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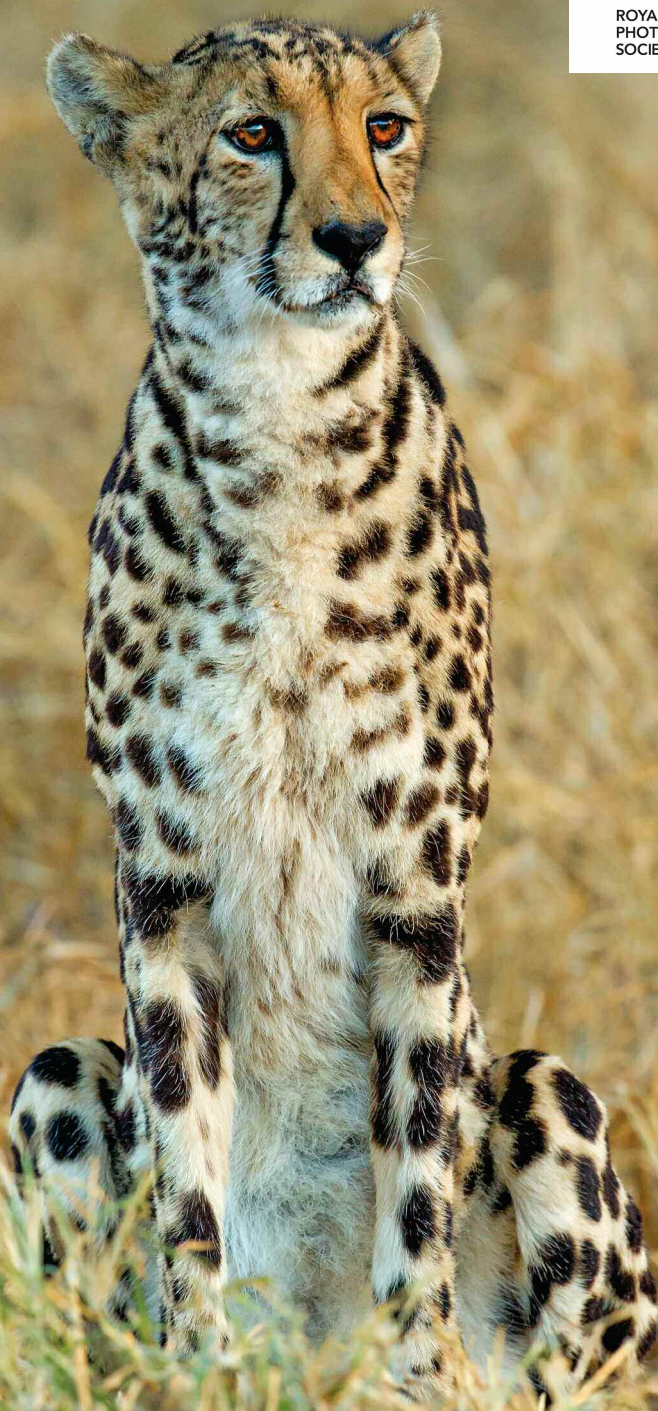
THE **RPS**
ROYAL
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SOCIETY



MAGAZINE OF THE RPS NATURE GROUP

Issue No. 118 / Spring 2014

THE IRIS



David Osborn Phototours 2015

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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 ppi (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. All cover images will be in vertical format

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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.

Distribution:

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

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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

I sincerely hope that by the time you read this, the lives of those of you who have been affected by flooding this year have improved significantly. The scenes shown on TV news bulletins have been appalling to say the least. Here in Norfolk our coastal regions were affected by the high tides and strong winds which caused a tidal surge. Some areas are getting back to normal but it is slow going with the continued bad weather.

I often 'bump into' Nature Group members, sometimes in the least likely places - last summer, at an event where a Lancaster Bomber was the star of the show, I found myself talking to a gentleman who turned out to be a Nature Group member and in January this year, during a visit to the Falkland Islands, I had the pleasure of meeting Neil Anderton, a member from Australia! I hope to be hearing from Neil in the near future with an article about the fabulous birds he photographs on his 'home patch'.

You cannot have failed to notice that this issue has a new look. The RPS has undergone another transformation of its 'corporate image' or 'brand identity'. Gone is the oppressive brooding black that we had to embrace some six years ago with issue No.100. The new look is described as providing "a fresh, unique and contemporary look and feel." You may have noticed that the RPS website also has this same new look. The Nature Group's own website has now been closed following the RPS mandate and all future announcements for the group will be made available there.

There are several announcements in this issue - the Spring Meeting/AGM/Annual Exhibition, Chairman's Day, The Nature Photographers' Joint Conference, The Nature Group Residential Field Meeting, a Nature Photography Workshop and a good showing of Field Meetings. Please support them if you can, especially if they are being held in your region.

As always, I am requesting interesting articles from members for future issues of The Iris. Share your experience whether it has been an overseas wildlife adventure or the achievement of an Associateship or Fellowship Distinction. I look forward to hearing from you.



From the chair

If you have seen Portfolio 3 you will know that the Nature Group has a good showing. The Group itself is represented by a portfolio of insects in flight by our vice chairman, Richard Revels, and information on how they were taken. There are also individual images by some of our members. This is a quality publication showing the varied interests within the Society in both words and pictures and is recommended.

I am writing this in mid December just after the first taste of winter. The snowdrops are just poking above the surface in my garden and by the time you read this they will be in full bloom or possibly a little past their best. The humble snowdrop is one of my favourite flowers and I know that I am not alone because of the popularity of snowdrop walks in estates and gardens throughout Britain. A feature of the autumn has been the proliferation of fruits and berries. At one time these would have been devoured by now but this year they are dropping off the trees. It looks most unlikely that there will be a repeat of last winter's waxwing invasion which was caused by a lack of berries in Europe. I read reports of migrant butterflies in the south of England but up here in the 'Frozen North' we have had suffered another poor year possibly due to the so-called summer of 2012. When I submitted my records to the recorder for Greater Manchester and said that the only Painted Lady I had seen all year was in North Wales he replied that it was one more than he had seen.

And now we know all about the autumn fungi and how they turned out. Like me you may have read in the media that it was a very good autumn and the mycologists seem quite happy. However I know that many of you are not. I have had reports of poor returns in a large swathe of England from Cumbria through the Midlands to Norfolk. The only area from which I have heard good reports is the New Forest. Perhaps Gordon Dickson's ghost looks after it. It goes to show that the mycologists and ourselves are looking for different things. We require specimens in good condition in an attractive setting whereas all the fungus hunters require is something that they can put under the microscope. I completed a second placement with Natural England which was a repeat of the Waxcap survey which I described in the Spring edition of *The Iris*

but restricted to the best sites found in the 2012 survey. On my September visit to the cricket field the season had only just finished and all I found were decapitated Waxcaps. The October visit was better and by November there were lots of fruit bodies of seven species but most were in very poor condition. This made identification very difficult but I was fortunate to have the support of someone who knows the site much better than I do and I am happy that our identification was correct. The numbers were impressive but I doubt whether seven species will meet Natural England's criterion for SSSI designation. If you could select a year for doing a Waxcap survey you would not choose 2012 or 2013! I have it on good authority that the taxonomists are turning their attention to the Waxcaps. The Parrot Waxcap, *Hygrocybe psittacina*, is first in line for splitting so you have been warned.

