birders among us to photograph.

Lunch time soon arrived and we went back to the picnic area to eat our lunches. We caused havoc with the hot drinks machine in the RSPB hut but eventually settled down to eat our lunch and have a friendly chat.

After lunch we set off in the opposite direction and found the pond, which was very productive. Creatures found included Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*) Common Blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*), Azure (*Coenagrion puella*) and Large Red (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) Damselflies as well as Spiderlings. The boggy area proved good for Sundew - a bog specialist. On arrival at the Kingcombe centre I was met by one of the wardens who checked the weather forecast to see if it would be worth setting up the moth traps. The weather forecast for our first night was for thunderstorms so it was decided to set just one moth trap up in an outdoor barn.

After a very pleasant dinner it was time to prepare for the evening presentations which included Health and Safety, Risk assessments and a presentation on the sites we were going to visit over the weekend. After that it was time for bed and a well-deserved night's sleep.

Saturday morning soon arrived. The moth traps did not produce many subjects for us, although we were surprised to find that there was a Butterfly inside. This turned out to be a Purple Hairstreak (*Favonius quercus*). There were just two moths.

After breakfast we collected our sandwiches and set off for our first day's photography at Ryewater Nursery with the kind permission of Clive Farrell. The morning weather was quite good and there were plenty of subjects, including Emperor Dragonflies (*Anax imperator*), Four-spotted Chasers (*Libellula quadrimaculata*), Broad-bodied Chasers (*Libellula depressa*), Ringlet Butterflies (*Aphantopus hyperantus*), Common Blue and Azure Damsels as well as Hoverflies.

During lunch the heavens opened and clearly there was little chance of the rain stopping for quite a while so, again with permission of Clive Farrell, we went in to the tropical butterfly house and once our cameras acclimatized we were photographing Glasswing Butterflies along with others species. After leaving the tropical house we all decided to head back to Kingcombe for an early tea and cakes.



Field Meeting Reports

Following our evening meal we all met in the Barn for a review of our day's photography and then set up two Moth traps before heading off to sleep..

During the night there was some very heavy rain and when we woke up there was no power, we assumed this would mean no cooked breakfast - just cereal, bread, butter and marmalade. How wrong we were! Due to the ingenious thinking of the Chef, who cooked a barbecue breakfast while we photographed some of the moths found in the moth traps - fifty or so at the Centre and double that at the Cottage.

Following breakfast we set off for Cogden Beach which is near to the famous Chesil Beach. The weather was nice but with quite a strong breeze. Among the subjects we photographed were Rosebay Willow Herb (*Chamerion angustifolium*), Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*) butterflies, ladybirds and Green Grass hoppers, Spiders, Sea Thrift (*Armeria maritima*).

During the afternoon we found Yellow Horned Poppies (*Glaucium flavum*). Three of us sat by a stream photographing Emperor Dragonflies and Marsh Frogs (*Pelophylax ridibundus*) At one point one of the Marsh frogs tried to catch one of the dragonflies and missed. All three of us missed the photo too!

For our evening's entertainment we reviewed some of the super images we had taken during the day.

On Monday morning breakfast was back to normal and after collecting our lunches we drove over to Powerstock Common. However, we found the main pond had become overgrown and the other was closed due to cattle grazing. Instead we decided to take a slow walk along the railway cutting. Our main subjects here were Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*), Common Blue, Peacock (*Aglais io*) and Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) butterflies. On my way to a pond in the Railway cuttings I could see three female figures laying down in the mud - they were photographing Blue Damselies and Ruddy Darters. By the time I had made my way there it had become a lot busier and the girls were photographing Emperor Dragonflies in flight. Then a newly emerged Golden-Ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) was spotted and in order to photograph it we all had to lay down with our elbows in mud and water.

All too soon it was time to head back to the Centre, get cleaned up and say our goodbyes. A good weekend was had by all.

RPS Nature Group Residential Weekend 2015

Friday 5th June to Monday 8th June 2015

Preston Montford, Montford Bridge, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 1DX

Leader: James Foad LRPS

Cost: £210 Single Room, £180 Shared room

Subjects of Interest: Spring Flowers, Insects

Contact: James Foad LRPS, 24B Queens Road, Ramsgate, Kent. CT11 8DZ

Tel: 01843 580295 Mobile: 07810 306365 Email: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com

Additional Information: It is advisable to book as soon as possible after 'The Iris' appears, to avoid disappointment – last year's weekend was overbooked.

A waiting list will operate once the weekend is fully booked 16 available places.

Deposit of £150.00 secures your place and is required no later than 17th April 2015

Wicken Fen - July 12th 2014

A dozen people met in the National Trust Reserve's educational area where there are old brick pits, excellent for Dragonflies and other insects. It was a cool dewy morning so the insects were quite sparse but we gradually got our eyes in and photographed a variety of flies and roosting butterflies and damselflies. Two plants were also of interest, the rare Marsh Pea and the insectivorous Bladderwort in full bloom in the ponds. Giant Diving Beetles in a holding tank presented a great photographic opportunity. As the clouds cleared, the dragonflies became active and gave us the expected challenge of capturing them in flight, especially the impressive Brown Hawker. We found we were sharing the site with a young man who was filling a huge net tent with captured dragonflies and hoverflies. David Attenborough had visited and been filmed the week before for a new Sky series and the film crews would return the following week to film the sequences of mating and capturing prey for which David had already done the commentary! We helped with the identification of various species and he shared some of the perched dragonflies with us. The hot afternoon took its toll and gradually members wandered back to the cafe for drinks and then gentle strolls around the rest of the reserve.



Giant Diving Beetle



Hydrotaea irritans

Devil's Dyke - 29th June 2014

Devil's Dyke, near Newmarket, is a 7.5 mile long Anglo-Saxon earthwork consisting of a bank and ditch built out of clay and chalk. The Dyke is notable for its chalk wildflowers, with several species of orchid including our target species, the impressive Lizard Orchid. Unfortunately the weather was not kind to us – the forecast predicted a mostly dry overcast day with rain arriving around 4pm. Eight of us met mid-morning and already there were dark threatening clouds approaching. We decided to give it a go and set off for the mile-long walk to the orchid site. En-route we discovered quite a few chalk specialities including Greater Knapweed, Sainfoin, Harebells, Rockrose, Milkwort, Restharrow, Bellflowers and Wild Mignonette. 2014 was a good year for Pyramidal Orchids at many sites in East Anglia and we found colonies of large specimens to photograph. The wind increased and rain began to fall just as we arrived at the Lizard Orchid site. Lizard orchids can be up to a metre high but the flowers are mainly green and grow in tall grasses so are very difficult to photograph but I think we all got a few reasonable images. The rain had set in and we abandoned the trip at lunchtime.



