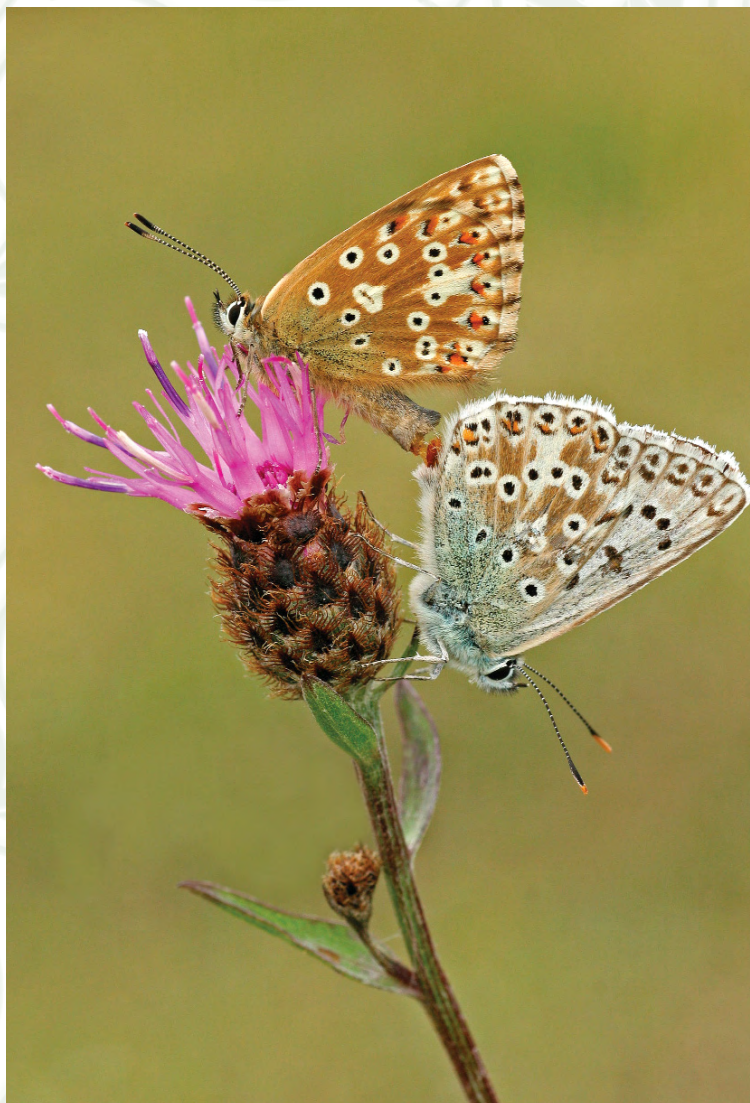




THE IRIS

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

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 The
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Photographic
Society

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▲ Marbled White (M)

▼ Marbled Whites on Field Scabious



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(below): Marbled Whites on Field Scabious
by John Bulpitt FRPS
Back Cover (top): Burnished Brass, and
(below): Sallow Kitten, by Tony Bond FRPS

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Nature Group Exhibitions

Copies of Nature Group Exhibitions dating back to 2000, are available to book for camera clubs/photographic societies. If you would like to book one of these or the current or next years' Travelling Exhibition, please contact: Peter Jones ARPS, details above.

Field Meeting Reports

Please send these directly to the Editor (address above) by post or email.

Editorial

Where does the time go? As I write this, in early March, there is snow on the ground and it is bitterly cold! By the time you are reading this it will be April; Spring will be in full flow and (hopefully) winter will be well behind us.

I do hope you all enjoy this issue, another bumper one, full of interesting reads and some lovely images to boot. You will find articles from both digital and film based photographers, covering both near and far distant corners of the world, as well as familiar and not so familiar nature subjects/species. I very much enjoyed reading the article about Oliver Pike which was put together for our enjoyment by Richard Revels FRPS.

There are also details included in the issue about Field Meetings planned for this year. It is not too late to organise one for Summer or Autumn - the next issue of The Iris comes out in early July and events can also be posted on the Nature Group website. Contact Colin Smith FRPS (contact details on this page). Kath Bull may still have some places left for the Residential Field Meeting she has organised at the Kingcombe Centre in Dorset. Kath has been organising these residential events since the early 1990's and can promise you a thoroughly enjoyable few days.

Did you enter the Nature Group's Annual Exhibition? Even if you didn't, you can still come along to the Spring Meeting on Saturday 29th April at The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands (home of Smethwick P.S.) and see the accepted prints and projected images. The next issue of The Iris will feature the winning images from the Exhibition plus more articles from members.

Finally, if you have an idea for an article, please email me - The Iris is only as good as you, the members, all make it, so keep on sending me stories about your trips, techniques, tips, etc. and I will do my best to maintain the excellent reputation which The Iris has earned itself.



From the chair

Once again I find myself sitting in front of the PC, looking for inspiration for 'from the chair'. Its cold and wet; rain drops cascade down the window panes. This all feels rather déjà vu and strangely enough, it is! I wrote this piece weeks ago but I'm afraid to say that my PC, which has been having its moments of late, has lost it!! And I mean lost it in every frustrating way possible. So having thought I was well ahead of the game, I'm actually not and now have to begin all over again!! However, this caused me re-think the winter and what I've achieved since the last 'Iris'. My first thoughts were of a disappointing winter filled with too many dull grey days and very few photo opportunities. Often there are wonderful winter highlights to capture, but on cold, dull, grey days, photography can be difficult or impossible. While I do believe that DI produces superior images to film in dull conditions, I feel that the weather this winter has probably defeated many of our aspirations. On serious reflection though, although photography is great, it is people that really make the difference and in that respect I have had an excellent few months. I've enjoyed another superb trip to the Falklands, during which time I bumped into old friends David & Jean Hosking, who were leading a Hosking tour of the Islands - it was really nice to meet them in person again. Then in January, we had a very productive committee meeting, when as always it was pleasant to renew acquaintances and make new ones. On this last occasion we were joined by Roger Reynolds FRPS, chairman of the A&F panel who, on taking up his new position, took the opportunity to address the committee. Not an easy task, so I do thank him for coming along. The most recent meeting of the A&F Distinctions panel, proved to be both interesting and enjoyable and offered me the opportunity to see the facilities at the new RPS HQ. I now have a Florida photo-tour to look forward to (which I love almost as much as the Falklands trips). So all in all, even though I've had very few photographic days, I have had a lovely winter. Now, with Snowdrops and Aconites in bloom and Catkins bursting forth, Spring has well and truly arrived and, together with the lengthening daylight hours, offers promises of the potential for photography in the new seasons ahead.

On committee matters, I've always been a great believer in sharing the many tasks and duties that arise and as a result of the last committee meeting there have been a few changes. To ease Nick's workload and allow him to concentrate on running the group's web-site, Colin Smith FRPS joins us as our new field meetings co-ordinator. I'm sure that Colin's vast knowledge and experience will prove to be a major asset to both the group and committee - if you've ever been even half tempted to run a field meeting, now would be an excellent time to give Colin a call. Remember it's your group and it can only get better if you become more involved in its activities. The Nature Group is one of the strongest specialist groups in the RPS but the strength of the group lies totally in the willingness of its members to support its aims and activities and our programme of field meetings is very much in the fore front. John Bebbington has taken on the vitally important role as our representative to the Advisory Panel. John's knowledge of Natural History and photography will be put to excellent use in supporting the group and advising the Society. I also need to appeal to the membership for someone to take over from Trevor as the group treasurer. Trevor has filled this most important role exceptionally efficiently for a number of years, and (along with his predecessor, John Myring) is the reason we are so financially sound. However, the time is fast approaching for Trevor to hand over to another suitably qualified member. To enable a smooth hand over of responsibilities we would like to hear from anyone who feels they are able to take on this role. And last but by no means least, on the group's behalf, may I thank all committee members for their continued support in helping to keep the group operating in such an efficient manner.

Finally, I would like to mention Chairman's Day. To be held Saturday 21st October and featuring lectures from eminent wildlife photographers plus, on the 22nd, local field meetings will complete the weekend's activities. Full details will appear in the next issue of the Iris, but until then please keep the dates free.

I look forward to meeting members at the AGM, during the summer or at Chairman's Day.

David

The 30th Annual General Meeting, Spring Meeting and Exhibition Opening

**The 30th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group
will be held at:
Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands
(directions below)
Saturday 22nd April 2006**

Timetable

- 10.30 a.m. Assemble for 11.00 a.m. start
- 11.00 a.m. 'Who Needs Long Lenses Anyway?' -
a slide presentation by Tony Bond FRPS.
- 12.30 p.m. Break for lunch.
Light lunches will be available in the club-house -
ploughman's or jacket potatoes.
There is also a dining area if you wish to bring sandwiches.

2.00 p.m. Annual General Meeting

Agenda:-

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 29th AGM 2005,
printed in issue 92 of 'The Iris'.
3. Matters arising.
4. Chairman's Report.
5. Treasurer's Report.
6. Secretary's Report.
7. Chairman's Day 2006
8. Any Other Business.
9. Date and Venue of the 31st AGM 2007.

Opening of the 2006 Annual Exhibition

- 2.45 p.m. Presentation of the awards followed by the
showing of the accepted projected images.
Exhibition Prints will be on display throughout the day.

Directions:-

Leave the M6 at Junction 2 and get into right hand lane. At roundabout (with traffic lights) approximately 200 yards from motorway take A4034 right towards West Bromwich. This is a dual carriageway, stay in the left hand lane. At the first traffic lights (approx 1/3 mile) turn left into Park Street. At the end of Park Street, turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac). The Old Schoolhouse is last but one building on the left.