If you have not yet volunteered to lead a field meeting it is not too late to contact Richard Revels. Field meetings were once the cornerstone of our programme and I am delighted that they are making a bit of a comeback. If you are familiar with an interesting site why not share it with other members of the Group? We pride ourselves in being the friendly Group and field meetings have a social purpose as well as the opportunity to exchange ideas on tools and techniques.

Last but not least here is a date for your diaries. Chairman's Day will be held on Sunday 9th of November 2014 at the usual venue, the Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands. An announcement appears in this issue Full details of the days events and how to obtain tickets will be published in the next edition of *The Iris* but make a note of the date now so that you do not miss it.

Tony

NATURE GROUP

38th Annual General Meeting, Spring Meeting and Annual Exhibition Opening

Saturday 5th April 2014

**Smethwick Photographic Society,
The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands**

(for directions see below)

Timetable

- 10.30hrs - Assemble for 10.45 hrs start**
- 11.00hrs - A presentation by Kevin Maskell FRPS
and Margery Maskell ARPS**
- 12.00hrs - Break for lunch.**
Light lunches will be available in the clubhouse (ploughman's or jacket potatoes with baked beans, cheese, chilli or a combination of any). There is also a dining area if you wish to bring sandwiches. If you require a lunch please let the secretary know at least ten days before the AGM as they have to be ordered in advance.
- 13.00hrs - 38th Annual General Meeting**
Agenda
1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 37th AGM 2013, printed in issue 116 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 39th AGM 2015
- 13.45hrs - Opening of the 2012 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 Junction 2 and get into right hand lane. At 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.

Chairman's Day 2014

Sunday 9th November 2014

10.30 hrs - 16.00 hrs

The Old Schoolhouse

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

Speakers:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Trevor Davenport ARPS | - Treasures of the Sefton Coast |
| Geoff Trinder ARPS | - Photography my Way |
| Chairman, Tony Bond FRPS | - Fungi - The Hidden Kingdom |

Two recent successful Fellowship panels will be on display.
Hopefully the authors will be in attendance to answer any questions.

Full details in the Summer edition.

The Nature Group Spring Meeting, AGM & Annual Exhibition, April 5th 2014 by Sue McGarrigle LRPS

As a past secretary of the exhibition I have had the pleasure of seeing the exhibition continue to go from strength to strength. The Spring Meeting, allows members to browse, socialise and comment on the Exhibition prints while also having the opportunity to attend the AGM, voice their comments, enjoy the first showing of the projected digital exhibits, the presentation of awards and, in the morning, a first class lecture.

I have always found both the Spring Meeting and Chairman's Day to be very enjoyable and have been motivated and inspired. I have learned much along the way and this has helped me to further my photography.

The exhibition location is within very easy reach at The Old School House, home to Smethwick Photographic Society in Oldbury just five minutes away from the motorway network, (J2 of the M5) and there is ample parking.

Roger and Judith Parry, who work tirelessly with many organisations and alongside Smethwick members, are the backbone of the club and always ensure the Nature Group receive a very warm welcome, providing a comfortable venue with home cooked food for committee meetings and other events.

Do come along - I guarantee that you won't be disappointed.

Cheating Nature?

An investigation into suspect images in an international exhibition by Richard Nicholl ARPS

I looked through the winning images in the nature section of a recent exhibition's CD, which had just dropped through the door, (although this was entirely at random) to see what had won awards and perhaps to gain some insight into why my images hadn't done so well. With a couple of years experience of taking nature images and entering them into the exhibitions I am always wanting to learn from the best and wonder at how they were achieved. Can I aim for something like that, how on earth did they do it, was it luck or just massive amounts of patience, what are their secrets?

Some of these images always seem to stand out to me. You know the ones I mean, chicks being fed by one or more parents flying in with prey to an isolated nest with nothing obstructing your view on a very dark background all miraculously in sharp focus and backlit.

There is one image or I should say type of image, as I can find at least 4 almost identical versions all by authors with different names, doing the exhibition circuit. It is of a fish jumping out of the water just about to catch a dragonfly. Let me focus on one image of the two very similar ones accepted into this particular exhibition. I first noticed this image and one of the others when they both won gold medals at the same exhibition. At first glance all I can say is 'WOW', if only I could have taken that. It has action, it has hunter and hunted, its sharp where it needs to be, it has no real distractions, is it just too perfect? I decided to take a closer look and found several issues that make me very suspicious:

1. Although the fish's tail arches away from the viewer the end of its tail enters the water nearer the viewer than the large splash near its middle. The perspective just seems wrong.
2. Where the fishes tail does "enter" the water there is no refraction and the tail continues on as if going through the same medium.
3. The end of the fish's tail reappears on a bright band at the bottom of the image and yet it is supposedly pointing straight down into the water.

4. I would expect to see some sort of reflection in the water of the fish (even if distorted by the turbulence of the splash) I cannot see any.
5. There are duplicate water drops on the left and right hand sides of the image and there is a large water drop near the top of the splash in the middle which is duplicated overlapping its lower jaw (there is also no refraction of the jaw through the water drop).

I am left wondering how anyone could think this was not a composite.

Let me move onto another image which seems to me more obvious that it should not be allowed in a Nature section. This is an image of a group of Whooper Swans on partially frozen water in front of a dramatic landscape. The part of the image where the water meets the mountain scape looked suspicious to me so I performed a Google search using the authors name and title. Hey presto, I found another image with a similar name by an author of the same name with the same group of swans in the foreground (simply a mirror image of them) and a completely different landscape in the background! I checked this out further by flipping one image, resizing it and placing it over the other one and they match almost perfectly.

The next image shows an image of a raptor carrying another bird in its talons (the raptor's foot is wrapped around the neck of the bird) and has won several awards including the Exhibition I am looking through. Having done a fair bit of searching by now I thought I had seen something similar elsewhere so I did a bit more 'Googling' and found another image by an author with the same name. Now comparing each bird carrying the prey item they are almost identical down to the places in the wings where the feathers split and the tones of light coming through them seem to me to be identical. I have doubts whether either image meets the 'rules' for Nature sections.

I remembered seeing other images with a species of blue bird dangling from a raptor (although there is no identification of the species in the title which is another subject in itself) and did some more 'Googling'. The search revealed other images by an author with the same name and once again I found what appear to be duplicates apart from an amphibian in one birds beak and not in the other. The first image has definitely been entered in at least one Nature section but I could not discover whether the second image has. At the very least this shows how skilled the author is at digital manipulation.

Now onto another image that won an award in the exhibition CD I looked through. The image is of two large birds of prey in mid air (nicely separated) with one carrying a fish and the other attempting to snatch it. The birds are flying against a cloudscape which is sharp. Now I could not see how the subjects in the foreground could be sharp and the cloudscape in the far distance could also be sharp without using a short lens with a small aperture. Fortunately there is exif data with this jpeg (which I know can be faked but why fake it so that it doesn't match your scene?) and it states that the image was taken at f/6.3 with a 280mm lens @ 1/1600 sec on a Nikon D300. Even if the subjects were 50m away the depth of field would be too shallow to have the clouds sharp also. This makes me very suspicious that this image is in fact a composite.

All the above images won awards in this particular exhibition circuit.