Lizard Orchid

Aspects of Bird behaviour

by Gill Cardy FRPS

I know this is a popular theme, and I tried to avoid it. My first Fellowship application was of Winter Wildlife, but when that failed I went back to my first thought and my abiding interest in the fascinating activities that happen when you take the time to watch birds.

During my attempt to gather winter images, I became particularly aware of the immense struggle all wild creatures have to find food in winter. This increased my respect and admiration of birds, sometimes in extreme conditions. Of course this means that photographers have to face the same difficulties, and some trips to achieve these images, though very enjoyable on the whole, meant some fairly tough conditions too. Lugging a heavy tripod, heavy camera body and 500mm lens across a field of deep snow was an extreme challenge for me but resulted in some exciting moments with a Great

Grey Owl. No comfortable hide for this species! Images in the snow often result in flying birds, in particular, being lit by light reflected from below, which helps to lighten shadows, and gives a special winter feel. I much enjoyed the chilly days photographing the dancing display of Japanese cranes, a particular species I have long wanted to see. Nearer to home, Scotland provides a wealth of opportunity and though it doesn't always snow in the winter, I have been lucky.

A trip to Spain in Spring was somewhat warmer and the special facilities set up gave me close views of some of the specialties of the Pyrenees and the Steppes during the breeding season, though I couldn't resist including an introduced, though now truly wild, Great Bustard displaying on Salisbury Plain, near my home in Wiltshire.





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I hope this panel will encourage people to appreciate some of our less well observed species and encourage them to spend time watching the fascination of bird life in general. I have been lucky to be able to travel to places where the more difficult species are easier to photograph than in our own country. My aim in Natural History Photography is to encourage interest in the conservation of wildlife, through simply watching - and photographing.

Statement of Intent

ASPECTS OF BIRD BEHAVIOUR

For many years I have been fascinated by wildlife, particularly birds, and have become passionate about the role of photography in bringing the natural world and its conservation to the attention of the general population,

This panel shows some of the various and fascinating behaviour of birds throughout the seasons, and in particular the skilful use of wings and feathers to accomplish this. The photographs have been taken in several different countries from the United States to Japan, including Northern and Southern Europe including some habitats closer to home.

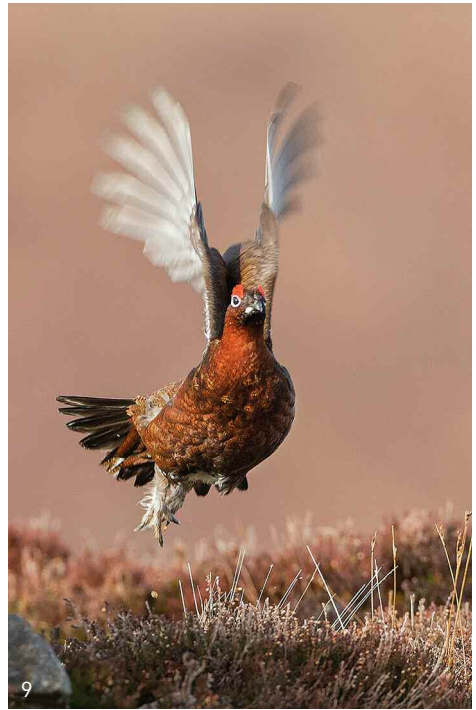




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Fellowship Application Sep Hangin



1.



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3.



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Image Titles:

01. Steller's Eagle
02. Japanese Crane display
03. Great Grey Owl sitting in snow waiting for voles
04. Peregrine with prey
05. Capercaillie attaching intruder
06. Bald Eagle taking off
07. Lesser Kestrel hovering
08. Little Bustard Displaying
09. Red Grouse taking off
10. Great Bustard display
11. Redshank calling to proclaim territory
12. White-tailed Eagle catching fish
13. Japanese Crane in flight
14. Goshawk plucking prey
15. Black Grouse fighting at lek
16. Tawny Owl in snow storm
17. Great Grey Owl hunting vole
18. Osprey with nesting material
19. Golden Eagle on Willow Grouse prey
20. White-tailed Eagle in flight



t 2014 - Gill Cardy ARPS g Plan



Photographing foxes in Devon

by Andrew McCarthy ARPS

I have long had an ambition to spend time with and photograph a family of wild foxes, but finding good photographic opportunities in a rural setting such as mine can be difficult.

Whilst the urban fox population has expanded considerably in recent years, localised persecution in rural areas means that foxes often occur at relatively low population densities. Cubbing dens in particular can be very hard to find, as they tend to be located on private land where access permission can be difficult or impossible to obtain. Even my day job as a professional ecologist has not brought me into contact with foxes on a regular basis, despite having surveyed many urban and rural sites. In fact only once in the past few years have either I or my ecologist colleagues come across a den with cubs.

It was therefore with a great deal of excitement that I spotted a dead fox cub at the side of a local road during mid-May 2013. Whilst this was rather sad, it indicated that there would be an active cubbing den

nearby, so over the following few days I kept watch across local fields for signs of foxes and a week later I was rewarded with the sight of a vixen and four young cubs at play in the early evening sun.

The local landowners willingly gave me permission to walk their field boundaries in order to search for the den, which I soon found. The single entrance hole was on the edge of the arable field in which I had first seen the vixen and cubs a few days earlier and, judging from the levels of vegetation disturbance in the immediate vicinity, I assumed it was the main cubbing den (vixens will often use more than one den).

I chose a bag hide as the most appropriate method of concealment, since this would be light, easy to carry and would not involve leaving anything semi-permanent (and visible) on the field boundary, which was close to a nearby public road. On the first visit I positioned myself up wind and so the emerging foxes would be lit by the evening sun. After an hour or so



Vixen and cubs socialising

of inactivity, I heard rustling behind me and turned round cautiously to see all four cubs watching my hide from a distance of around 20 metres. After slowly moving round 180 degrees I managed to get a few shots, including one of a very confident cub that spent several minutes stalking me, before settling down to keep an eye on this strange camouflaged 'lump', in case it moved, eventually disappearing into cover.