Oliver Pike Hon FRPS, FRZ, FIBP, 1877 - 1963

A look back at a past master of Nature Photography

by Richard Revels FRPS

We now live in an age when anyone can go and purchase a high-tech camera, take a series of images, go home and within minutes print out good quality A4 prints on their inkjet printer. In today's world we don't need to know anything about the technical side of photography to be able to produce good pictures. If we wish, we can leave the focusing and exposure to the chip inside the camera, and it usually gets it about right.

To my mind there is no merit in making things more difficult than they need be, and today's cameras make picture taking easy. This has brought many more people into photography, which must be a good thing. However, if we go back a century or so, things were very different. Heavy plate cameras were then at the cutting edge of technology, and with film speed being very slow, about 5 ASA (ISO), it made taking good wildlife pictures very difficult.

I have recently been looking at pictures taken by a leading wildlife photographer during the early part of the twentieth century, and I am amazed at what he managed to produce considering the equipment he was using.

A Century ago, the range of cameras available was very limited indeed, so some of those early wildlife photographers designed and marketed their own cameras. One such photographer was Oliver Pike Hon FRPS. FRZ. FIBP, who designed a camera for his bird photography (the Bird-land Camera), then he marketed it world-wide for some years around 1905.

While most nature photographers will have heard of Richard and Cherry Kearton, who were leading pioneers in nature photography a hundred or so years ago, I suspect few if any Nature Group members will have heard of Oliver Pike.





Oliver was one of the last great pioneers of nature photography and knew the Kearton brothers well. Born in Enfield in 1877 he became interested in nature photography at the age of thirteen, taking pictures of flowers and bird nests and eggs. He published his first book 'In Birdland with Field Glasses and Camera' in 1900. 24 more books about birds and wildlife followed during the next 3 decades. He also wrote many illustrated articles for a number of countryside magazines.

In common with all the other wildlife photographers of that time, Oliver was very much a naturalist, knowing a great amount about the subjects he wanted to photograph. During his life he seems to have visited almost all the best British bird islands and other top wildlife locations. Getting to some of these places would have been much more of a challenge a hundred years ago than it is today, with horses often being used.

During the first World War he joined the Royal Flying Corps, serving for two years in France, and rising to the rank of Captain. When he was demobilised in 1919 he returned to wildlife photography.

Oliver took many classic bird pictures like that of the first recorded nesting of the Black-necked Grebe in England, taken at Marsworth reservoir near Tring, Hertfordshire in 1919. On the reverse of his exhibition print of this picture was written "Taken with my home made camera using a Tessa f4.5 lens."

Besides taking still pictures, Oliver also developed a passion for the cine-camera, and produced over fifty films of British mammals, birds and other natural history subjects. These included the first movie pictures of a female Cuckoo egg laying in another birds nest. In 1922 he sold the rights of this film for £1,500 - a small fortune in those days.

Oliver was also a conservationist long before it was fashionable, being involved with saving the Red Kite as a British bird. He was a member of the team that moved the last few surviving Kites from England, where they were in danger of being persecuted to extinction, to a safer place in mid Wales. This helped to boost Kite numbers in Wales where they were also very close to extinction.

Much of Oliver's life was spent living on the outskirts of Leighton Buzzard in Bedfordshire.

Here he had his own disused gravel pit nature reserve, where he photographed the resident Badgers, Foxes and birds. He also made friends with a wild Otter that he named "Bobby". Bobby became so trusting that he would come when called, taking fish from Oliver's hand. Sadly Bobby came to a nasty end when a pike fisherman hooked and killed him.

Oliver was much more than a top wildlife photographer of his time, he had an interest in the natural world generally, and was a founder member of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS) in 1946, becoming this societies first chairman.

I have no record when Oliver joined the RPS, but he was awarded his Fellowship in 1907, and served on the council from 1924 to 1948, and when he retired was made an Honorary Fellow.

When Oliver died in 1963 some of his exhibition prints were left to the BNHS. Recently I was asked to copy and record these prints to CD. A few of them are reproduced here by kind permission of the BNHS to show some of his work.

Looking at Oliver's few surviving exhibition prints and pictures in his books from 70 to 100 years ago, leaves me wondering how many members of today's RPS Nature Group would be able to match his picture quality using the same equipment as he did. I doubt if many could, yet I am sure that if he were active today, he would be one of the best wildlife photographers around, and also an active member of the Nature Group.

It is good to be able to give recognition to an old master like Oliver Pike in the pages of The Iris and show images from past times. I wonder if in the years 2055 and 3005 any of our images from the current RPS exhibitions will be shown on the pages of The Iris? Indeed will those images, now saved to CD or DVD, have survived so long? I rather doubt it.

Previous page - Red Kite: Oliver was one of the team that captured and moved the few remaining Red Kites from England to Mid Wales.

This page - Black-necked Grebe: 1919 was the first time Black-necked Grebes had been recorded breeding in England. In 1918 they were seen on Marsworth Reservoir near Tring, Herts.

Page 7 - Young Rabbits: Getting young Rabbits to keep still is not easy.



The Brown Bears of Finland

by David Manners ARPS

There are a number of wilderness centres in Finland offering opportunities for visitors to photograph wild Brown Bears (*Ursus arctos*) at close quarters. It would seem that some have greater success than others and can claim almost 100% guaranteed sightings. This makes the prospect of a short trip to Finland with very good chances of seeing and photographing this impressive mammal, a good option.

Two years ago, my wife and I travelled to the Russian borders of Finland for a long weekend with a well known nature holiday company and had the privilege of enjoying two nights in a comfortable hide with a small group. The hide has reclining seats, bunk beds and a chemical/earth closet so, whilst not being the height of luxury, it compares well with some wildlife watching facilities! We saw about thirteen bears over the period, often at very close quarters.

From the photographic point of view, however, there were downsides. In particular the location, 'primed' with salmon leftovers to attract the bears, has a distinctly well-worn look, much of the terrain being devoid of interesting vegetation and having a scattering of guano covered rocks and logs courtesy of the visiting seagulls and ravens. The viewing angles are limited especially if the hide is fully occupied, making it a little difficult to negotiate changing places with other people in order to try and alter your viewpoint. Despite these comments, I would have no hesitation in recommending a visit.

On our second night, we shared the hide with a Finnish family with whom I exchanged email addresses and have kept in contact. Over the months, I received a number of emailed images of the bears in surroundings which were aesthetically much better. It was no good - I had to go back! A date in early June this year was agreed and I managed to find a very reasonable cheap flight via Helsinki to Kajaani in central Finland. The journey can be pretty hectic as unfortunately the arrival and departure gates at Helsinki are at opposite ends of the airport with maybe only 30mins transfer time,

but if you know this and are prepared for it, your journey time can be quite reasonable.

Through the good office of my friend, he had booked for us the much smaller (and basic) professional hide in the forest. This cabin is about 8ft X 5ft (2.5m X 1.5m) and is only sitting height. The facilities – well, think bucket and you will have some idea! The other advantage of this hide is its position. Located only a few metres from the border and with windows and viewing ports on three sides it has been positioned to see the bears when they enter Finland from Russia and overlooks a much more photogenic vista within the edge of the pine forest. Needless to say, this cabin gets booked very quickly.

My BIG gamble in making this journey was that I would only spend one night in the cabin before returning home. With no guarantee of seeing anything at all and with no opportunity to pick and choose a time when the weather and light would be good, it did seem like madness. The day before 'bear-night' saw rain all day. The daytime journey from Kajaani to the Wilderness Centre (about 150km drive) was overcast and drizzly for the most part. This didn't prevent a couple of forays into the forests to look (sadly unsuccessfully as it was a little too early in the season) for Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*) and Calypso Orchid (*Calypso bulbosa*) – my friend had good contacts and had done his homework! Even the half hour trek through the forest to the cabin boasted a couple of heavy downpours – then the skies cleared and the sun came out and being close to the Arctic Circle in early June meant there was no nighttime darkness.

By 5.00pm we were safely installed in the cabin and were entertained by a number of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos major*), Ravens (*Corvus corax*), and even a juvenile White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) which perched in a tree about 50m away and kept itself un-photogenically behind another tree trunk for about half an hour. Other nocturnal visitors were the legendary Finnish mosquitoes – they come big and hungry and fly in squadrons!



Our first bear slipped silently from the undergrowth about 50mins after locking ourselves into the cabin. As with all wildlife encounters, the feeling and privilege of sharing the forest with such a creature is something that has to be experienced to be understood. The bear came within 30m and with the sunlight dappling through the trees made a wonderful image. Over the following hours more bears came and went from the scene including two mothers with cubs (one with twins and one with triplets), both groups providing much amusement and opportunity for the 'cute' shots. It was also the height of the mating season for the bears, resulting in some noisy activity as the animals calls echoed through the stillness of the forest together with pre-mating 'canoodling' around the cabin! Bears came and went all through the night and often brushed the cabin walls as they strolled by. This perhaps is an indication that serious telephoto lenses are not vital! We enjoyed seeing about 15 different individuals.

At the time of my first visit I was still using film in Pentax Super A equipment. My lenses were manual focus and the two of most value were a 400mm/f 5.6 and 135mm/f 2.8 Super Takumar.

Using 100 ISO Fujichrome meant that it was possible, even in the darker moments of a Finnish August night, to attain reasonable shutter speeds. In practice it proved better to use a faster film stock (400 ISO) and even to uprate this in order to gain both better aperture/shutter speed combinations. With a single animal it was possible to choose the moment when there was little movement, but with groups of bears the story was quite different. The end results were acceptable but to be honest I knew things could be better – hence my need to return.