Selectors have a difficult job in national and international exhibitions, with huge numbers of images to view and a relatively short period of time in which to provide a score. From the perspective of the people who are entering legitimate images into these exhibitions they would expect that the rules are being pro-actively enforced and that images are being judged in a consistent manner. I have been truly shocked at the number of suspect images I have found from looking at just one CD from one exhibition circuit. This issue should be getting a high profile within the worldwide organisations patronising exhibitions (FIAP, PSA, etc) as it discredits the whole system of patronage, makes a mockery of the awards and devalues distinctions that are given on the basis of exhibition acceptances.

So how could these apparent irregularities be combated more effectively?

1. It seems to me that the rules for Nature sections are not actually being enforced. They need to be or exhibitions should lose their patronage.
2. Perhaps along with the voting buttons for judges there should also be one for suspect images that should automatically flag images for closer review after the judging process is complete.
3. As a minimum, entrants should have to provide RAW files (or if only a jpeg is available the psd or other intermediate files used for processing) for all their accepted entries if one of their images wins an award. I know that some exhibitions already do this and Wildlife Photographer of the Year has proved that this is a useful tool. I am aware that there are of course ways of creating RAW files artificially but at least this might act as some sort of deterrent.
4. All rejections for serious infringements of the rules should be made public. I came across one entrant who had plagiarised another's work, was formally stripped of his medals and publicly shamed in an exhibition catalogue.
5. More of us need to ask awkward questions about suspect images of exhibition organisers. In fact someone said to me when researching this that organisers would welcome this as their job is so hard.

I am sure that others can come up with more suggestions.

It seems to me that there are potentially some reasons organisers may be reluctant to be more pro-active:

1. It's just too much effort given the volume of entries to enforce the rules properly.
2. This may reduce the volume of entries they get and hence reduce their potential income and the prestige associated with their exhibition.
3. Some of the entrants may have reputations in the photographic world that would be called into question by such analysis/rejections which may have legal consequences.

Another catalogue has just come in the post. And the Gold medal for the Nature section goes to... You guessed it, its one of those fish miraculously caught jumping from the water and about to catch a dragonfly!

My next task is to tactfully write to the organisers.

Butterflies of Estonia

by Trevor Davenport ARPS

Despite its small size and northern position the country of Estonia is a superb place to see and photograph butterflies, dragonflies and other insects. Almost half of the country remains wild, and the population density in the remainder is one of the lowest in Europe (approximately 30 people per sq. km). It is a country of varied wilderness and enchanting beauty, undeveloped and unspoiled, with vast peat bogs, dense forests, water-meadows, numerous rivers and over 1400 lakes. Remarkably, some 18% of the entire country is afforded protection as national parks or nature reserves which are well cared for. Add to this an excellent infrastructure and road network that, for the most part, is almost empty, then it comes as no surprise that this is fast becoming a top destination for visitors with an interest in all forms of natural history.

I was unaware of most of this information when I agreed to join a friend for a week in early July 2013, and team up with another 7 butterfly enthusiasts on an Estonian Nature Tours trip. I had, however, seen the list of butterflies and dragonflies we might encounter - and it was a list to drool over! The butterfly fauna numbers about 100 species which is almost twice the number we can see in UK, together with an impressive 57 species of odonata. Many of these insect species are rare elsewhere in Europe but thrive here in their natural habitats undisturbed by intensive farming and, dare I say it, by insecticides. Estonia is at a geographical crossroads for flora and fauna, where species with mainly northern and eastern distribution overlap with those from the south. This provides an opportunity to find insects from the north alongside those from the south, some of them being at the extremes of their distribution.

Our group met in Tallin from where we travelled for 3 hours on good roads to the southeastern corner of the country and our excellent accommodation at Mooste Viinavabrik, a superbly renovated vodka distillery, (free vodka on arrival), beautifully situated in countryside on the edge of a large lake. This delightful location served as our base for three days from where we explored a variety of butterfly-rich sites. From the very first trip out it was obvious that

there were insects here in abundance. All sorts of butterflies, dragonflies and day-flying moths, together with grasshoppers, crickets, bees and flies, buzzed and flitted around us in a profusion of wild flowers - and this was only on a railway embankment! My highlight for that day was to photograph the elusive Cranberry Blue butterfly (*Plebejus optilete*), but, as with many of the days that followed, the astonishing variety and density of insect species was a source of both joy, and, at times, bewilderment. There were so many of them it was hard to know which to photograph first. Our time in the field was constantly punctuated with cries of discovery of this or that species. At times it was hard to settle to photograph a specimen before another, even more spectacular, was announced.

Our railway embankment morning was followed by an excellent farmhouse lunch with plenty of home cooked regional specialties. Estonian food is an interesting blend of Continental and Scandinavian cuisine - with a hint of Russia in there - served in generous and tastily satisfying portions. Mealtimes were always a delight. Next, to a wooded riverbank that nestled between flower-filled flood meadows. Sites like this are a rarity anywhere in UK these days and they are a reminder of what our flood plains and wet meadows may have looked like in times past. It may sound like exaggeration to say they were 'alive' with insects and birds but it's a fact that they were. In the chest-high grassy expanses there were enough flower species to thrill any botanist and those flowers supported an insect population to delight the entomologist - not just in number but in variety too. Here we photographed Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis xanthomelas*), a large butterfly with an Eastern European/Middle East distribution; any number of 'blues', and, by the riverside, we netted and photographed a lovely Green Snaketail dragonfly (*Ophiogomphus cecilia*), a species of Eastern European distribution and considered a scarce insect even in Estonia.

This first day was to be similar to the days that followed - out early and back late - having packed as much as possible into the day. We visited sites



Silver-studded Blue



Essex Skipper with dew



Black-veined White

with differing habitats such as Kärkna Forest, where, on forest tracks and rides we found the threatened Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*); Lesser Marbled Fritillaries (*Brenthis ino*); Large Chequered Skippers (*Heteropterus morpheus*) and many, many others. In forested bog habitat, whilst being pestered by mosquitoes and horseflies, we were hushed to silence by the sinister, primordial atmosphere of the virgin forest, all the while ticking off insects both known and new. At times we heard, but never saw, the Corncrake (*crex crex*), and in rainwater puddles on the tracks we found many varieties of butterflies 'puddling' for minerals.

Each evening, at the guesthouse, a cold beer helped us wind down before dinner whilst watching for birds on the lake. At these latitudes in early July it never really gets totally dark but we put out a moth trap and enjoyed checking the moths before breakfast. It was completely light by 3 am. and a good time to look for roosting butterflies and dragonflies. One morning, by the lake, I was pleased to find and photograph an Arctic Bluet damselfly (*Coenagrion johanssoni*), the most northerly of our European damselflies and considered scarce in the Baltic States.



Heath Fritillary



Chestnut Heath



Ringlet on Scabious

For the second part of our trip we travelled west to the Baltic island of Saaremaa, stopping on the way at wooded meadows and species rich roadsides. On wide, well maintained and deserted roadside verges we found a variety of orchids and butterflies in almost overwhelming numbers. How strange it seemed to photograph Scarce Copper butterflies (*Lycaena virgaureae*) in dips and hollows at the roadside with scores of fritillaries, skippers and blues hanging like confetti on the surrounding wildflowers. It was almost surreal.