A few days later, and after a number of unsuccessful photographic attempts outside this den entrance with no further sightings of the family, it was becoming clear that the vixen had either moved the cubs, or was preferentially using a second nearby den. A chance conversation with a landowner proved extremely helpful and I was shown a den on their land in a derelict area of overgrown outbuildings, under a pile of rubble and old tyres. Not quite the photogenic 'outdoor studio' I was hoping for, but it was quiet and located away from the road, making it a suitable site for photography. More importantly, the land owners were kind enough to allow me more or less unhindered access to this area during the coming weeks, during both early mornings and evenings.

Some two weeks later, by mid-June, and after spending regular time with the vixen and her cubs, the family was sufficiently relaxed that I was able to sit quietly with them and shoot without the hide. The vixen in particular would seem to pose for pictures and her confidence seemed to relax the cubs. By the end of June the original litter of five cubs had shrunk to three, with a second cub having been killed on the nearby lane as increasing independence caused the animals to explore further afield. It was wonderful to watch the cubs mature and eventually the most confident cub became so inquisitive that it would come right up to my camera and investigate its reflection in the glass. My photography continued into early July, when it became clear that the cubs were almost independent of the vixen. By this stage they were spending much of their time away from the den and opportunities to photograph them were becoming increasingly scarce.

From a photography perspective, whilst the animals themselves were accommodating, the site proved difficult to work. My main aim at the start of the shoot was to produce clean, simple images of foxes with nice uncluttered backgrounds and in good light; ideally with the animals interacting with one another. This sounded simple but proved easier said than done.



Fox cub stalking



Fox with rabbit prey



Backlit Fox



Fox in cereal crop



Fox on tyres



Fox



Relaxed Fox cub

The site was small, very cluttered with piles of tyres and concrete rubble, and with a backdrop of some rather unprepossessing garage doors! Also, although the site was on the edge of a field, its orientation meant that there were very few long views that would give the nice clean backgrounds I was after. Further compounding the challenge was the presence of a line of tall trees nearby. This meant that the 'window' of good light was restricted to a maximum of 45 minutes each evening. All-in-all it was a tough shooting location.

With the above in mind, I found the best way to capture the images I had originally envisaged was to first spend as much time as possible reassuring the foxes by sitting quietly and watching them. Eventually the animals relaxed and allowed me to reposition myself often during each shoot, in order to try differing camera positions as the foxes moved around (which was frequently). I started by using my 500mm f4 Canon on a cropped sensor 1D Mk4 body, but it quickly became apparent that this focal length was too long for many shots. Many of the later images were captured with a 70-200mm f2.8 lens, which proved a better focal length for this particular site; the zoom capability also meant more versatility, which was very useful for such highly active animals.



The short evening window of good light complicated matters further by necessitating an early evening start, i.e. before the sun had dropped behind the trees and whilst it was still very bright. This, coupled with the foxes' habit of chasing each other in and out of bright sun and heavy shade, made nailing focus, exposure and composition tricky. Once the sun was behind the trees (by about 7.30pm in mid June) and the site was in shade it was still possible to shoot of course, but it was often difficult to obtain a shutter speed fast enough to stop motion blur, whilst enabling a depth of field sufficient to maintain focus across the faces of all the animals if there were several in the frame. Despite these challenges, by the time the cubs had become old enough to disperse and my photographic opportunities were over, I had taken a large number of images; many of which I am very pleased with.

Notwithstanding the challenging technical issues at this site, the experience of sitting with and being able to watch, close up, a family of wild foxes going about their daily lives, often within touching distance, was wonderful and is surely what nature photography is all about. Whilst I am aware that my enthusiasm for foxes is not shared by everyone, I am captivated by this handsome and ecologically highly adaptable and successful mammal, and next spring I will be out searching my local patch in an attempt to find another group of cubs in order to continue the elusive quest to get that perfect fox image!



Starting out

Sue McGarrigle LRPS



Bamburgh Castle



Puffin with Sand Eels

For anyone just starting out in photography Northumbria is a good place to both learn and put into practice a range of photographic techniques. Northumbria is rich in history and has more castles per square mile than any other county. For aspiring nature photographers both the Farne Islands and the surrounding areas are particularly good as the wildlife is very much 'on tap'. The Farne Islands, located just off the coast near Seahouses, are owned by The National Trust and cited as possibly the most exciting seabird colony in England with unrivalled views of 23 species and a large colony of Grey Seals.

Early in 2014 two of my friends expressed an interest in learning about nature photography and so armed with my kit we initially made a couple of outings on our local patch - The Malvern Hills and a local WWT reserve - for practice and to see whether it was for them. We reviewed the daily takes on the computer and they began to pick up an understanding of framing, depth of field, backgrounds, lighting and the rest of the basics needed for flowers, birds and anything else that caught their eye. Soon they were wandering off experimenting on their own.

I remember their raw enthusiasm while out in the field and when seeing their shots displayed on the computer at home and recall their delight when everything came together and they were rewarded with the odd 'gem'.

Soon thereafter we were making trips to camera stores and trawling a variety of websites with Ruth eventually opting for a new bridge camera and Nicky following with a pre-loved DSLR and just one lens for a starter due to her budget. Their enthusiasm grew and we agreed to meet once a month to get accustomed to the new kit.

Shortly afterwards I suggested we make a visit to Northumbria in late June for five days with the particular focus being two full day trips to the Farne Islands, for nature images. The Farne Islands are a particular favourite of mine because of the stunning location and the wealth of wildlife. In summer the Farne Islands are 'home' for over 100,000 pairs of breeding seabirds. I have made several previous visits with other photographers. I had warned my friends that because of the small jetties it might not be possible for us to go ashore if there was a heavy swell on the sea.

We duly arrived at Saint Aidans Hotel, set back on its own from the shoreline at Seahouses and overlooking the Farnes. Our first stop was a visit to the nearby harbour to check on the boat timings (Billy Shiels) and weather forecast which was a bit choppy for our first day, however we managed to land on one island and toured the rest by boat getting excellent views of a variety of inaccessible seabird and seal colonies from the sea. Our fellow shipmates were a mix of visitors from various countries - the amount of expensive kit onboard was a real eye opener for Ruth and Nicky!