On this latest trip I was fully digital. Now some might argue that a Fuji Finepix S602 is not a 'seriously professional' camera, but after much research I had chosen this model as it provided all (and more) than I need for enjoying my nature photography. I needed auto-focus and certainly could not afford to go down the digital body and AF lenses route to replace my ageing Pentax kit. The optical zoom is nominally 35mm - 210mm but I have purchased the 1.5X tele-converter (front mounting) which extends the long focal length to 315mm without compromising the aperture and I have found the quality to be quite



acceptable. I also needed easy 'macro', which the S602 provides satisfactorily, and above all for health reasons I had to seriously downsize the kit I could comfortably carry. Also, the results would better serve to illustrate my talks than big exhibition quality prints. I now use digital projection, a technology more comfortable with smaller file sizes, therefore operate the camera at its 3 MP/Fine setting - I have found this is perfectly adequate for the occasional A3 print. At this setting the camera not only saves files quickly but also provides good capacity on the Smartmedia memory cards and has the option of a microdrive for more storage if needed. I also carry a 30GD portable hard-drive (Innoplus Phototainer) onto which files can be easily and swiftly downloaded as the memory cards fill up. At least some card space can be freed up by deleting the real disasters knowing that you have all files duplicated on the portable drive. The only risk here is what happens if this hard-drive fails? I speak from the experience of a very sudden and disastrous PC hard-drive failure resulting in loss of many hundreds of files including many photographs.

All digital technology is vulnerable somewhere along the line and my experience has made me much more fastidious about backing-up and archiving valuable data - but you have to draw a line at some point! Incidentally, I heard of a photographer returning from India who, having (unwisely) put memory cards into checked-in hold luggage, found that nearly all files had become corrupted, whereas memory cards carried on board in hand luggage were okay.

Digital allowed for much more 'shooting power'. As the action unfolded, I was able to keep taking shots all through the night and able to assess on the spot whether or not it was wise or indeed necessary to increase the ISO setting on the camera. Even at slower shutter speeds, with the camera firmly nestled into a beanbag (provided in the hide at no extra charge!) it was possible to obtain sharp, movement free images at 1.00am by watching carefully and choosing the moment when the subject was attentively looking at something, possibly you - they certainly know you are there! One problem proved to be that the

autofocus does not like the dark fur of a Brown Bear especially in lower light levels. I found that the mechanism 'hunted' and sometimes missed the correct point of sharp focus. The most successful way round this was to focus quickly on a tree at similar range and hold the shutter release on it's halfway point, reframe and take the shot when the right moment came. This is not so good when the action is busy but I think it is all down to anticipation and experience with wildlife. Switching the camera to manual focus helped slightly, but with the resolution of the electronic viewfinder of the S602 being poor, critical focus was far from easy. The second problem proved to be the auto-exposure readings if the bear was used as the target. Over-exposure had to be compensated for by adjustment in either aperture or shutter priority mode. At the end of the day (or should I say night?) it proved better to take photographs in quantity and then have the chance to edit once home and use the powers of Photoshop to 'tweak' the final images.

During the night and unknown to us, a scenario had unfolded when two mothers (who were sisters) had joined up as a small group. When mother with twins wandered off she unfortunately left one cub with it's three cousins and shortly afterwards this cub took to the treetops in a mild panic - and there it decided to stay and go to sleep! Despite calling and attempting to climb the tree, mother failed to recover her cub and in the morning we faced the prospect of a swift departure from the location in case she was still around. Mother bears with cubs are very protective and potentially dangerous - need I say more? I heard by email the next day that the cub chose to climb down the following night and the family unit was restored.

People often ask me 'Weren't you scared?'. My answer 'Scared? No. Privileged? Yes!' And would I go again? You bet! I can't wait and next time we both return and I now feel confident to make all arrangements direct with the centre and as it were 'do the trip solo'.



Mountain Walking and Photography - Do They Mix?

by John Nathan LRPS.



For some twenty years I have had two great loves in life - photography and walking, or perhaps I should say walking and photography. I am a semi retired GP, and have been advising people about the value of exercise for most of my professional life. I also love photography, and have been Chairman of a Digital group of the RPS for several years, in addition to being a member of the Nature Group for ten years. It is hardly surprising that I should try to combine the two.

Some ten years ago, in 1994, I was part of a medical research expedition to Mount Everest. What an opportunity for photography! On an expedition such as this, the amount of weight you carry is crucial. In the Himalayas most of your gear is carried on yaks, (donkeys in the Andes) and you carry a daypack. If it is too heavy you have such a struggle walking uphill that it spoils any enjoyment. You soon learn that every kilo counts. A sensible weight limit for the daypack is about 10 Kg including your water and lunch - 6-7 Kg is much better. You may be able to get away with more when you are in your twenties - I was aged 53 on my expedition in

1994. You also have to decide early each the morning what equipment you are going to carry with you, because you have no access to your property from 8.00am until 4.00pm - if you forget a spare battery or film, you have had it.

At that time I had a Canon A1, (wt 1164 gm including a 28-70mm lens). This added 16.6% to the weight I carried. I quickly learned that camera batteries go flat under conditions of extreme cold, and how to warm them up. Film can crack if it gets extremely cold. Temperatures varied from 70°F during the day, down to 20° below freezing at night. Drinking water froze solid in its bottle inside my tent, so my camera had to come in the sleeping bag.

This was not the type of expedition where the primary object was photography. The main object here was medical research and trekking. Although you could take photographs, and I took many, you just do not have the time on trek to walk round a subject, view it from several viewpoints, lie down flat etc. You would be left behind in a remote place,

without knowing the route. As I mentioned earlier, you also have to decide early each morning which equipment you will need for the day. If I wanted to take my 70-210 telephoto lens (933 gm), that would add another 13.3% to my weight - flash gun - very useful in conditions of tremendous contrasts, 624gm. The camera and two lenses, without a tripod, added nearly one third to the weight I carried. Add film, polarizing filter, camera cases and the extra would be 40% extra. At 5,000 metres that made a big difference. A proper tripod was out of the question - my Benbo trekker weighed 2,500 gm; and it is 0.8 metres in length. Carrying this, the camera and two lenses would have weighed 4597 gm, and caused an increase of nearly 66% of my pack weight. It was just not on.

In 1997 I went on a mountain trek to Peru with a Canon EOS 5, wt 1164gm. This was not too much of a problem because conditions here were less harsh. The altitude was 4,000-5,000 metres, but near the equator, where the lowest night temperature was about 5° below freezing.

More recently digital cameras have arrived. I have a Canon EOS10D (wt 1542 gm). You don't have to carry film any more - no film to get wet in the tropics or crack with cold in mountains. But - hang on - what happens if you are out of contact with mains electricity for two or three weeks - not unusual in mountainous places. The experts suggest taking several batteries. In my experience, each battery only lasts two days. Recently in Patagonia, I was off the mains for eight days - I just managed with four batteries (wt - 4 x 75= 300gm). More recently RAW has come along - marvellous but uses far more pixels. One expert told me he took several 1 GB microdrive with him - at £ 250.00 each. An alternative is to buy a portable battery driven hard drive; I bought A Flashtrax (wt=427gm with one spare battery). Each battery lasts about four days if you do not review your pictures much. I transferred pictures once a day, quite interesting in a tent with the wind howling outside - I checked the first and last one I transferred.

Some of my trips are entirely unsupported - viz walking in the Alps for three weeks, or Pyrenees for nine days. If you are entirely unsupported





Pictures supporting this article:

Page 12: *Rhododendron hirsutum* - Alps.

Page 13: *Gentiana acaulis* - Trumpet Gentian - Pyrenees.

Page 14: *Chiliotrichum rosmarinifolium* - Andes. (top)

Doronicum columnae - Heart-leaved leopardsbane - Alps. (centre)

Campanula rapunculoides - Creeping

Bellflower - Alps. (bottom left)

Chilean Gentian. (bottom right)



you cannot carry heavy rechargeable batteries or a tripod. Even modern carbon fibre tripods are too heavy to carry day after day. Your total pack weight should not exceed 10Kg, and SLRs, long lenses etc are just too heavy. Recently I have carried a compact camera on my trips, a Canon A95 (wt 467gm with case) - one third the weight of an SLR and using AA batteries, available everywhere. It has its limitations - no inter-changeable lenses - but is light enough to be practical, and adjustable enough to be useful. You can, for example, easily use exposure compensation; one stop underexposed for a bright scene is nearly as good as using a polarizing filter.

On walking holidays, in contrast to photographic expeditions, you may see places that sedentary photographers never see, but you do not have the time, nor can you carry the weight, to take prize-winning pictures. Regrettably, a compromise is not possible and I have come to the conclusion that it is just not practical to attempt competition photography on unsupported mountain walking holidays. The experts with their back up vehicles, extra porters, etc, and access to mains electricity may say otherwise. I believe that compact digital cameras are the answer - or film cameras which are lighter, use smaller batteries, and did not need access to mains electricity.



Non conformist Nun and Red-necked Footman in Uncertain Cameo under Dark Arches

by Tony Bond FRPS



We nature photographers are a stoical bunch. We have to be to survive all the disappointments and retain our sanity. It all becomes worthwhile when an unexpected opportunity arises and leads to pastures new. Which is how I became involved in photographing moths.

While on one of my occasional forays into the town where I live (on foot, to help save the planet!) I met someone I had known for many years but had encountered very infrequently in recent times despite living only half a mile apart. He was experiencing problems with a well known high street processor and was eager to pick my brains. I had always thought of him as a 'bird' man - indeed, he was the first secretary of the local ornithology society. However, it emerged that he had shifted the focus of his activities to moths and was very busy recording in our area. He asked if I would like to photograph some of his captures. I said yes, although I was not terribly enthusiastic at this stage, having dabbled in the field many years ago.