Scarce Copper

Having crossed by ferry to the island, for the next few days we stayed at the lovely Loona Manor guesthouse on the west coast of Saaremaa and travelled out daily to a variety of habitats, including shoreline, meadow and woodland. One very special habitat we visited was an 'alvar' meadow: in Europe, these can only be found in Estonia and southern Sweden. Alvar is an environment with very thin or no soil on a limestone plain producing sparse vegetation and fascinating flora and fauna. Here we found orchids in variety with lots of butterflies including Chestnut Heath (*Coenonympha glycerion*) and Dusky Meadow Brown (*Hyponephele lycaon*). I found and photographed a specimen of this latter butterfly that



Lesser Marbled Fritillary



Scarce Fritillary



Cranberry Blue

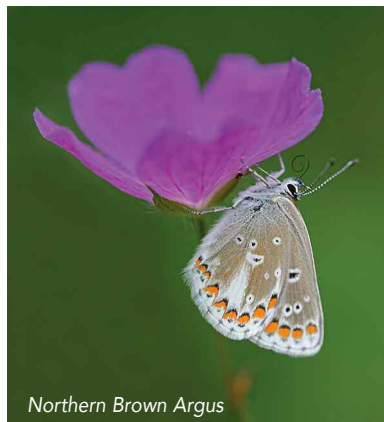
had been marked which indicated that this rare and remote environment was being well monitored. Our guesthouse - Loona Manor - is in the centre of Vilsandi National Park and, once again, we were treated to excellent cuisine served at times by ladies in national costume. On our penultimate day we travelled back to the mainland and spent an unforgettable day in the wooded meadows of Laelatu and the raised bogs of Mukre. Laelatu is renowned for its wooded meadow habitat where over 700 vascular plant species have been recorded. It holds the unofficial world record for the most vascular plant species recorded in a single square metre - 76.

Our final destination was the raised bogs of Mukre. These (ombrotrophic) bog forests are pine forests but with a peat substratum that strongly hinders tree growth. At one point we traversed a well made boardwalk over 2 km long that wound its way through magnificent bog flora of sphagna, heathers, cotton grasses, cloudberries and stunted trees. The scenery was a spectacular mixture of mire, lakes and dwarf forest with a veritable snowfall of Silver-studded Blue butterflies (*Plebejus argus*). I confess I had to be dragged away from these iconic little butterflies but other rarities awaited in the form of White-faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia dubia*) and Eastern White-faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia albifrons*) dragonflies. What a truly wonderful environment with which to finish our Estonian adventure.

We spent the final night in Tallin, recounting our experiences whilst dining in a Tallin Medieval Experience hostelry. We had recorded 58 species of butterfly, (many new for me); over 30 species of dragonfly, including the majestic Baltic Hawker (*Aeshna serrata*); a splendid number of birds, beetles, orthoptera, and blur of botanic notables. On our last day we were treated to a free guided tour of this lovely city before we were taken to the airport for the flight home. We saw no rain - which was a bonus - and the benign weather added to a really memorable and enjoyable holiday. Now, as winter approaches, my thoughts are drifting towards next year: with any luck I may get a chance to make a return visit.



Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell



Northern Brown Argus



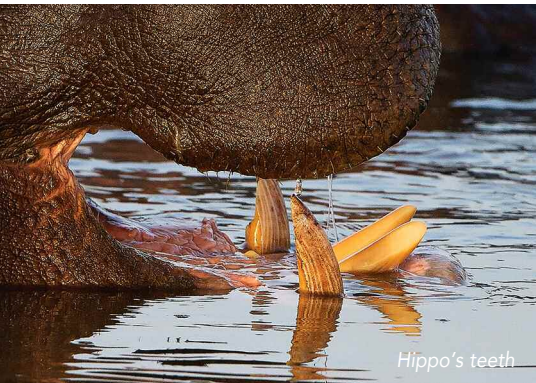
Silver Studded Blue

Kruger National Park

by David Cantrille FRPS



Grey Hornbill take-off



Hippo's teeth



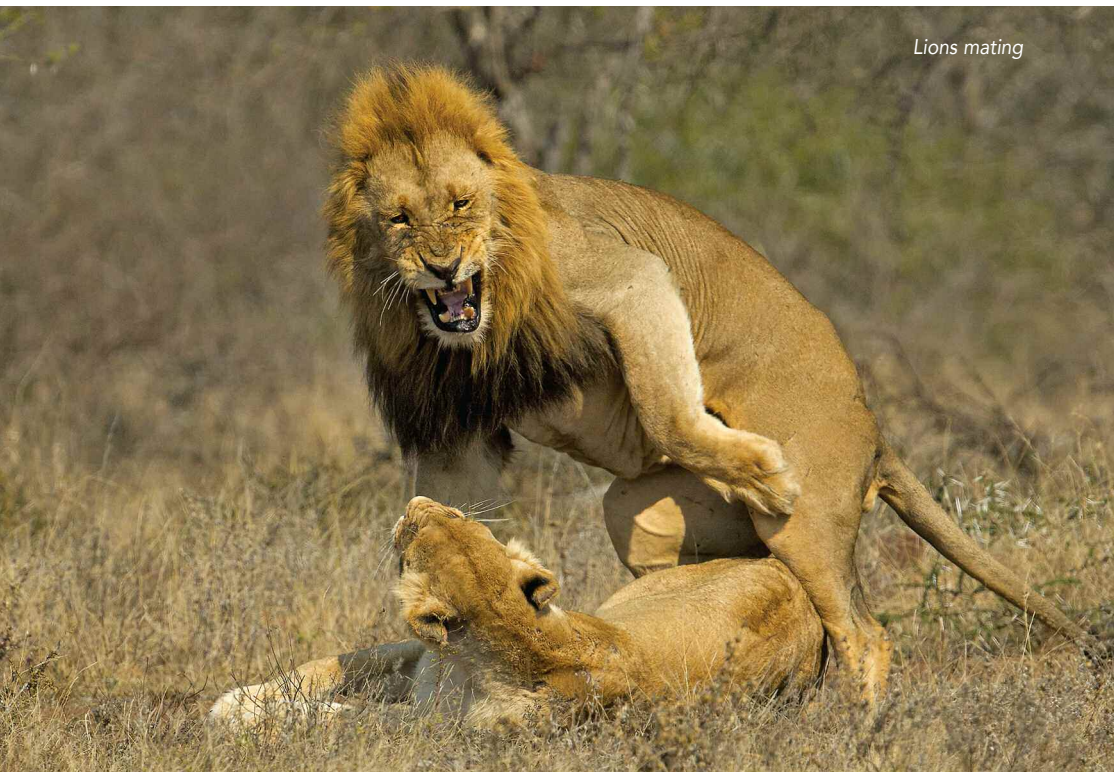
Crocodile with Hippo foot

This was our third visit to the Kruger National Park, South Africa. We stayed this time in two lodges in the park itself: Lower Sabie and Satara, both well situated for a variety of drives in different terrain. Also, at Lower Sabie, we were next to the Sabie river which produced lots of opportunities for water birds and animals. Our safari took place in the South African winter so that the days were largely sunny and dry, nights were cool and the days not too hot. This meant that we could be out all day if we wished.