Guillemot and Kittiwakes nesting on the cliffs



Atlantic Grey Seals



Common Tern with chick



The Farne Islands



Black-headed Gull collecting nesting material



Shag parent and chick



Kittiwake at nest with chicks

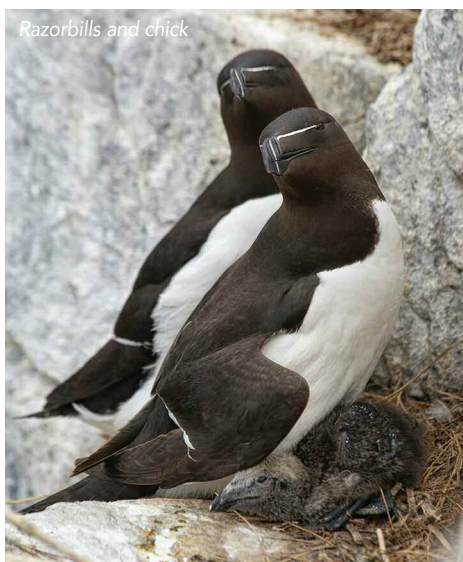


Red Valerian growing on cliffs

Our second visit to the Farnes was more fruitful and we were able to land on both islands. We found an abundance of nesting birds and flying birds in their thousands, mainly Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Cormorants, Shags, plus four species of Tern and their young, often almost too close to the designated boardwalks. The shots from our first day were reviewed prior to our second visit, so any obvious errors were picked up on and tips necessary for photographing white birds/black birds were shared. Field craft was developing as well as their appreciation of the do's and don'ts from the Nature Photographers' Code of Practice. Nicky borrowed some of my lenses to use with her DSLR in order to help her decide what lens she needed to purchase next.

We finished our trip with visits to two other locations. Our first was to Holy Island and Lindisfarne Castle - its tidal mudflats, saltmarshes and sand dunes combining to create an ideal environment for flora such as the Dune Helleborine. We enjoyed the spectacular display of Red Valerian at the castle's rocky base along with Sea Campion, Biting Stonecrop and Thrift. Holy Island is reached by a causeway and can only be visited at low tide. The second visit was to the stunning beach below Bamburgh Castle which stretches as far as the eye can see, with its rock pools and dunes yielding plenty to practise our techniques on.

Their verdict? Awesome! Results? Much improvement and a picture worthy of hanging on the wall at home. Cost? Around £250 for five days including the hotel, (shared room), two boat trips, travel and food. We have already planned a visit to Norfolk in 2015.



Razorbills and chick

Flora & Fauna of Thailand's Scrubland

By Nicholas Reuss ARPS

At GPS coordinates 12.7919580 N and 100.9508870 E in Thailand's Chonburi Province lies a nondescript area of scrubland. Google maps will give you a view of the place. This site lies about six kilometres from the sea at an elevation of only 30 meters and is sandwiched between two roads and next to a large lake. The term 'nondescript' doesn't do the place justice for, on closer inspection, a wide variety of animal and plant life can be found.

Thailand's climate is driven by the monsoon, a wind which reverses direction due to the Tibetan Plateau being heated at different rates resulting in high and low pressure areas being created above the plateau in different seasons. The plateau is a barren and highly elevated landmass of 3,000 Km² (about 30% of the size of Europe). The clear air and heat loss caused by the high reflectivity of snow and rock lead to a high pressure zone in winter but, in the summer months, a low pressure zone results. Low pressure zones suck in air from surrounding areas whereas high pressure zones have the opposite effect. Consequently Thailand has a dry season from November to May and a wet one for the rest of the year. Despite being only 12°N of the Equator there is an appreciable temperature drop in December and January as cold air flows into Thailand. In these tropical savanna regions the change from dry to wet season has the greatest influence on plant cycles which in turn cause all animal life to flourish. Many trees flower from February to May, the hottest months, so their seeds fall at the start of the wet season; other flowering plants tend to bloom during the wet season. Pollinators are active in this period and the wet season provides a time for insects to breed and their predators to feast.

Human activity has affected the area through clearing forests and leaving the denuded land exposed to torrential downpours and the direct blast of the equatorial sun both of which significantly remove nutrients from the soil, the grains of such leached soils are composed of 95% quartz, very sandy, and excessively well drained and of low fertility. Few crops can survive in such poor soils but cassava is an exception. The absence of an extended period of



Water Monitor Lizard



Green or Indian Vine Snake



Coreidae species mating



Blue Mud-dauber Wasp



Thai Flower Mantis

cold weather allows detritivores, fungi and bacteria to be active throughout the year so humus is unable to accumulate in the soil. This combined with the lack of an autumnal leaf fall results in no improvement to the fertility of these soils and man-made fertilisers are too expensive to be an economically viable solution. Once the forest is cleared it is farmed for one or two years and then it is left fallow and it's the plants that can survive in these conditions that determine what animals can live here.

Over the last 3 years I have visited this site two or three times each week and photographed many of its resident species. There are four main species of tree growing here; two species of acacia, *Senegalia catechu* and Climbing Wattle, plus Yellow and Royal Poincianas. The main shrubs are Jack-in-the-Bush, Chan (Pignut) and a number of Mallows. Many varieties of vines live on these shrubs and in the woodland and Touch-me-not carpets much of the grassy areas. The larger grasses include Marsh Foxtail and Phragmites.

The only mammals seen were a Burmese Hare (*Lepus peguensis*), 3-stripped Palm Squirrels and a species of rat. Birds are numerous and all fall into the LBJ category so a hide is necessary. I am not up for sitting in an airless hide in 40°C temperatures so there are no bird images.

There are 7 spider families from 3 superfamilies represented in this scrubland:

Superfamily/Family

Salticoidea Jumping Spiders

Araneoidea Orb Web Spiders

Long-jawed Web Weavers

Large-jawed Spiders

Licosoidea Lynx Spiders

Wolf Spiders

Nursery Web Spiders

Insects are here in glorious abundance and their structured bodies make them wonderful photographic subjects. I have shot on this site Owl flies (1), Cockroaches and Termites (3), Beetles (11), Flies (11), True Bugs (13), Ants, Bees & Wasps (13), Butterflies and moths (36), Mantids (5), Dragonflies & Damselflies (18), Grasshoppers & crickets (21), and Caddisflies (1) giving 133 insect species in total.