It was now early Autumn, but some moths duly appeared. My initial attempts at photographing them only served to show that more effort would be needed, particularly in lighting, if I was to be successful. The following April the phone rang

one Sunday afternoon to say that there were some attractive specimens for me to collect. The trickle soon became a flood as we entered May and June. At this time I was hampered by the lack of a field guide to offer guidance on how to pose my subjects. The one used by my mentor was old and out of print. In the absence of reliable information I posed most of the moths on bark from various tree species. It was no surprise to find that the best lighting was overcast daylight warmed by an 81A filter. I did all my photography outdoors until a particularly windy May day when I was forced indoors and discovered that the light from a south facing window, but out of sunshine, was very suitable, with the benefit that any badly behaved moths which flew off could normally be recaptured. I still use this method if I am photographing on bark and now have a Lastolite brolly/softbox into which I fire a Mecablitz 60CT4 if the light is bad. I confess I have not put enough effort into using this flash set-up as it is clumsy and the brolly has to be close to the subject to achieve the sort of aperture needed for adequate depth of field. However, the last time I did a comparison between flash and daylight from the window I preferred the flash result because it had a bit more sparkle.



One very big difference between butterflies and moths is that with the exception of the few day-flying moths we cannot observe their natural behaviour in their chosen habitat. If we could I have no doubt that we would see them landing on all manner of surfaces and perches. For example, the Engrailed which illustrates this article was found on a brick wall. Two factors changed my approach to setting up my subjects. The first was reading that those moths which hold up their wings at right angles to the abdomen normally rest on a flat surface such as bark. Those which hold their wings parallel with the abdomen normally rest on something thin such as a twig or stem. I had never heard of this general rule before but it seemed to make a lot of sense. The second bit of enlightenment came from Robert Hawkesworth's review of the newly published 'Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland' in *The Iris* (Issue 89, Summer 2004, page 27). I contacted my friend to enquire if he had seen it, to be told that he had a copy and was already using it! I can thoroughly recommend it and not only find it indispensable for deciding on what to pose my subject, but also a good browse. Now, when I receive a moth, I look up the larval food plant and habitat, decide whether to use bark or something different and then scour my collection of bits and pieces for something

appropriate. By doing this I am confident of avoiding the sort of howler which anyone with a good knowledge of moths would spot instantly.

If you decide to use something other than bark, you then have the problem of finding a suitable background. We are all aware of the difficulties that backgrounds cause in any branch of natural history photography. Nothing can be left to chance and the stop down button is of limited value because of the small apertures we have to use. This is why the lawn of my back garden is featured in so many of my pictures. However, in nature, backgrounds are rarely perfect and a series of pictures in which the backgrounds are uniformly immaculate can lead the viewer to wonder if they owe everything to Colorama. For this reason I sometimes introduce some slight out-of-focus flowers. At least, that is my excuse and I am sticking to it!

I must warn you at this juncture that photographing moths can be highly addictive. Although I still enjoy photographing butterflies, the moths offer far more scope if only because there are far more of them and they are on the wing every month of the year. There are approximately 900 macros on the British list and this rises to 2,500 if you include the micros (but you would not wish to go there!) The micros exhibit enormous variety of size, shape and colour and although the colourful species catch

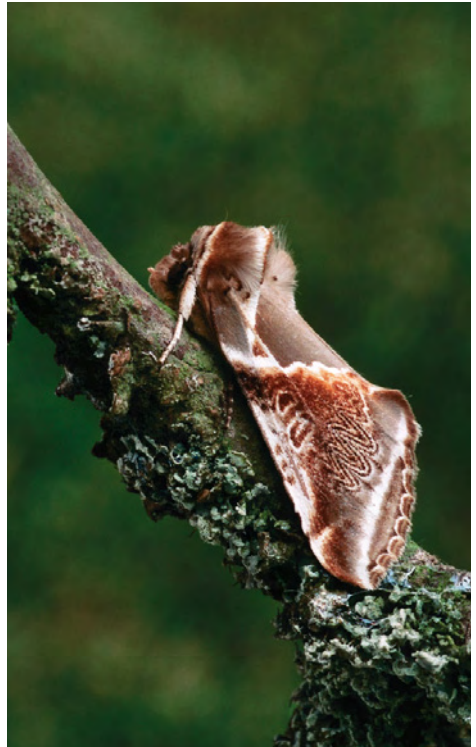
the eye, those species with superb camouflage are great fun to photograph. There is always a feeling of excitement when the trap is opened in case there is a gem amongst the little brown jobs. Even after a good night there will be few moths worth photographing. Many will be showing signs of wear or damage - like a Poplar Hawk Moth I saw recently, which was so battered it must have walked into the trap.

Moths are rather like fungi and orchids - the more you know the more you realise how much more there is to learn. In the relatively short time I have been involved with moths I have learned a lot, enjoyed myself and produced some pictures which have really pleased me. And isn't that what natural history photography is all about?



Pictures illustrating this article:

Page 15	Large Emerald
Page 16	Beautiful Golden Y (opposite)
Page 17	Engrailed (above)
Page 17	Ghost (below left)
Page 17	Buff Arches (below right)
Back cover	Burnished Brass (top)
	Sallow Kitten (below)



Photographing Butterflies and Dragonflies



by John Bulpitt FRPS

One of my early attempts at nature photography in the early 1990's, involved trying to capture butterflies on Buddleia bushes in the garden. My kids still laugh at the memory of me placing a step stool by each bush and rushing round trying to snap Peacocks, Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells and the occasional Comma. I learned that the butterflies were not very confiding, the light was impossibly harsh, buddleia generally makes a poor backdrop and my pictures were rarely sharp where it mattered.

The basic mistake I was making was in trying to photograph at the butterfly food plant whereas what I needed to do was to find the caterpillar food plant. This was an early introduction to the fact that consistently successful nature photography requires detailed knowledge of the subject.

Finding a good source for the caterpillar food plant for any given species and arriving at around 8.30/9.00am on a warm day at the right time of year is vital if you want decent butterfly shots. At this time it is relatively easy find newly emerged individuals or mating pairs. If you are careful both individuals and pairs can be moved into more advantageous positions (using a twig or grass stalk, not your fingers!). Tidying up of the background is also possible.

As far as dragonflies (and damselflies) are concerned, a one day workshop with George McCarthy taught me the basics. Two books have proved particularly helpful for identifying locations.

"Butterflies and Dragonflies, a site guide", Hill and Twist, ISBN 1 900159 05 8, and

"Field guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of GB", Steve Brooks, ISBN 0 9531399 0 5.

These are excellent to get you going but it is surprising how much local knowledge is available through Wildlife trusts, Natural History societies etc. For my home county, Bedfordshire, there is a comprehensive book on dragonflies. A Google search will almost certainly reveal similar gems for other counties.

I find dragonflies fascinating. It is always a treat to sit in the garden on a summer evening with a glass of wine, watching their extraordinary aerial acrobatics as they hunt. Dragonflies belong to one of the most ancient orders of insects and have been around for about 300 million years. Fossils of the early dragonflies indicate that they were about 5 times the size of today's species.

One needs to be up at dawn (which is seriously early in June/July) to find newly emerged or more mature dragonflies covered in dew waiting

for the sun to dry their wings before they can fly. Opportunities to photograph pairs mating and ovipositing (egg-laying) occur at a more civilised hour. Flight shots are best attempted early to mid morning as males patrol reed beds looking for newly emerged females. (As a generalisation the females of most insect species mate within hours of emerging from the pupa.)

Let us now turn to the equipment necessary for successful butterfly and dragonfly photography. For everything apart from flight shots I normally use a macro lens (Tamron 90 in my case), sometimes with an extension tube. Coupled with my Canon 20D which enhances the focal length by 60%, this enables me to fill the frame with even the smallest species. At dawn I may use a tripod but generally I find tripods more trouble than they are worth for these subjects, as however careful one is it is very difficult to avoid disturbing the surrounding vegetation, and hence the subject itself. A bean bag and occasionally a reflector can be very helpful for butterfly photography.



For flight shots I use a 70-200 lens with a 1.4 converter coupled with a Canon 1D mk2, which has a very fast autofocus. In both situations I shoot in raw format because exposure errors, which are very easy to make with these subjects, are much easier to correct in photoshop.

For macro work I always try to use the depth of field preview as it often reveals intrusive background details. Because you are so close to the subject depth of field can be measured in millimetres and so there is usually a trade off between rendering the subject pin sharp and blurring the background. I usually find that f8/11 gives the right balance providing you are careful to get the subject parallel to the film plane. It is also important to choose the focus point carefully to ensure that the subject is sharp at a point of your choosing.

I always use auto focus for macro work, set to A1 servo/ continuous autofocus with motor drive switched on. I appreciate that most nature





photographers use manual focus but I find that even on a still day there is some perceptible movement when my lens is 6/12 inches from the subject and this is a method that works for me. Where appropriate I use fill flash with a setting of $-1 \frac{2}{3}$ stops. With a hand held macro lens I try to set a shutter speed of at least 1/200th.

For flight shots AI servo and motordrive are used all the time but I never use flash. The aperture is set to f4 because the efficacy of the continuous autofocus is optimal at this level. I look for a minimum shutter speed of 1/1000th. It is vital to prefocus on a point approximately the same distance as you expect the subject to be, because otherwise the autofocus will hunt and you may never lock onto the subject when it flies into the frame.

In these situations, especially macro, exposure is tricky. When I used film I just had to accept the cost of bracketing. With digital I check the histogram regularly and err on the side of underexposure.

My next challenge is to try to capture butterflies in flight using a hand-held camera. In the unlikely event that I succeed I will post something on the website.