One highlight of our stay at Lower Sabie was at Sunset Dam, where a Hippo had died during the night, either from old age or from a fight with another male. At first the other Hippos defended the carcass but by the second morning they had abandoned it and Crocodiles were busy trying to break through its very tough skin, twisting and turning to get the legs from the body. Suddenly a Crocodile sped straight towards us through the water, opened its jaws within 15 feet of us to reveal a Hippo foot, chomped three or four times and then swallowed the whole thing. It was awful but riveting! We also managed to get a few shots. Sunset Dam was very good for birds, too: Yellow-billed Storks, Black-winged Stilts, White-crowned Lapwings, Black Stork, Hadedda Ibis and Egyptian Geese, to name but a few.

Satara Lodge is situated in an area of grassland – good for Ostrich and big cats - though with an area of hills and woodlands nearby. It was also very good for Eagles and Lilac-breasted Rollers. On our journey from Lower Sabie to Satara the weather was grey and damp after a thunderstorm the previous night. Our guide told us that rain would be good for animal sightings, as few animals liked to lie around in wet grass. This turned out to be absolutely true – as soon as we set out we met a Hyena which was curious enough to come right up to our vehicle to look at us. Shortly afterwards we met another Hyena, then a mating pair of Lion about 30 yards away, followed by a group of lions with a giraffe kill right next to the road.

Another highlight of our stay occurred near Satara, when a late afternoon drive produced a Saddle-billed stork looking for prey in a grassy area, not in a stream as would be normal. As we drove nearer, the stork appeared to be wrestling with some prey, which turned out to be a Slender Mongoose. After several attempts to hold on to the Mongoose by its neck or its tail, the Stork lost it and flew several yards away, presumably to avoid a nip on the ankles! This adventure produced some interesting images.



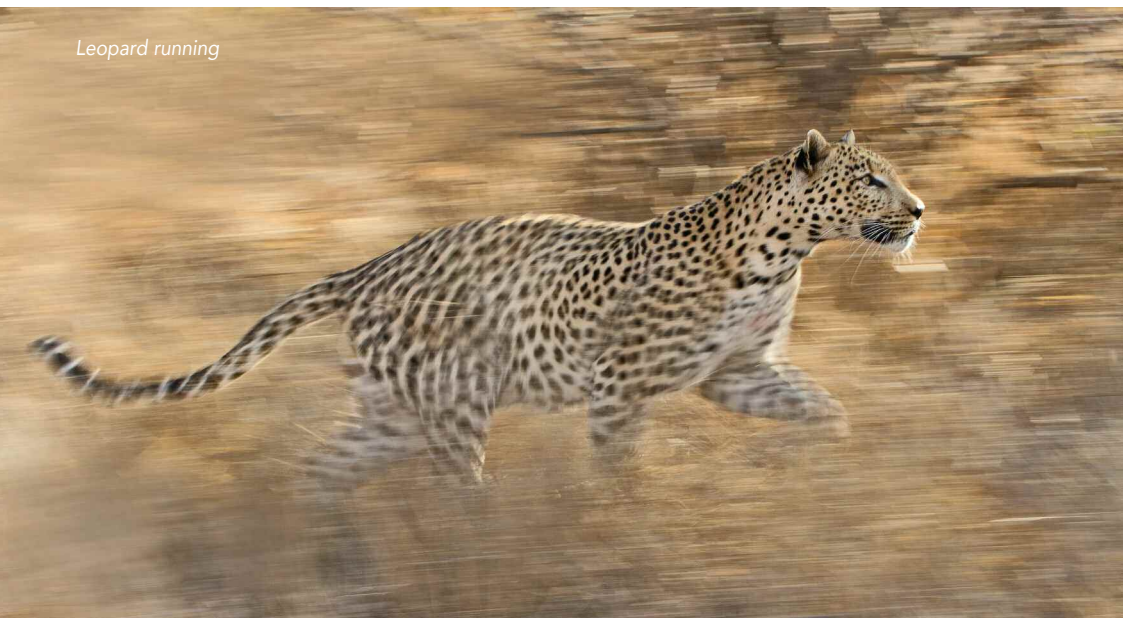
Lions mating



Young Cheetah

The first two days of our trip were spent at a private game lodge (Tshukudu) next to Kruger where they take in orphan or injured animals. For instance, they have a female King cheetah, whom they are trying to mate with a normal cheetah, to continue the line.

A King cheetah is very rare and carries a recessive gene which causes darker markings, particularly along the back. At Tshukudu we could also take a cheetah for a walk! There is nothing quite like stroking a purring cheetah.



Leopard running

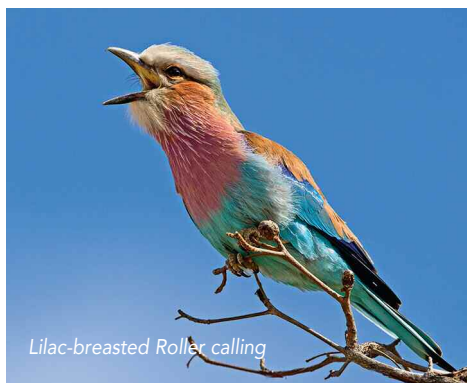


Caracal jumping

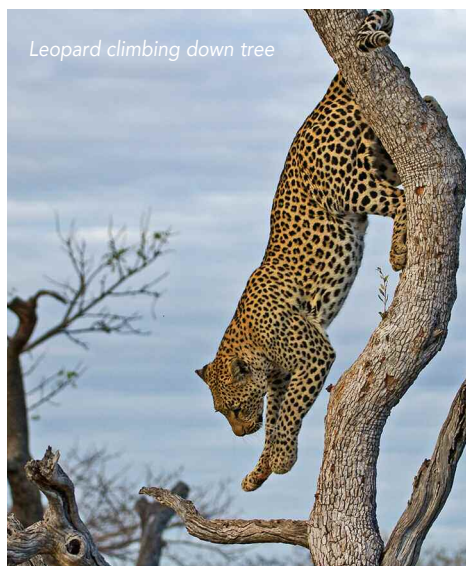
The game lodge also has a Caracal breeding programme, where the kittens are put out into the wild when fully grown. We had the advantage this trip of spending an afternoon with two almost adult Caracals who were familiar with humans and some interesting photographs resulted. It is extremely rare to spot Caracals in the wild.

We have recently downsized our equipment. My longest lens is now a Canon 300mm f2.8L MkII and my wife has the MkI version of the 300mm. Our cameras were a Canon EOS 1D Mk IV and EOS 7D. I was also able to hire a Canon 500 mm lens for part of the trip. 1.4x and 2x converters were both very useful.

Each of our Kruger trips have been very productive of a wide variety of images, and we have benefitted from having our own safari driver/field guide, familiar with the terrain and knowledgeable about the wildlife. We have used Wild 4 Photographic Safaris each time. Our vehicle was custom-built for photographers, with bean bags on platforms at each window and access to both sides of the vehicle for each photographer.



Lilac-breasted Roller calling



Leopard climbing down tree

La Brenne - a hidden wildlife gem

by Brian Sherwin LRPS

Situated in the Indre and Centre Departments of France, some 40 miles north east of Poitiers, lies the little known designated National Wildlife conservation area of La Brenne. The population of around 30,000 residents, living in small towns and villages, are mainly engaged in agriculture, which in common with many other rural areas of France, is in gradual decline.