In the dry season reptiles and amphibians are scarce but even when they are about the number of species is low. I have found four snake species; Ornate Flying Snake, The Indian Vine Snake, The Common Cobra and a King Cobra that climbed onto the back of my pick-up truck which made for a tricky situation, one that was happily resolved with the use of insect repellent spray. Normally snakes are not a problem as long as you don't threaten them by leaving no

escape route or accidentally treading on one. Their main ambition is to get away from people as fast as possible. I always wear knee high rubber boots as a precaution against bites and scratches from Touch-me-not-plants. Blood attracts insects which can cause serious infection. The lizard population is high density but species poor; there are innumerable Garden Lizards (*Calotes versicolor*) which, as their scientific name suggests, come in many sizes and colour variations depending on their gender and whether it is the mating season or not. There is also the Common Sun Skink but the best is the Water Monitor Lizard; a two metre long monster that nests in the site and feasts on the large fish in the adjacent lake. Amphibians found include the Common and Grey Tree Frogs, the Painted Frog and Asian Common Toad. I have also filmed four species of snail and giant millipedes which are harmless; it's the centipedes that are lethal.

In these latitudes the window of opportunity to photograph without wind and in good lighting is brief. Usually the first two hours after sunrise are calm and the temperature not too high but it soon warms up significantly which creates air movement. Fortunately most diurnal activity takes place at this time of day and in the hour before sundown. About one hour after sunrise the light becomes harsh and contrasty so I try to work in the open for the first hour and in the woodland shade during the second. In the evening there is usually still too much wind for photographing small animals or plants close up without using flash which I mainly use to freeze the motion of fast moving creatures like weaver ants and bees. The variation in daylight hours between the longest and shortest days is only 1 hour 29 minutes and the golden hours are just one hour long. The lowest recorded temperature is 24°C (76°F) and the highest is 40°C (104°F) so insects and reptiles don't need to sit around long to dry out or warm up.

One doesn't have to expend much effort before sweat breaks out and makes a beeline for the eyes so a hat and sweat band are recommended. Smarting eyes make focusing impossible. I use an expandable diffuser to reduce contrast when feasible and necessary. The other essentials are: insect repellent spray, I use Citronella which is totally effective, long trousers, socks and rubber boots.

Any camera with a lens that can be manually focused close up and has a long throw and effective pixels of at least 12 million will suffice for this type of imagery. I use a Fujifilm X-T1 mirrorless camera with a 90mm macro lens most of the time but if I am



Bur-fruit Urena



Common Dragonfly



Common Tree Frogs mating



Green Lynx Spider



Blow Fly



The Plain Tiger Butterfly



Morning Glory

going to be using flash then out comes my Nikon D3x DSLR with 105mm macro lens because their lighting system is second to none for close-up work. A polarising filter can be an image saver when used to deaden light reflections from leaves. A strong tripod is essential unless one is going to use flash. Very few of my images are truly macro (1+:1 magnification) as my preference is to see the whole animal and include, where relevant some of its immediate environment.

Mating animals and those that depend on camouflage for concealment are the easiest to photograph; once you have spotted them. See the images of the mating Common Tree Frogs, Long-headed grasshopper and Indian Vine Snake. Camouflage can go wrong if the seasons change significantly from the norm. In 2014, the rains lasted in to December which is 4 or 5 weeks later than usual so animals whose colour scheme is designed to hide them in umber coloured grass can be doomed when the grass is bright green (the image of the moth *Trigonodes hyppasia* illustrates this problem). To manoeuvre a tripod into position without scaring off the subject is always tricky. I find it best to adjust the height of the tripod to the appropriate level about 2 or 3 meters away from the subject; another reason to look ahead. Once in position it is impossible to lower the camera so I tend to set the height a little below that of the subject and then raise it if necessary using the central column as this causes less disturbance than adjusting the legs. I move in holding the camera in front of my face so the subject doesn't see my eyes. A cable release is vital.

A full account is included in an iBook which I published in November 2014 and is available free of charge. Many of the images have been focus stitched for which I tend to use an aperture of f5.6 which gives a shallow enough depth of field to blur backgrounds whilst giving a pleasing bokeh. It includes images of 180 animal and 30 plant species together with biological notes. There is also a direct link which can be typed into a browser and then dragged onto the iBooks icon:

<http://itunes.apple.com/gb/book/isbn9786163744593>
Alternatively search for isbn9786163744593 in iBooks.

If any of you are planning to visit Thailand for Nature or Travel photography then I would be delighted to answer questions or, if asked, make suggestions on where and when to go. If you need help navigating the iBook please send me an email and I will send instructions.

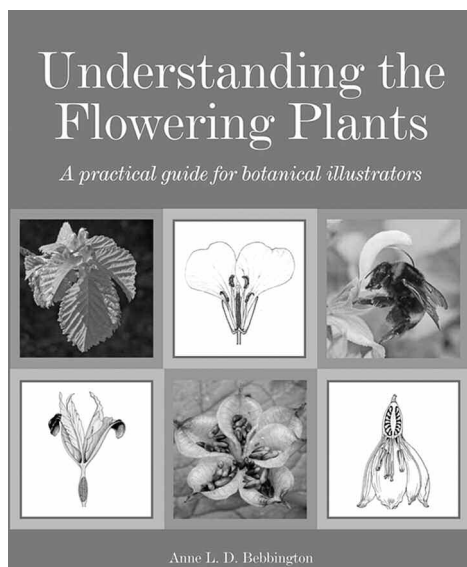
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Book Review

Understanding the Flowering Plants

Author: Anne Bebbington
Photographs by John Bebbington FRPS
Publisher: The Crowood Press
ISBN 978 1 84797 758 8
Published Price £24.95 256 pages



Understanding the Flowering Plants by Anne Bebbington has its origin in a series of workshops given by the author and colleagues to help students of Botanical Illustration relate better to their subject by increasing their knowledge of the plants themselves. Hence the subtitle, *A practical guide for botanical illustrators*. There is however no doubt that the increasingly large number of people participating in botanical walks with Wildlife trusts and local Natural History Societies will gain much from the contents of this book. Too often in my experience such outings result in simply identification with little further information. Photographers too, and with the almost universal ownership of digital cameras that includes most people, will benefit from understanding more about their subject, and might be encouraged to look at it more closely before they press the shutter.