Picture details

Front Cover	Chalkhill Blues on Knapweed
IFC top	Marbled White (M)
IFC bottom	Marbled Whites
Page 18	Migrant Hawker patrolling reed beds
Page 19	Blue Tailed Damselflies
Page 19	Common Darter with larval skin
Page 20	Dark Green Fritillaries
Page 20	Gatekeeper
Page 20	Ruddy Darter (F) covered in dew
Page 20	Banded Demoiselle (M)

Photographing migrating Cranes

by Manfred Klindwort



The breeding territory of the Common Crane extends from north-east Europe to the north of Asia. During the winter months there is much snow and ice and not enough food so the birds must leave their home. Every year in the autumn, perhaps 100,000 Cranes fly along the West Europe migration route passing over Germany. After a break in Eastern Germany, the birds flying far make a stop in France and by the end of December the last cranes will arrive in the Extremadura of Spain or NW-Africa.

The return migration begins at the end of January by the same route - the last cranes leaving Spain by the end of April. The a short breeding time in northern Europe demands a punctual arrival.

The "Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft" is an important resting point in Germany. From the air, the landscape looks similar to the northern homeland. The flat waters offer a safe sleeping place and the surrounding farmlands are a great source of food for the cranes. From the middle of October to the middle of November 30,000 - 60,000 Cranes can be found roosting at the same time in the "Rügen-Bock-Region" and near the island of "Zingst" more than 10,000 Cranes may be found sleeping at high tide. With this

concentration of Cranes, this landscape is one of the greatest and important resting places in central Europe.

In October 1997 an information centre and hide was opened at Hohndorf, from where you can view the resting cranes. Good field-glasses are important.

Last year, I visited Hohndorf for the first time. It was overwhelming. I stayed there for 5 days with a motorhome. On some days, there were as many as 8,000 cranes standing in front of the visitors. I had never seen such a spectacle before.

At 6.30 am we were standing in the twilight of the morning and waiting for the first Cranes from the water of the "Bodden". I had set up my tripod and fitted my Canon EOS 1D Mk II with an EF 500L lens. The ISO setting on this foggy morning set at 800. Then the air was filled with cries, louder and louder as they arrived! One wedge of birds after another was flying close over our heads to the food plains. As the sky became clearer it was possible to see masses of birds landing right in front of us. I quickly shot picture after picture and I soon filled a 1 GB Card. In such an action-packed situation a quick motordrive is very helpful. With 8 frames/sec I



could capture many moments in time. When the birds were feeding peacefully, I fitted a Canon EF 1.4x between lens and camera. The quality of the images are always super. It is important that the visitors remain very quiet as then some cranes will approach as close as only 25 meters away!

In the afternoon we drove along the country roads to “Bartelshagen”, where the Cranes can be seen standing in the corn fields. Sometimes we observed the first dances of the mating season. At twilight after the sun had sunk below the horizon the Cranes started their flight back to the waters of the “Bodden”. It was fantastic!

We stayed overnight in the little village of “Duvendiek” where there are huts and rooms to rent, and a nature campground for tents, motor-homes and caravans. The best of all was that every morning from 6.00 am thousands of Cranes were flying over our heads in endless formations to the feeding grounds. This spectacle is breathtaking. Where else in the world could you observe such flights of wild-living birds with a cup of coffee in your hand?

For photographing this spectacle you need a camera with film 200-800 ISO or a digital camera where you can change the ISO settings. For the birds on the fields you must have a lens with 400-600 mm focal length. To photograph the cranes in flight with the surrounding landscapes you need a lens from 28-135mm. For the heavy artillery you must have a stable tripod.

Check the weather report before you start. Last year we experienced a week of warm weather with temperatures around 20°C and blue skies.

If you have any questions, please email me at: mkwildlife@aol.com

I would be happy to help you plan your visit to photograph the Cranes in Germany.



A Different Corner of India

Peter Evans FRPS

As I indicated in my piece on Sri Lanka last year, photographing India's wildlife is fraught with problems, many of which are nothing to do with the animals themselves. However, I had some scores to settle in the dry west, because my previous visit suffered from being immediately after the great earthquake which destroyed Bhuj. I set out to do this in February 2005.

Until recently, Gujarat was little visited by wildlife photographers, but it is now appearing as a listed destination by several tour companies. It is easy to fly to Mumbai with Emirates from Manchester, thus avoiding the pain of Heathrow. Thence, a short scheduled flight takes you to Ahmedabad or Bhavnagar and a shortish drive to one of the National Parks. We started with the former and drove to the Wild Ass reserve, where the relatively new tented accommodation at Dasada is greatly superior to that at Zainabad, despite the superb hospitality we received there in very difficult circumstances on the previous trip. This is a semi-desert reserve based on saline mud, which is flooded in the monsoon

and bakes to a hard, cracked surface in the sun of the dry season. It hosts a good population of the endangered Asiatic Wild Ass and when food in the reserve runs short they can visit nearby farmland. They emerge from cover in the early morning to seek grazing and since this is sparse they have to move around quite a lot. Following them in a vehicle does not give good pictures, but observing where they are going, getting ahead of them and waiting behind such little cover as there is, gives sporting chances. Two early mornings spent this way gave me what I wanted. I was told that they are less shy of an observer on foot, but I did not try it, as we had a Land Rover with an opening windscreen. There were plenty of Nilgai and we had one fox, but the backgrounds are not ideal. A couple of hours after dawn the light becomes fierce and it is time to settle for some birdwatching and then to head back. Despite the general aridity, there are some good wetlands with flamingos, pelicans, cranes, ducks, dabchicks and many other species, but the birds are only occasionally in camera range.



Our drive from Dasada to the lodge at Gir was broken by a night at Gondal, where at night the mosquitoes were unusually numerous and aggressive. Fortunately, Paludrin and Avlachlor still seem to work in India and there is no need to resort to the more aggressive antimalarials, which are now needed in Africa. Gir holds the only Lions outside Africa. The park consists mainly of dry forest and has some three hundred each of Lions and Leopards. Parts of the forest are relatively open, but you still have to work hard to get a clear view. About two thousand people and their cattle and buffaloes share the park with the predators, the deal being that the people are allowed to graze their beasts and 50% compensation is paid if any are killed. Generally, the Lions find their natural diet of Chital and Wild Boar more to their taste, but they have the domestic stock in reserve. Only rarely will you find a Lion in the open, but trackers will seek out where one is settled, usually with prey or by a stream. Then, for a fee, they will guide you on foot to it. This is against all park regulations, but is so widely practised that it must be with the connivance of the authorities. You may think it unwise, possibly crazy, to walk up to photographing distance of a lion in a forest, but they seem to be so well fed and so accustomed to people that they are

remarkably placid. Because they are under trees, the light is poor and it is difficult to get a clear shot, but it is an interesting experience. Gir has all the common mammals, including Nilgai (Bluebull), Sambar, Chital, Wild Boar, Indian Hare and a couple of mongooses. We even saw Four-horned Antelope, though not to photograph. Birds are plentiful, including a wide variety of raptors, but we only had one vulture sighting.

From there we bussed to Bhavnagar, where we spent the rest of our time and shared our rather grand quarters with the rajah and his family. Velavadar, an hour's drive from Bhavnagar, is one of the main places for Blackbuck. These used to be common all over India and were even hunted using trained Cheetahs, but the Cheetahs have gone completely and the Blackbuck are now only found in a handful of places. At Velavadar, they are hunted by Wolves, and we watched a pack of five chasing the antelope up and down until they found a weak one. They caught it and were beginning to eat it when an enormous black Wild Boar strolled up and took it from them. It all happened some distance away and before dawn, so there was no chance of pictures. Do not go there expecting a repeat, as Wolves are pretty scarce and have to range over large areas. You can, however, expect to get decent images of the





Picture details:

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
Pterocles exustus

Nilgai Bull
Boselaphus tragocamelus

Asiatic Wild Ass
Equus hemionus

Asiatic Lion
Panthera leo

Blackbuck. Only the older males are black; younger males and females are pale brown. There is a huge roost of harriers at Velavadar, but you need to go in mid-winter to see them, because they start to move north in February. The salt lakes near Bhavnagar are good for water birds, including lots of Lesser and some Greater Flamingos, and a wide variety of ducks and waders. Tour groups often spend half a day from Bhavnagar visiting the ancient Jain temples on a hilltop at Palitana. I bunked off, hired a car and driver and spent the couple of hours from dawn photographing the salt lake birds.

Gujarat will not attract those who demand Tigers or Asian Elephants and the Leopards are unlikely to perform for you. On the other hand, it offers a good variety of subjects which are a change from the African ones and it has few enough tourists to escape the press of the multitudes. Worth going before the mob catches up, but understand that still camera fees of five to ten US dollars are charged in addition to the park entry fee. The stated fee for video varied up to an absurd two hundred dollars. We did not test it, but if video is your thing, check before you go.



Digital Update

by David Osborn FRPS

The digital onslaught continues and worldwide sales of film and film cameras plummet. Film sales alone are down 49% on the same period last year. The ever evolving face of photography this week sees the dual announcements that Nikon are to cease the production of film cameras and a certain major American industry leader openly admitting to a long term strategy to withdraw from the film market. That certainly is a sign of changing times. To highlight that further, Konica/Minolta have also stated their intention to withdraw completely from the photographic industry. 2006 will certainly be a year of change.

There is no doubt that digital has now gained the marketplace position as the main image recording media, and over such a relatively short space of time. It's quite dramatic to see how far the technology in consumer level digital photography has leapt forward, probably more so than at any stage in its history. It's even more amazing when you think that with a PC in your own home you can achieve images that would have tried the quality control of any professional laboratory just a decade ago.

The fast action shot of the Gentoo Penguin bursting out on to the shore is now more achievable due to the flexibility gained with variable ISO settings and the availability of instant image assessment allowing you to check you've actually captured the image you require.

Having written initially in the Winter 2003 *Iris*, No87, I can't help but reflect on my own 'accidental' introduction into the digital field. Three years ago I was a die-hard slide worker. I would never have dreamed of changing 'ships' and at that stage certainly was not too impressed with either the achievable results or costs of entering the digital market. However, chance circumstances combined with the introduction of Canon's wonderful EOS10D changed my photography instantly and re-juvenated my enthusiasm.