Covering an area of roughly 20 miles from north to south and 30 miles from east to west, the land is fairly flat and provides numerous wildlife refuges in the form of more than 1000 'etangs' (shallow lakes). Constructed in the middle ages by the monks living in the local abbeys, as a ready source of freshwater fish, the lakes are still in commercial use today for the same purpose.

The spin-off from all this water has created one of the largest and most important inland 'wetlands' in France, providing a breeding area for a range of summer migrants, principally Whiskered Tern, Black Necked Grebe, Herons, Ducks, and Warblers. It also holds the largest resident European population of Pond Turtles.

The distance to the area from Calais is about 400 miles, which can be driven in a day using the French motorways. We opted to break our journey with an overnight stay in Chartres. On our return journey we stayed in Evreux, having used the Eurotunnel service for our channel crossing, and driving on the largely traffic free 'Route Nationale' roads.

Our visit took place in May of 2012 when we stayed near to the small town of Azay-le-Ferron at 'La Confiance', a converted farm owned by British ex-pats Chris and Sue Mooney.

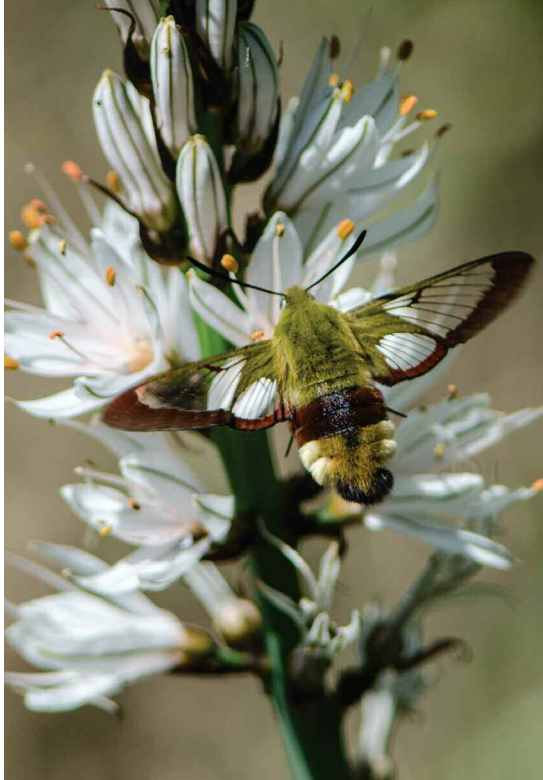
Our first morning was a revelation. On country roads with virtually no traffic, it was easy to stop and start at every new thing we spotted. Most roadside verges were dotted with orchids which in one 300 yard stretch yielded nine different species. Along with the other flowers, butterflies were found in profusion, with nearly every lane dotted with Wood White, Sooty Copper (a new species for me), Common Blue and Wall Brown. The afternoon was spent at 'La Cherine' nature reserve, which was set up to protect one of the main breeding areas of the Pond Turtle.



The reserve has a visitor centre with English speaking staff, and provides up-to-date information on where birds, butterflies and plants can be found. With three bird hides and numerous paths on our first walk we saw Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, Marsh Fritillary and Brimstone.

Many English visitors to the centre book a guided tour with Tony Williams, an Englishman who lives in the area, and has worked as a warden in La Brenne for over 20 years. Tony can usually be found at La Cherine on a Monday morning and is always to talk about his work.

The 'Maison du Parc', the administrative headquarters near to the Chateau of Le Bouchet is the other major information centre and well worth a visit. Guides and maps of the region are freely available, together with a good shop stocked with guide books and local produce. The centre provides booking facilities for daily guided tours throughout the region, including an evening visit to the Lancosme Forest to watch Nightjars. A small theatre shows an audio visual presentation of the region whilst the restaurant serves excellent snacks and lunches.





Subsequent days were spent photographing as many flowers and insects as possible, with a view of extending my portfolio of natural history pictures. The illustrations shown here represent a small sample of some of the more interesting species using a Nikon D7000 together with 105mm f2.8 Nikon Macro and Nikon 300mm F4 telephoto lenses. My favourite image is the Broad-bordered Bee Hawk moth, which visited a flower close to the car whilst we were enjoying our daily picnic.

The log of our visit shows that we recorded 51 birds, 16 Orchids and 25 Butterflies during our 6 days.

I found most of the information about La Brenne on the internet prior to our visit, and would recommend that you do likewise. Being a rural area accommodation is not easy to find, although one or two Nature Travel companies offer a package visit to the region. A search on 'Google' will reveal plenty of visitor reports, many with species logs, and the places where they were found.

Details of our stay can be found on the website – www.laconfiance.net

If you need any help to plan your own trip you can contact me at briansherwin@talktalk.net

Mike Lane photography

The Wildlife Photography Shop

www.nature-photography.co.uk

Camouflage material for wildlife photography. DPM cotton fabric, scrim netting, DPM tape. Leaf pattern neoprene sheets. Bags for large Lenses, Lens rainsleeves and low cost Gimbal Tripod heads



Chile: Land of Contrasts

by Margaret Johnson ARPS



In November three friends and I spent five weeks in Chile and Easter Island. It was our intention to do a lot of walking in the Andes so we tried to keep our luggage as light as possible. I took a Panasonic Lumix FZ45 with a 24x optical zoom. It was light to carry and I was very pleased with the way it performed.

It was a long flight to Santiago, the vibrant and modern capital city, and then on to Valparaíso for a couple of nights before returning to Santiago and an opportunity to look around before flying to Arica.

We were met there by Mario, the university professor who was to be our guide, and driven to Putre (3500 metres high). We passed through some incredible scenery of the Atacama Desert. It is so dry that there are no plants, animals or insects in some areas.

We then travelled to Lauca NP which is a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. There are many beautiful lakes in this park especially Lake Chungara which is one of the world's highest (4512 m). The perfect cones of volcanoes Parícuti, Pomaerape, Sajama and

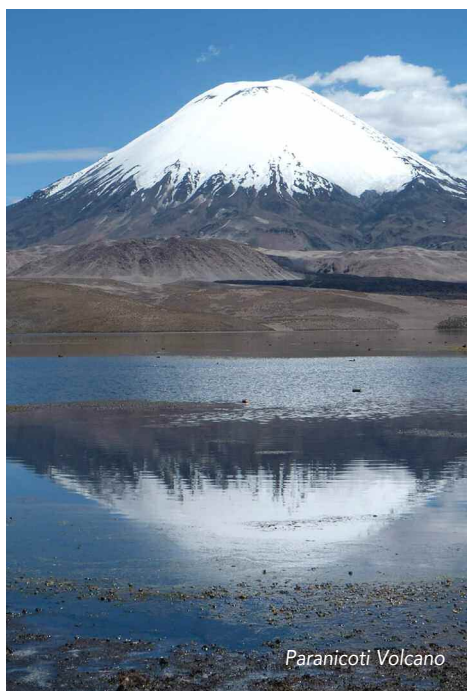




Vischaca



Liolaemus tenuis



Parícuti Volcano

Guallatire loom over the lake. The lake was a haven for birds, the Chilean, James and Andean flamingos (and we saw all three), Giant Coots nesting, Kelp Gulls and Andean Gulls to name a few. We saw many Viscacha sunbathing on the rocks. Back in Arica a visit to the harbour to photograph Peruvian Pelicans, Sea Lions and Cormorants.