Of the twelve chapters only 2 and 3 relate mainly to botanical illustrators and the latter does contain useful information about images obtained with a flat-bed scanner and a stereo microscope. Each chapter begins with a full page photograph or painting, about A4 size, followed by a brief summary of the chapter content on the next page. Each following page has photographs of flowers or parts thereof, (all photographs by John Bebbington FRPS unless stated otherwise) mingled with sketches or paintings, all on high quality white paper. Colour reproduction is good. Text is dispersed among the illustrations where possible, and generous line spacing makes for easy reading of block passages. The immediate impression is one of considerable clarity, equally so for the Glossary and Index.

Each of the chapters covers one of the major parts and functions of a flowering plant: leaves, flower, reproduction and so on. The numerous photographs, which complement the brief text descriptions, ensure that information is presented in an easily memorable way. For example, in the chapter on sexual reproduction images of vertical sections of a Foxglove flower clearly demonstrate how the plant avoids self-pollination. Similarly a macro-photo of an Eyebright shows vividly how its colours guide an insect pollinator to the nectar. Such examples are numerous throughout the book. Headings and Subheadings are frequent within a Chapter and consequently selective browsing is an excellent means of absorbing the information. There is no need to read a Chapter from start to finish.

Most readers of this review will be members of The Royal Photographic Society and will view their work as an art form. Many may gain satisfaction from photographing flowers which often demands considerable skill to capture and retain detail that can easily be lost. Some basic knowledge of flowering plants, in addition to the name, is surely desirable for a full appreciation of the result. This book will provide that knowledge in a very accessible form, along with much enjoyment.

John Weir ARPS

Membership Statistics

Shown Below are Nature Group members per RPS region
together with regional codes and other statistics

Regions		Distinctions	
CE - Central	78	Honorary FRPS	04
EA - East Anglia	79	FRPS	86
EM - East Midlands	59	ARPS	240
IRL - Ireland	07	LRPS	209
LN - London	33	None Distinction holders	413
NI - Ireland (North)	04		
NO - Northern	28		
NW - North Western	56		
SC - Scotland	44		
SE - South Eastern	111		
SO - Southern	85		
SW - South Western	32		
TH - Thames Valley	79		
WE - Western	73		
WN - North Wales	14		
WS - South Wales	18		
YO - Yorkshire	42		
		Total	952
Total UK	842		
Overseas	110		
Total Membership	952		

These statistics are prepared from data supplied by the RPS Membership Department January 2015

Map courtesy of the RPS Journal January/February 2001 revised 2014

Announcement

Natural History Advisory Day for Associateship and Licentiateship Distinctions.

Sunday 8th November 2015 at The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands.

The event will be hosted by the RPS Central Region.

A member of the Nature Distinctions Panel and the Licentiate Panel
will be available to offer guidance and advice.

Full details will be given in the Summer issue of The Iris.

Setting up Galleries on the RPS website

Galleries are a good way of showing your work to other people, but the contents should be relevant to the groups that they appear in.

For example - you have set up three galleries of images, one of landscape images, another of nature images and also one of heritage images. Within the gallery editing page you see a list of the region and groups that you belong to. Lets say that in addition to your Region and the Nature Group, that you also belong to the Archaeology & Heritage Group. Please, do not put a tick against them all for each gallery, just because you belong to them all.

In the above example, all three galleries can appear in your Region, but only the gallery containing nature images should appear in the

Nature section - the other two galleries are not relevant to natural history. Likewise, the heritage images should appear in the Archaeology & Heritage section, but not also in the Nature section. Therefore the landscape gallery should only appear in the Region, and not in either of the two specialist groups.

I would ask all members to check the contents of their galleries already loaded on the RPS website. Are they relevant to the specialist groups that they appear in? If not, please deselect the appropriate galleries from the groups concerned.

Thank you.
Margery Maskell ARPS,
Nature Group Treasurer and Webmaster

Psychological-Photographical aspects of photography.

by Bev Ward

The Nature Group excelled themselves again in 2013 with an absolutely brilliant weekend. The locations were excellent with plenty of wildlife and scenery to be had. It was the second time I had been on such a weekend and it had set up a pattern which I am hoping not to end but to continue annually. It has helped to hone my nature skills, macro and landscape but this trip also helped me understand something else, something about being a photographer and about skills learned and used.

From my previous weekend away with the Nature Group I was motivated to find the money to purchase a Sigma 105mm lens, second-hand, to use on this year's trip and it served me well. In anticipation of the next Nature Group weekend I have purchased a 150mm macro lens that I look forward to using. Most of the images here were taken with the 105mm lens.

In fact it occurred to me that quite a psychological component was involved in my photography this time and so I have been looking into it. I wasn't sure if the weekend improved my skills markedly or if I became more aware of them because of the intensity with which I approached the weekend, intent on developing the skills I had. I took a number of images and although I took my tripod I barely used it. I very rarely use it actually.

The only use I have found for it is for landscapes or multiple focus stacking. I tried to take some images last year, close ups of bees in flowers and wasn't very successful. I had my tripod but found it very restricting and noted I had more freedom using a monopod. While my images were still not that successful I was impressed by the freedom of using a monopod. If I carry a tripod now, it is usually a waste of time, I don't use it. I think I only carry it because of convention and so many photographers swear by it.

I work with a Sony Alpha 900 camera, purchasing it because it had built in sensor stabilisation which made my old lenses compatible without the added expense of specifically purchasing stabilised lenses. I think this in itself encouraged me to despatch the tripod and to develop my hand holding techniques which I think I have been successful in. Most of my shots are hand held and I have been surprised at how effective this technique has been especially for butterflies. Almost all my butterfly images have been taken using a handheld technique. What I noted on this trip was that I was tuned in to what I was doing more so than in the past. I didn't seem to need to think about what I was doing and much of what I had learned in the past seemed to come naturally to me. I felt as though I had internalised what I had learned and it had become a part of my photographer personality and this worked for hand holding the camera. I very often find that if I am stalking something, by the time I've set up the tripod, the thing I've been stalking has gone. The use of the monopod came into it's own recently as I happened to spot a water vole within 4 feet of my location. My camera was on a monopod and it was a case of slowly setting it down, focussing and shooting. I was successful but it was dark, and focussed despite the light. Had I a tripod attached I believe things would have been different. I not only would have had to set it down but also arrange the legs and adjust the platform which I think would have scared the creature off, so I was glad of the monopod, especially as the 70-400mm lens is very heavy too.