The flexibility and control offered both in camera and with image manipulation software such as Photoshop, together with the option to instantly preview images is more than enough. But it doesn't actually end there. You can move images to anywhere in the world in seconds, you can still enjoy creating slide shows, produce high quality prints in both black & white and colour and, even better, as long as you back up your images correctly, you're never going to lose or damage your original material. In fact, no more degraded copies and in truth no more originals,





This Falkland Skua was originally taken in a landscape format, but creative cropping to the vertical and the addition of a little upper canvas allowed an already imposing image to be improved, highlighting the ultimate flexibility digital offers the photographer in image presentation.

This shot of the Grass Wren, the Falklands smallest resident bird, was made easier due to the increase in magnification made possible by the changes in DSLR sensor sizes, resulting in a high magnification image obtained without the need to carry a high magnification super tele-photo lens.



the last copy is every bit as good as the first and with the availability of such excellent software applications as Photoshop, the flexibility doesn't end with your image taking as any minor flaws in the original image can carefully be corrected. In my original article I asked 'Why change?' The truth now is that soon you'll probably have to, film is receding rapidly. I also stated that the major system disadvantage was the cost and the only down side still is equipment price! But actually, is it? I previously stated that within a few years digital cameras would be a similar price to their film equivalents and today that's almost true. However, it's the hidden and overall costs that we perhaps don't initially take into account and which do actually make the difference. For example, since purchasing my 1DmkII and CF cards, I've taken over 20,000 images which haven't cost me a penny - the equivalent film costs for that number of images would have been about £3,500 without the price of the camera. Evaluate that statement as you will, but the fact is that in film purchase, developing and processing savings alone, the camera has now paid for itself.

So, how does the new digital based equipment fare and handle by comparison to film and what associated problems might this new technology present to the nature photographer operating in the field miles from home? In truth, none! In leading my photo-tours, I'm fortunate enough to be able to travel to the Falkland Islands every year, you probably can't get more extreme than the South Atlantic in terms of distance and conditions. So does that produce any problems or pitfalls? Once again no, the digital equipment handles changing conditions every bit as well, if not better, than its predecessors, modern ergonomic design sees to that and away from home I've never had a major problem. The laptop packed up on me once but that was backed up by carrying a digital wallet and in that statement lies the bitter truth of digital photography - make sure that everything is backed up. You couldn't do that with film. Once your film or image was lost or ruined there was no recovery point. With digital there is, and you can and must back up your files and storage equipment, it's just a mind set and a change of habits - your work is then better protected than it ever was. No more bulk film carriage, no more worries over airport X-ray machines and to an

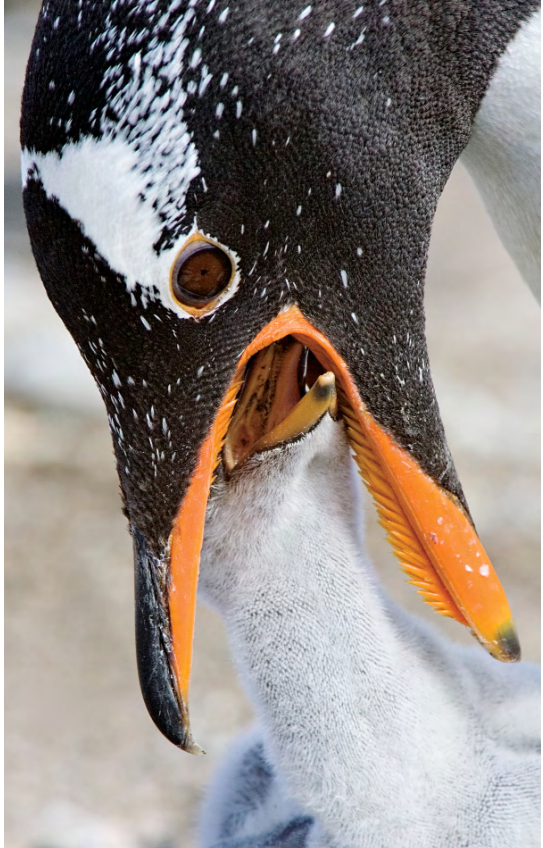
extent no more worries with ruined images. You'll be surprised what you can recover in Photoshop if you have to.

Away from home your only major concern is a reliable electricity supply and most places on the planet these days have access to electricity. Even the remotest of settlements in the Falklands have their own generator and on those that don't you just need to be aware and prepared. Major strides have been made with batteries for digital cameras and the ones for the 1DMkII can store power for months without any noticeable loss. So you take an extra battery, make sure they're fully charged at all times and you're fine for a couple of days.

Another unsung advantage to digital imaging comes from the variety in the sizes of DSLR sensors which allows an almost unimaginable resource to lens focal length without the need to carry limitless lenses. This feature certainly comes into its own with the carriage of large focal length telephoto's.

The ease of use, flexibility and immediacy of the media makes digital a wonderful tool for any photographer and, unencumbered from the worry of film cost and wastage, it leaves the photographer free to explore their imagination and their subject material.

Would I ever go back to film? Well, in short, never! Personally, I can see absolutely no advantages in film based photography and so many in digital!



The changes to current DSLR sensor sizes allows high magnification access to this Gentoo colony, allowing us to capture undisturbed behaviour without causing unnecessary disturbance.



A near perfect composition of this Striated Caracara in flight was made possible by a selective crop in Photoshop and improved under wing detail highlighted by using the shadow/highlight feature.

Ascension Island

by Dawn Osborn ARPS

It has been my good fortune to have visited the Falkland Islands many times in recent years. Those of you who have made the journey to the south Atlantic will already know that the flight from RAF Brize Norton makes a re-fuelling stop at Ascension Island, where you can relax in the sunshine for an hour or so before continuing your journey. On these occasions we have whiled away the time watching the skies for a passing Ascension Frigate Bird. I thought how interesting it would be to see more of Ascension than just what is visible from the arrivals/departure area affectionately referred to as the 'cage'. But until recently Ascension was closed to tourism. Then, in the spring of 2004, a chance conversation with a colleague resulted in the discovery that for the first time Ascension was opening its doors to tourists and that our return journey from the Falklands that year would coincide with the breeding cycle of Sooty Terns and the arrival of the first Green Turtles also returning to breed. And so it was that in December 2004, on the return journey from the Falklands, I broke my journey home with a visit to Ascension Island. The visit consisted of five days packed with new things to see and do. I had pre-arranged the accommodation and organised visits to different wildlife sites on the island by Landrover.



Ascension Island is an isolated volcanic island of only 35sq miles - roughly the size of the Isle of Wight - projecting from the mid Atlantic ridge about half way between South America and West Africa, just south of the Equator. The weather was extremely pleasant for the majority of our stay - not overly hot or humid and no tropical storms - but it can change quite quickly. The average daily temperature on the coast varies between 20° and 30° C but up on Green Mountain - the highest peak at 2817ft - it can be much cooler.

Ascensions origins are volcanic and it is thought that the most recent eruption probably took place between 600 and 1000 years ago - the craters are defined as dormant rather than extinct.

First discovered in 1501 and rediscovered two years later, Ascension remained uninhabited until 1815 when Napoleon was exiled to St Helena - another remote volcanic island about 750 miles south east from Ascension. A small garrison was stationed to keep an eye out for the French and the island became HMS Ascension - a 'stone sloop of war' which remained under Admiralty supervision until it became a dependency of St Helena in 1922.

The main wildlife of the island is tropical sea birds and marine life, although there are feral donkeys and sheep which were originally brought to the island to provide a ready supply of meat. There are also a variety of introduced birds including Mynahs and Frankolins.

As mentioned earlier, our visit co-incided with the breeding cycle of the Sooty Tern also referred to as the Wideawake Tern because of its call. Wideawakes are an attractive black and white species of tern which return to Ascension every 9.6 calendar months (10 lunar months) to breed. The main food source of Sooties is small flying fish and it is because the warm waters around Ascension support large numbers of these fish that this unusual cycle is possible. Sooties congregate on the lava plains in their tens of thousands - these huge colonies are called Fairs. The fairs are amazing - at any time there are hundreds of birds coming and going with food for their young and many predators overhead - the rare Ascension Frigate Bird for example. Young terns hide in the lava while they wait for their parents to return with food. Needless to say, fairs are very noisy places. I found that the terns are very curious and would hover right in front of me as if to check me out, so by standing still and using a short zoom (28/105mm) on my camera, I was able to get some close up flight shots. With the exception of Sooties, most other seabirds nest on Boatswainbird Island and other small offshore lava stacks, or on steep inaccessible cliffs where there is protection from feral cats. Ascension had been rat free until the arrival of the first ships. Soon after the garrison was established, cats were introduced to control the rat population, however the cats found that the ground nesting seabirds were much easier prey and now extensive areas whitewashed with guano are the only evidence of what once must have been spectacularly large bird colonies.



Feral cats have now been eradicated and there is an ongoing programme to rid the island of rats. The seabirds are slowly returning to re-occupy their historical colonies once more.

During our visit we photographed many birds at some of the offshore stacks both from the water, and (Boatswainbird Island) from the shore; birds such as Ascension Frigate Bird, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Tropicbird, Fairy Tern, Brown Noddy, Black Noddy, Masked Booby, Brown Booby and Red-footed Booby.





During our boat trip out to the offshore stacks, we witnessed breeding Green Turtles. These amazing creatures which can grow to 400lbs travel more than 1250 miles from the coast of Brazil to breed off Ascension's beaches from December through to May. The males lurk offshore awaiting the arrival of the females. A female may have several mates and lay three or more clutches of eggs in a season, but most do not do so every year. At dusk the female hauls herself up the beach and searches for a 'nest' site which she will dig before laying her eggs, covering them safely and returning to sea.