A short flight to Antofagasta and then a four hour drive to San Pedro de Atacama from where we visited the El Tatio geysers - the third largest geothermal area in the world. Our visit there was early in the morning so that we would see all the steam swirling around - once the sun rises the steam evaporates and it is not so spectacular. We also saw the amazing rock formations in the Salt Flats, Death Valley and Moon Valley where the Americans tested the equipment they sent to Mars.

Another flight from Calama to Tamuco and then a drive to Pucon. From there we went to Huerquehue NP where we walked through rainforest to visit two waterfalls. This was to turn out to be one of two wet days and the terrain was very muddy! Then on to Conquillo NP where we photographed at another lake surrounded by volcanoes. There are almost 2000 volcanoes in Chile of which 49 are still active, including the Llaima volcano which erupted last in 2008. We walked across a lava field to a beautiful beach. There are also many Monkey Puzzle trees in this park. These are an endemic species and on the endangered list.

A four hour bus journey brought us to Puerto Varras and from here we journeyed by bus and boat to Puella - on a fine day this would have been spectacular as the boat passed by the mountains but unfortunately they were covered in mist and cloud. We visited Chiloe island to see the breeding sites of Magellanic and Humboldt Penguins. There were only two Humboldt penguins visible as most were nesting underground but there were many Magellanic. At Ralun we visited the Orsono volcano where we went up to the snow line from where there were spectacular views.

A flight to Punto Arenas and a five hour drive took us to Torres del Paine NP. We stayed at the only hotel in the park and I think it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. The Andes provide the backdrop and the three granite pillars soar more than 2000m above the Patagonian Steppe and dominate the landscape. You meet the guides each

evening and decide which trips you wish to do the next day. We spent the next few days walking in the Andes and saw many species including Condors, Guanacos, Skunk and Silver Fox. .

It was then time to leave the mainland and fly to Easter Island, a five and a quarter hour flight from Santiago. This is the most amazing island with a fascinating history. Prior to my visit I had thought there were only a few of these giant statues but there are hundreds of them spread all over the island. Many are lying on the ground where they were abandoned but some have been restored and are now standing on their platforms. How they got there from the quarry is just unbelievable. There is only one small town, Hanga Roa, and most of the inhabitants are self-sufficient. Everything comes in by plane or boat and the way of life is very leisurely. We visited all the major sites and my sense of wonder just increased as the days went by.

Our trip of a lifetime was over all too soon and before we knew it we were starting the long, long journey back to England.



Nature Group Residential Weekend

The Kingcombe Centre

Lower Kingcombe, Dorset DT2 0EQ

Friday 18th July to Monday 21st July



Cost: £285 including all meals and packed lunches.

The weekend is limited to 16 participants.

Meet for afternoon tea on Friday afternoon, depart following afternoon tea on Monday.

For further information or Reservations contact:

James Foad

Tel: 07810 303365

Email: james_foad@hotmail.com

Field Meeting

Bempton Cliffs, East Yorkshire

Date: Saturday 5th July 2014

Time: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm

For further details see page 25



Schedule of Field Meetings 2014

Date: Sunday 10th May* and/or Tuesday 13th May, 2014 (*additional/ alternative day)

Location **Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve**
Bradbourne Vale Road, Sevenoaks
Kent, TN13 3DH

Meeting: Jefferey Harrison Visitor Centre

Grid Ref: TQ 520565

Leader Graham Saxby

Cost: Donation of £3 to £5 to Kent Wildlife Trust is suggested

Subjects of Interest: Water birds, wildflowers, insects

Items to bring: Stout Shoes, Waterproofs, Packed Lunch and something to drink.

Additional information: Smooth level paths, good wheelchair access round reserve, six hides, including one very small hide. Café hatch serving light refreshments, outside tables.

Contact: Graham Saxby
Tel 01737 246397 (H) 07818 433079 (M)
Email grahamsaxby@ntlworld.com

Date: Thursday June 19th 2014.

Time: 10.00 for 10.30 am start

Location: Malham Tarn Estate and environs, North Yorkshire

Meeting: National Trust Estate Office car park, Water Houses, Settle, North Yorkshire. BD29 9PT . GR 888674

Subjects of interest: The National Nature Reserve is habitat for many rare plants and grasses; the tarn and surrounding limestone country is home to curlew, dipper, kestrel and wading birds. Additionally the geology of limestone pavement, water sinks, Malham Cove, Goredale and Janet's Foss provide many photographic opportunities within two miles of the tarn.

Leader: George Lamb. We will also be joined by the National Trust Ecology Ranger for the area who will provide an introductory talk to the area and accompany us for the first part of the day around the tarn and fen areas. His local knowledge of plant locations etc should ensure we maximise photographic opportunities.

Additional Information: The day will start with activity in the NNR and tarn area. As the day develops and depending on numbers we could spread in smaller groups to visit

the other limestone features mentioned above. It will be an informal, free form day developing around weather and individual interests. There is so much to see and do so our visit will only touch the surface of this beautiful and diverse habitat. Details of route directions to Malham can be found on the web sites for Malham Tarn and Malham.

Items to bring: We will be in exposed moorland country so warm clothes, waterproofs (even in June!!) and walking boots are essential. There are good paths and boardwalks around the tarn, at Malham Cove and Goredale but on the limestone pavement the ground is rough and care is needed. Accommodation, pubs and café are available in Malham village and nearby Settle but for midday please bring a packed lunch and something to drink.

Note: Limited toilet facilities are available at the National Trust Office so I recommend a stop en route in Malham village at the National Park Visitor Centre (GR 900627) where there are good facilities and also disabled facilities.

Contact: George Lamb. Tel 01543 491644. Mobile 07796 426391
E mail: george.lamb@virgin.net
Please call if you need further information. It would be helpful to know numbers in advance so please let me know if you intend to join us.

Date: Saturday June 21st, 2014.

Time: 10.00 am.

Location: Ainsdale Sand Dunes, Sefton Coast, Merseyside

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

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

Leader: Trevor Davenport ARPS
Dr Phil Smith, MBE, has kindly agreed to join us 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' (Amberley Press 2009).

Schedule of Field Meetings 2014 continued

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. In early summer the dunes can be richly rewarding for both botanic and entomological subjects. We should expect to find up to six species of Orchid as well as many other botanical species, Northern Dune Tiger-beetle (*Cicindela hybrida*) - a superbly photogenic insect; and a plentiful array of early butterflies and dragonflies. The area is also noted for two increasingly rare species: The Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), and The Natterjack Toad (*Epidalea calamita*), formerly (*Bufo calamita*). Although not easy to locate, we will do some prior research into possible locations. There is plentiful accommodation in the nearby seaside resort of Southport.

Items to bring: There are very few natural hazards but the area is exposed so light warm clothing and waterproofs in case of rain. Stout shoes or wellingtons may also be required. There are no costs involved but attendees are advised to bring a packed lunch and something to drink.

Contact: Trevor Davenport -
Tel: 01704 870284
Mobile: 07831 643844;
Email: trevor.davenport@virgin.net
Please call or email for further information.

Date: Sunday June 29th 2014

Time: 10.00 am.