There are a number of psychological factors that I have personally found come into play in my photography. The first is the expert theory. To become an expert or highly accomplished in a task takes 10,000 hours. So while I, like many of my photographer colleagues, decry the images we take (I have found many photographers who feel they lack confidence in the images they produce), I cannot deny that my experience and knowledge in the light of this makes me better equipped to be a photographer than most people. My photography is better than I give myself credit for. The second is that there is a 'zone' theory, that when concentrating on a task you lose yourself in that task, becoming quite immersed in it and practising your art. This zone theory is what I equate to 'tuning in' to a task. It has also been referred to as 'flow', a concept discovered by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and explained in his book 'Flow, the Classic Work of How to Achieve Happiness' (2007). He says happiness or the optimal experience is one which is not a passive process, but one which a person works hard for. Someone involved in photography, for example, whose talents are developing and who becomes inextricably involved in what they are doing could be said to be in flow based on the learning and experiences of photography in the past. Certainly, many photographers will have amassed over 10,000 hours of study and practice to hone their skills. I think many

photographers (as well of course as other experts) experience this amount of practice and it is something I can identify with when I am on a Nature Group weekend, or any other type of photographic adventure. So I am immensely pleased with the images I have taken on the Nature Group weekends. They are fascinating, informal, social weekends with much learning involved, much practice involved, and whether we photographers are aware of it or not, much psychology is involved too! Long may it last!



Commentary on scandals and new rules

The articles in *The Iris* concerning cheating by digital manipulation raise many additional questions as do the new rules. We seem to be equating nature photographers with scientists working in these fields with the current debate raising issues not only of ensuring accurate unaltered renderings of nature and wildlife subjects but putting on trial the personal integrity and honesty of members who transgress in any of these areas and perhaps raise questions about the services of professionals working in this field.

While there has been extensive comment on what is permitted in a photograph, there is no debate about photographers who use professional printers, elaborate professional mounting, or framing. Credit has never been given, for instance, to those photographers who embrace these skills. Whether working in film and chemicals or digitally, surely those who master all the craft are more deserving of distinctions, or should at least be recognised as bringing an extra dimension to their photographic skills.

In this digital age those who bring unnatural sharpness to their images by stacking - certainly more than a straightforward photo would achieve - find their activity endorsed. With many plug-ins for Photoshop available to all, what attitude should now be taken regarding their use by nature and wildlife photographers? Indeed there must be many who could probably find a whole lot more things to object to other than cloning, HDR and cropping.

To achieve a level playing field is virtually impossible. There are those who have just Photoshop Elements, Picassa or other cheaper programmes available to them while others can afford the very latest versions of any number of programmes. Some photographers use professional cameras and top of the range prime lenses, while many amateurs struggle with lower cost equipment.

Turning to definitions, can we really define wildlife as anything existing in zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, and aquariums where they are totally dependent on human intervention? Other important questions surround photographers who go on safari in motorised transport to pre-baited sites or (as I have known) drag a carcass behind their vehicle, go to provided water holes on reserves, or embark on any number of professionally guided events such as photographing ospreys at a hide

provided by a fish farm. Is this the true spirit of wildlife and nature photography?

What of those who go on tours or visit sites where well-known professionals virtually guarantee you can photograph a specific species, and often provide it? I have stood in cages with wolves, foxes, badgers, wild cats and even been offered the opportunity to photograph a grizzly now very accustomed to posing for the camera. I know of photographers who have obtained RPS distinctions by visiting special bird lodges in rain forests where tropical birds are encouraged to take provided foods.

The hope of maintaining that most basic precept encouraged by Nature Group - that the subject is always more important than the photograph - is long gone. I have personally witnessed photographers lying flat on the sands in Lincolnshire to take wide-angle photographs of Atlantic seal pups despite being told of heavy losses of pups caused by human disturbance. I have seen wild orchid sites and rare chalk down-land sites for Pasqueflowers trampled by photographers and members of the public alike.

A much wider debate and education programme for photographers in general is called for before we can establish the approach that the Nature Group does so much to encourage. A start would be to make its Code of Conduct more widely available to camera clubs and wildlife and birding enthusiasts.

I do not agree with many modern methods of wildlife and nature photography but I am not setting myself up as a purist and I am more than grateful to the many dedicated wildlife and nature professionals who pass on their skills. I fear, however, that if we become much more prescriptive in what is permitted many may leave our ranks rather than face the censure currently proposed or the restrictions on their activity. I do not believe the current witch-hunt to find those who break the rules is the way out of this problem. And I say that after a lifetime of photography as an enthusiastic amateur.

Yours sincerely,

Derek Dewey-Leader LRPS.

What's in the Long Grass?

by Russell Edwards ARPS

"We don't know the half of what goes on in the long grass," remarked a lady as she saw me aiming my camera at apparently nothing but long grass.

It has been a splendid summer and I have spent much of it enjoying the English countryside. I had been looking for wading birds at the local reservoir but without success as it was full to overflowing with rain from the winter storms. The water proved to be too deep for waders. However I became intrigued by the swarms of very small blue Damselflies hovering like miniature airships coming to rest on their grass mooring masts. They are very small about 2cm long (otherwise known as an inch) with a body 2mm dia.