All of this can take several hours and must be concluded before dawn. The egg laying reaches its peak in late February and the first eggs begin to hatch in March through to July. I well remember standing on Georgetown beach in total blackness listening while a huge female excavated a nest site. The stars were incredible - but that is another story!

If you would like to be one of only a handful of nature photographers to have visited Ascension, join me in May 2007 when once again the breeding cycles of the Sooty Tern and Green Turtle will co-incide.

Pictures:

Page 30: Sooty Tern and Wideawake Fair

Page 31: Boatswainbird Island

Red-footed Booby, brown and white forms.

Black Noddy with egg

page 32 Ascension Spurge

Offshore lava stack

Female Green Turtle returning to sea following egg laying

Ascension Land Crab, red form.



Field Meeting Reports - 2005

Kenfig Reserve - 4th June 2005 **Leader - John Hankin LRPS**

On a bright but windy morning in June, nine of us met outside Kenfig Headquarters. Earlier in the week I'd spent a long day exploring the dune slacks to the north – in the direction of the Steel Works – and found that area very rewarding, in terms of flowers but it's also well away from the local dog walkers! Leaving the lake to our right we moved out to the marshy stretches, many in the lee of fairly high dunes so the wind effect was minimised. We were probably a fortnight too early for Fen orchids, but there were good specimens of Southern Marsh, Bee and Pyramidal. Other flowers included a sweep of Meadow Thistle hiding the Bee orchids, with Viper's Bugloss, Bog Pimpernel, Eyebright and some Broomrape. I was specially grateful to Margaret Hodge, who didn't take pictures but spent her time finding subjects for the rest of us! The day was probably too cool for much insect activity but there were Cinnabar moths, and the occasional Small Heath and Common Blue Butterflies and one lethargic Drinker Moth caterpillar.

Derek Rodway, now sadly in poor health, was for many years THE photographic expert on Kenfig Reserve and many of his slides still form the highly valued nucleus of the archives of this fascinating location. I'm now looking forward to another Field Meeting in 2006 and this is planned for Saturday 10th June to make a weekend including Oxwich the following day with Margaret.

Porton Down - Sunday 9th October **Leader - John Hankin LRPS**

Porton Down, near Salisbury, is a unique area which I've visited many times in the last seven years. Access is controlled by Ministry of Defence Regulations, visitors having to be supervised. We were privileged to be led by the Conservation Officer so it was disappointing that so few members attended. I understand the problems involved in having to book places in advance but I had hoped for more than three!

Risley Moss - 2nd October 2005 **Leader - Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS**

This was my first group field meeting with myself as a leader. I decided to do the meeting for a number of reasons; because the Nature Group are always putting out field meetings for its members; because I kept seeing forms for meetings in The Iris (and having been persuaded by Nick Jarvis); and as I know the Moss reasonably well, I thought (rather nervously) why not have a go.

Having done a recce with my son the weekend before, we found Shaggy Ink Caps, various brackets, Mycaena, Earthballs, and Puffballs. We also saw a large number of dragonflies (I think they were Common Darters) and amazingly we were able to approach within 6 inches of them. It's always the same when you don't have your camera with you!

On the day, 9 people came including 3 from Nottingham and one from Leeds. The day was reasonably bright with some cloud cover but you wouldn't really call it flat or poor lighting. Rain threatened for most of the day but thankfully it stayed away until late in the afternoon. Some of the species we found were Glistening Ink Caps, *Tricholoma fulvum*, Birch Polypore, Many zoned Polypore, Turkey Tails, Common Earthball, Jew's Ear, Candle Snuff, Dead Man's Fingers etc. I also found a very photogenic Green Shield Bug. I've got to admit it was all rather small stuff, so to get good photographs we were using macro lenses with at least 1:2 capability and some with x5 macro. We had to work hard for our shots but I think everyone who came should have returned home with something worthwhile.

My thanks go to those who came and I hope to see you again at the next RPS Nature Group meeting.

Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS

Field Meeting Reports continued

Sherwood Pines - 18th October 2005 Leader: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

A pleasantly mild morning greeted the 20 or so members and friends who gathered at this Nottinghamshire venue. A glimpse around the car park showed that there were certainly fungi to be found for there were numerous groups of very photogenic Sulphur Tufts (*Hypholoma fasciculare*) to be seen. Indeed I was to learn later that a number of people never left the car park at all, finding plenty there to occupy them. Such is the design of the area that there are a number of well posted trails to follow and the members soon headed off.

We found a good example of Earth Fan (*Thelophora terrestris*), which the guides always quote as common or even very common but which I never seem to find regularly at all. It is far more attractive in reality than the pictures in the guidebooks show, look it up. A number of members found some good groups of Common

Funnel Cap (*Clitocybe infundibuliformis*) and of course the expected Fly Agarics (*Amanita muscaria*). The False Death Cap (*Amanita citrina*) is commonly found here and gave other photo opportunities. One fungus which I expected, Tawny Grisette (*Amanita fulva*), seemed to have peaked and we found only rather poor specimens, Boletes too had obviously had their day.

Nevertheless there was much to do and all members were fully engaged. The distribution of fungi was spasmodic, some areas of the woodland being well populated whilst other areas seemed devoid of any visible signs.

It would be very remiss of me not to thank all those members who attended and supported this field meeting. As always there was much friendly banter. It is warming to realise that so many people are prepared to travel many miles to share in this day of companionship.

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

David Osborn Photo-tours

spectacular wildlife photo-tours organised by David Osborn FRPS EFIAP

Wildlife of the Falkland Islands

November 2006 & 2007

Birds of Florida

March 2007

Southern Texas Ranches

May 2007

Ascension Island

May 2007

The Canadian Rockies

September 2007

In order to maintain the exclusivity of photo-opportunities, the group size for all of the above tours is limited.

For full details on these and other tours

Tel: 01263 511221 or

Email Poppyland3@aol.com



Field Meetings 2006

Tuesday 16 May 2006, 10.30am - 3.30pm. Deepdale and Monsal Dale, Derbyshire.

Leader: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Meet: White Lodge car park on the A6, approx 2.25 miles NW from the A6020 junction at Ashford in the Water.

Grid Ref: Sheet 119 SK 171 705

Cost: Car Park fee

Main Interest: Limestone flora and scenery.

Bring stout shoes, waterproofs and packed lunch.

Contact: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

T: 0115 928 1050 or

M: 07960 177291 on the day only.

Saturday, 10 June 2006, 10am. Kenfig NNR, Mid Glamorgan

Leader: John Hankin LRPS

Meet: Main car park.

Grid Ref: 801804, map 170

Cost: Nil

Main interest: Coastal habitat with marsh areas and sand dunes; butterflies and damselflies, plus flora including orchids.

Bring waterproof footwear, packed lunch, etc.

Contact: John Hankin LRPS

T: 01249 720917

Email hankinjw@hotmail.co.uk

Saturday 10 June 2006, 10am Hatfield Moor

Leader: Eric Wright ARPS

Meet: Boston Park Farm on the A614 sign posted National Nature Reserve.

Wheelchair access is good on this Reserve.

Grid Ref: Sheet 111 0677 045

Main interest: Peatland flora, Mammals incl. Red and Roe Deer, Stoat, Water Vole, etc. Also good for Adder.

Bring stout shoes, waterproofs and packed lunch.

Contact details: Eric Wright ARPS

T: 01522 691 312

Sunday 11 June 2006, 10am Oxwich Bay, Gower

Leader: Margaret Hodge FRPS

Meet: main car park

Grid ref: Sheet 159 502 864

Cost: £2.50 parking.

Main Interest: Seashore life and dune flora.

Bring shoes for paddling, waterproofs, suncream and a hat and packed lunch.

Contact: Margaret Hodge

T: 01792 207001

Nature Group Residential Field Meeting

Tuesday 30th May to Friday 2nd June 2006

**Kingcombe Centre,
Toller Porcorum, Dorchester DT2 0EQ**

Further to the announcement in the Winter 2005 issue of 'The Iris', regarding the residential field meeting to be held at the Kingcombe Centre in late May. I am pleased to report a good degree of interest in the event. Already we are approaching our full complement of resident members, and currently there is just one place remaining. We will hold a waiting list in the event of receiving cancellations. I can assure you that expert guidance and a wide range of natural history knowledge will be on hand.

If any member would like to join the group, be added to the waiting list, obtain further information, or request a booking form, please contact:

Kath Bull ARPS, Segsbury, St John's Road, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1RT.

Tel: 01892 663751. E-mail: kath.bull@virgin.net.

Cost:- £150/£175 depending on accommodation.

Includes full board, packed lunches, accommodation and VAT at 17.5%

Field Meetings 2006 continued

Saturday 8 July 2006, 10am

Thorne Moors

Leader: Eric Wright ARPS

Meet: Grid Ref. Sheet 112 776 218 which is on the A161 near Swinefleet, then proceed to Grid Ref. 759 181 to the entrance to the Moors.

Main Interest: Adders, deer, stoats & water voles.

Bring stout shoes, waterproofs and packed lunch.

Contact: Eric Wright ARPS, Tel: 01522 691312

Sunday July 9th 2006 10am – 4pm

Ainsdale Local Nature Reserve

Leaders: Tony Bond FRPS & Colin Smith FRPS

Meet: Ainsdale Beach. Grid Ref: SD 293 123

Directions: From the Formby bypass, A565, or the coast road, follow the signs to Ainsdale Beach. After paying the parking fee at the kiosk, turn left and drive along the beach. Park just after the last flagpole and before the fence which runs across the beach.

Cost: Car Park fee £3.00

Main interest: Dune flora and insects.