This had to be a photographic challenge. For close-up work I have been accustomed to using an SLR with either a 90mm Tamron or Nikon 105mm Macro lens. With either of these lenses it is imperative to get as close as possible to the subject. On this occasion I decided to use my Bridge camera, a Fuji HS 50, which has a zoom lens with a very wide range of focal lengths. Using the longest focal length (1000mm equivalent 35mm) enables close-ups to be taken



without getting close-up! At approximately 2 metres from the subject, this focal length gives a magnification of about 0.7, which means small creatures can be photographed at a distance without disturbing them. With this particular camera getting closer and using a smaller focal length on the zoom does not yield a greater magnification. However different Bridge cameras have different characteristics. Worth checking. The downside is that the auto-focus sometimes finds it difficult to focus on such a small slim subject and at times I resorted to manual focus. The Fuji has a conventional focusing ring, which magnifies the image to produce more accurate focusing. I have a hunch that the manual focus produces a sharper image. I plan to use it a lot more.

Although this procedure produced good results, especially for identification purposes, I hankered after greater magnification. Fortunately I have a Nikon 6T two element, 2.9 dioptre close-up lens, which I can screw into the filter thread at the front of the lens (not all Bridge cameras have a filter thread).

After plenty of trial and error I formulated a procedure which will produce magnifications from 1:1 up to 5x magnification but now I have to get close to my subject.

A tripod proved to be useless as moving it into position frightens the creatures away. Instead I lie on the grass and use my elbows and body as a tripod and work my way slowly and carefully to within 30 cm. (12 inches) of my subject. The camera is set at aperture priority, ISO 400, the focusing to manual, the on-camera flash raised and the zoom set at the wide angle end. I focus the image by rocking the camera slowly forwards and backwards until the subject is in focus. Thank goodness for vibration reduction! I can now use the zoom to increase the magnification up to about 5 x. The camera is now difficult to hold still but the flash helps to stop camera movement.

Having now taken many close-up pictures of the damselflies, I have ended up with an array of patterns and colours. Identification is now the problem. It seemed simple enough at first. The predominantly blue and black damselfly could be identified as the Common Blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) but it turns out that not all Common Blues are blue. The females can be blue or green with various patterns on the thorax and abdomen,

while immature or teneral Common blues are pink or straw coloured! Then again not all blue damselflies are the Common Blue e.g. the Blue-tailed damselfly, which can have a blue head, black abdomen with a bit of blue at its end. It is recognised as the Black-tailed damselfly by the twin-coloured spot on its wing.

Then I came across tragedy. A honeymooning couple attached to each other in the tandem position were so besotted with each other that they failed to notice the spider's web - however, the photographic record has given them immortality.

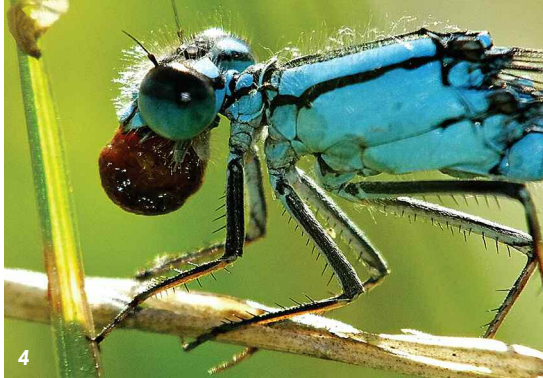
Of course, there were other creatures besides damselflies claiming my attention. It seems the bench mark for judging macro photography are the eyes of a fly and one particularly large one, a Flesh Fly, with bright orange eyes came close enough and stayed long enough for a photograph of its eyes.

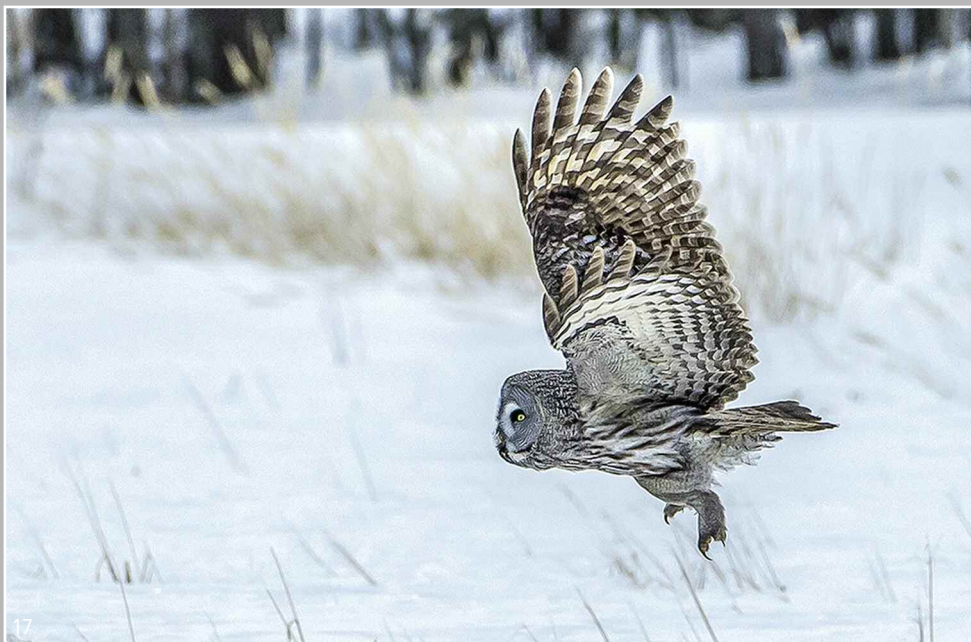
Spiders are not everyone's choice of pet but the so called black and yellow wasp spider looked stunning as it re-enforced its web with a tough zig zag web pattern. Whilst I was down amongst the grass a handsome Roesel bush cricket climbed a grass stem and rested while I photographed it.

As the lady said, '*we don't know the half of what goes on in the long grass*'. But guess where I will be next summer - yes, back in the long grass.

Photo Captions:

- 1 Mating Common Blues trapped and being eaten by a spider.
- 2 Common Blue Damsels mating in tandem mode.
- 3 Common Blue Damselfly blue male
- 4 Common Blue devouring a fly it had just caught. The fly was quickly transformed into a gooey mess.
- 5 Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) female green form.
- 6 Common Blue immature showing some pink.
7. Common Blue female green form resting with wings spread.
- 8 Roesel's Bush Cricket.
- 9 Wasp Spider - *Argiope bruennichi*





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More images from Gill Cardy's Fellowship Panel



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- 14. Goshawk plucking prey
- 15. Black Grouse fighting at lek
- 16. Tawny Owl in snow storm
- 17. Great Grey Owl hunting vole