Contact: Tony Bond FRPS T: 01942 674773

Monday, 17 July 2006, 2pm.

Acorn Farm, Sutton-on-Trent

Leader: Andrew Parsons ARPS ASWPP

Meet: Acorn Farm

Grid Ref: 801661

Cost: Nil

Bring packed lunch

Info: The afternoon will start with a guided tour of the farm to show what is being done for wildlife. Further information, including directions, can be obtained from our website: www.acornfarmvisits.co.uk

Subjects: Invertebrates, especially odonata and butterflies

Contact: Andrew Parsons ARPS

T: 01636 821768

E: andrewparsonarps@aol.com



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Field Meetings 2006 continued

Wednesday, 16 August 2006, 10.30am. Arne Reserve (RSPB), nr Wareham, Dorset

Leader: Geoffrey Hands LRPS

Meet: Main Car Park

Grid Ref: Y 9730 8780

Cost: Car Park £2 (free to RSPB members who leave their RSPB membership card on dashboard). Reserve is on shore (west) of Poole harbour.

Bring packed lunch

Main interest: Dorset heath flora and fauna:

RSPB species list 220 birds, 31 mammals, 850 moths, 33 butterflies, 23 dragonflies and almost 500 flowering plants. 2 separate trails, both with hides.

Contact: Geoffrey Hands LRPS,

T: 01202 480529 or

M: 07776 354 417 on the day only

E: geoffrey.hands@ukonline.co.uk

Sunday October 8, 2006, 10.30am. Wakerley Wood

Leader: Nick Jarvis FDPS ARPS

Meet: Main car park (near toilets)

Grid Ref: SP 963986

Cost: Nil

Bring packed lunch

Main interests: Fungi - a number of rarities were found at this site last year, including three different species of earthstar. This is a joint meeting with Kettering Natural History Society. Accessibility

Contact: Nick Jarvis ARPS,

T: 01933 651477

E: nickjarvis@thenaturegroup.org

A Unique Island Experience Photography and Wildlife Courses

Award winning landscape photographer and lecturer Tim Collier and Sea Trust chair, Cliff Benson are offering an incredible opportunity to join them as castaways on the dream island of Skokholm for a week of photography and wildlife watching. Apart from the wardens we will only have to share the island with a few hundred thousand seabirds; puffins, guillemots and razorbills by day and enigmatic shearwaters by night. Watch passing porpoises, seals and dolphins on a magical escape from the modern world of stress and hassle.

Each course is limited to only ten places - allowing for individual tuition and guidance. Week 1. 29th April - 6th May inclusive / Week 2. 5th - 12th August inclusive. The course is suitable for all abilities.

For further information or booking contact 01348 875 639 or 01443 228 907
email - tim@timcollier.plus.com / info@seatrust.org.uk

Skokholm Pembrokeshire

Field Meetings 2006 continued

Tuesday October 17, 2006, 10am.

Beacon Hill Country Park

Leader: Robert Hawkesworth

Meet: Main Car Park. Leave the M1 at J23. Take the A512 towards Loughborough. At traffic lights turn right onto an unclassified road. Go straight ahead at the next traffic lights and approx 2 miles look for a car park on the right. Grid Ref: Sheet 129 SK 521 149

Cost: Car parking £1.00 on entry at the barrier.

Main interest: The woodland is a mixture of birch, oak and beech which in a good year yields many species of fungi.

Bring stout shoes or wellies, waterproofs and packed lunch.

Contact: Robert Hawkesworth

T: 0115 928 1050

M: 07960 177291 on the day only.

Sunday October 22nd

Fungus Foray

To be arranged for the day following Chairman's Day. Full details will appear in the next issue of The Iris.

Leader: David Osborn FRPS

New Forest Weekend Autumn 2007

Leader Ian Newton ARPS

Venue: Forest Park Hotel, Lyndhurst.

Interested members should contact Ian and then make their own bookings at the Hotel.

Photography courses for 2006 with John Bebbington FRPS

- **Wild Flower Photography Weekend**
Juniper Hall Field Centre, near Dorking, Surrey
Friday 16th - Sunday 18th June.

The course will provide a practical introduction to the art and techniques of wild flower photography, including close-up work, in the floristically rich area around Juniper Hall.

Details from: Juniper Hall Field Centre, Dorking, Surrey RH5 6DA

Tel: 0845 458 3507 Email: enquiries.jh@field-studies-council.org

- **Insect Photography Weekend**
Preston Montford Field Centre near Shrewsbury
Friday 4th August - Monday 7th August.

This course is designed to demonstrate techniques and to solve problems for newcomers to Insect Photography whilst giving excellent opportunities for more experienced workers in a region of exceptional species richness.

Details from: Preston Montford Field Centre, Shrewsbury SY4 1DX

Tel: 01743 852 040 Fax: 01743 851 066 Email: enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org

Both courses will be suitable for digital and film users alike; John will be able to develop E6 process films during the weekend and there will be digital projection facilities available.

Chairman's Day

Saturday October 21st 2006

The Old Schoolhouse

Oldbury, West Midlands

A full day of excellent talks illustrated by superb images by eminent Nature Group Members including:

Colin Smith FRPS and
Tony Wharton FRPS.

Plus, for those wishing to make this a weekend away, a Fungus Foray will be organised for Sunday the 22nd.

Full details will be published in the next issue of The Iris.

The Nature Group needs you!

Trevor Hyman, our Hon. Treasurer, has expressed his wish not to stand for re-election at the 2007 A.G.M. By then, he will have served for 6 years out of the 8 years maximum allowed by the R.P.S. Guidelines. We are, therefore, looking for someone to replace him. If someone 'puts their hand up' now, it would be possible to have a good hand-over period.

If you feel that you could help and would like to have an interesting and rewarding job for the Group, working with a great Committee, please get in touch with Trevor for further details/information. Contact details are on page 2.

An Introduction to Digital Imaging

Adrian Davies

**Juniper Hall Field Centre,
Dorking, Surrey.**

Two weekend courses:

**12th – 14th May, 2006,
and**

8th – 10th September

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For further details contact Juniper Hall:

Email: enquiries.jh@field-studies-council.org

Tel: 0845 458 3507

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

Regions

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

CE - Central	73
EA - East Anglia	46
EM - East Midlands	35
NI - Northern Ireland	3
SI - Southern Ireland	2
LN - London	19
NE - North Eastern	12
NW - North Western	56
SC - Scotland	21
SE - South Eastern	84
SW - South Western	15
SO - Southern	67
TH - Thames Valley	59
WE - Western	42
WN - North Wales	12
WS - South Wales	12
YO - Yorkshire	28
Total UK	582
Overseas	47
Total Membership	629

Distinctions

Honourary FRPS	4
FRPS	85
ARPS	209
LRPS	178
Non Distinction holders	153
Total	629

The statistics are as at 31st December 2005 and based on information provided by the RPS Membership dept.

Map courtesy of the RPS Journal January/February 2001. Amended January 2006.

'An Interactive Guide to Obtaining your Nature Associateship'

Updated V2.0 CD-ROM now available - for PC only.

Approved by the RPS Council as an official RPS publication. Over 140 copies sold to date.

The best advice for anyone considering applying for an Associateship in Nature Photography is to attend a Nature Distinctions Workshop. However for many it is not always possible to attend, and the CD is designed to cater for such applicants.

The guide is the result of collaboration between Colin Smith FRPS and Tony Wharton FRPS, with advice from Chris Mattison FRPS and RPS Distinctions Manager, Carol Agar, and production by John Myring. It was the first distinctions guidance CD-ROM to be produced, not only by the Nature Group, but for the RPS as a whole. The 'Guide' benefits from the extensive experience of the authors viewing of numerous applications, both successful and otherwise and leads the user through all of the aspects that need to be considered. Coverage is given for both print and slide applications as well as the additional requirements needed to make a Digital application. The main sections include:

1. The procedure of assessment day and how applications are assessed.
2. Advice on selection and presentation of prints, with emphasis on print formats and layout.
3. Advice on selection and presentation of slides, covering masking, spotting and viewing order.
4. An interactive 'tutorial' set of twenty seven images from which to select the best application set, considering both the good and bad points of each image, and comparing their opinion to those of the authors who provide comments on each of the twenty seven pictures individually, using 'hot spots' to demonstrate points for consideration. Finally the authors' selection is shown with reasons for including/omitting images.
5. Successful applications shown in the form of individual presentations.

The CD-ROM (PC only) is available for only £10 - including p&p. To purchase your copy send a cheque for £10 payable to 'RPS Nature Group' to Nature Group Treasurer, Trevor Hyman LRPS, 3 Northcourt Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 1QA.



Congratulations

The following members recently achieved their Associateships:

James Broderick, Derbyshire	– Mammals and birds of the African Savannah	(prints)
Andy Callow, Surrey	– Insects and other invertebrates	(slides)
Mary Cantrille, Dorset	– Birds, all connected with water	(prints)
Chng Peng Erik, Singapore	– Birds in Singapore and West Malaysia	(CD ROM)
Jane Greatorex, Cambridge	– Wild life of the Falkland Islands in early summer	(prints)
G. Harinarayana, India	– Animals, birds and insects of India	(prints)
Joyce Hu, Canada	– Deserts, trees and flowers of Namibia	(prints)
Allen R Loyd, Monmouthshire	– Birds and their behaviour	(CD ROM)
Subhobrata Mitra, Nottingham	– The power, grace and beauty of birds	(CD ROM)
Ann Miles, Cambridge	– Swiss alpine flowers	(prints)
John Scotten, Reading	– Fungi and butterflies	(prints)
Derek Trendell, Hants	– Animals found in the game reserves of Southern Africa	(slides)
John Weir, Cumbria	– Fungi of the North West	(slides)



▲ Burnished Brass

▼ Sallow Kitten