Location: Devil's Dyke, Cambridgeshire

A 7.5 mile long Anglo-Saxon earthwork consisting of a bank and ditch built out of clay and chalk near Newmarket. The Dyke is notable for its wildflowers - including several species of orchid and butterflies. This outing involves a fairly long walk (c. mile each way) with some steps.

Meeting: Car Park is accessed via the slip road off the Racehorse Statue Roundabout (junction of the A1303 and A1304) leading to the July course. Continue on the lane to its end where there is a grass car park. Address: Newmarket July Race course, Suffolk, CB8 0XE

Leader: Ann Miles (ann@pin-sharp.co.uk)
07710383586

Cost: Free.

Main subjects of interest: Chalk loving flowers such as Greater Knapweed, Sainfoin, Harebells and Carline Thistle. Orchids including Lizard, Pyramidal and Bee, plus seed heads of the Pasque Flower. Butterflies include Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak and Brown Argus. Chalkhill Blue on this site later in the year.

Items to bring: Stout shoes and waterproofs. No refreshments available on site so packed lunch and drinks will be required. The area is very exposed so sun protection may be required if weather is hot.

Nature Group Residential Weekend

Date: Friday 18th July to Monday 21st July.

Location: The Kingcombe Centre, Lower Kingcombe, Dorset DT2 0EQ

Time: Meet for afternoon tea on Friday afternoon, depart following afternoon tea on Monday.

Cost: £285 including all meals and packed lunches.
The weekend is limited to 16 participants.

Booking information: Contact James Foad Tel: 07810 303365
Email: james_foad@hotmail.com

Date: Saturday 5th July 2014
Time: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm
Location: Bempton Cliffs, East Yorkshire:
 Postcode: YO15 1JF. Grid Ref: TA197 738
 Location suitable for wheelchairs
Directions: The reserve is located on the cliff road from the village of Bempton, B1229 road from Flamborough to Filey. In Bempton village, turn northwards at the White Horse public house - the reserve is at the end of the road after 1 mile (follow the brown tourist signs).
Leader: James Foad LRPS,
 Tel: 07850 306365 or 01843 580295
 Email: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.co.uk
Cost: Parking: free to RSPB members, £5 Non RSPB members
Main subjects of interest: Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) and their young, Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), Razorbills (*Alca torda*), Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Tree Sparrows (*Passa montanus*), Peregrine Falcon and perhaps Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*). Also Butterflies, Moths and other insects, Orchids and various wildflowers.

Date: Saturday July 12th 2014
Time: 9.30 am
Location: Wicken Fen Nature Reserve (National Trust)
Meeting: Meet in Cafe area at Wicken Fen
Address: Lode Lane, Wicken, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 5XP
Grid Ref. 154:TL563705
Leader: Ann Miles (ann@pin-sharp.co.uk) 07710 383586
Cost: Free to National Trust Members £5.90 (£6.50 with Gift aid) to non-Member of the NT. Car park free for Members; £2.50 for non-members.
Main subjects of interest: Dragon/Damselflies, Grass Snakes, Common Lizard, Konik ponies. Birds include Marsh Harriers, Cuckoos, Bearded Tit.
<http://www.wicken.org.uk> gives details of species present and the research conducted there.
Items to bring: Stout shoes, waterproofs, drink and packed lunch. There is a good cafe at Wicken but it can be busy at weekends.
Important: Prebooking essential so that the Warden can be informed how many to expect.

Nature Photo Workshop

Saturday 31st May 2014 – 10am to 4pm. North Lincolnshire
Cost £50 including buffet lunch. Limited to 12 people.

This will follow from last years successful event when Geoff Trinder ARPS held a similar event with Paul Hobson at Geoff's home in North Lincolnshire.

Species to photograph: Barn Owl and Kestrel both posed in suitable natural settings as well as in flight. Other species will include various moth species, Common Frog and Toad and it is hoped to have Harvest Mice and Fire Salamander, with the possibility of one or two other species.

Venue: 'The Croft', Carrhouse Road, Belton, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN9 1PG.

Above is the postal address but it is actually in North Lincolnshire.

Directions: From M180, leave at junction 2 onto the A161 and follow signs for Gainsborough. Belton is the first village. On entering the village turn right at the mini roundabout, signposted Sandtoft. After three quarters of a mile turn left into Carrhouse Road. The Croft is the 2nd detached house on the left, about 100yds from the corner. Parking is down the drive to the right of the house.

To book Telephone Geoff on 01427 872051.
 Cheques should be made payable to RPS Nature Group.
 Please book before 1st May as Geoff will be away until later in the month!

Schedule of Field Meetings 2014 continued

Wicken Fen Nature Reserve, continued ...

Other information: We have permission to use the educational dipping ponds - excellent for Dragonflies and other insects. The British Dragonfly Society has a Centre at Wicken Fen. Our visit is during Dragonfly Week 2014 so special events may be planned: <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/dragonfly-centre>. There are several hides around the fen and the last couple of years have seen plentiful sightings of Hobby and Marsh Harrier. See Richard Nicoll's article in *The Iris* Winter 2013. The Fen supports a good population of Cuckoos

Nature Group Residential Weekend 2014

Date: Friday 18th July to Monday 21st July.

Location: The Kingcombe Centre,
Lower Kingcombe, Dorset DT2 0EQ
OS grid ref.

Time: Meet for afternoon tea on Friday afternoon, depart after afternoon tea on Monday.

Cost: £285 including all meals and packed lunches.

Additional information: The weekend is limited to 16 participants.
Booking details and further information from James Foad:

Contact: James Foad, Tel: 07810 303365
Email: james_foad@hotmail.com

Havergate Island - Update

Cancellations

8th March & 29th March Field Meetings.

We regret to advise members that these meetings have been cancelled due damage to footpaths and hides on the island following the tidal surge in December. The RSPB is unable to confirm when the island will re-open. Therefore we have no alternative but to cancel/postpone the trips until 2015.

The population of hares has suffered badly and it is now estimated that as few as 10 may have survived. However, continued support will help the RSPB to recreate the environment that has allowed them to thrive in the past.

Havergate Island

The RSPB is looking for Working Party Volunteers to undertake a variety of necessary work including the restoration of footpaths and moving the hides back into the correct positions. Anyone interested in attending one of these should contact Kieran Alexander for more information.

Email: Kieran.Alexander@rspb.org.uk
Office Phone: 01392 450732

Congratulations

The following Nature Group members recently achieved their Associateship Distinction in Nature:

Charlie Bishop Somerset
Martin Chapman Warwickshire

Chee Kwan Leer Hong Kong
Martin Vaughan Leicestershire.

Good luck to all members who are submitting in March.

The Nature Photographer's Joint Convention

October 24th- 26th, 2014.

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire DE55 1AU

The 2014 Joint Convention will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside. Keynote speakers will be John Bebbington FRPS and Roger Tidman.

As an RPS Nature Group member, you would be made most welcome at this event.

A limited number of rooms are available and you are strongly advised to book as soon as possible. Priority has been given to past delegates and members of the major postal portfolios i.e. the NPP, NPS and ZPC. To take advantage of this offer and secure your place you need to book as soon as possible.

The package is all-inclusive and non-negotiable. All rooms are of a very high-quality with ensuite bathrooms. All meals from afternoon tea on Friday, October 24th, to Sunday lunch on Sunday, October 26th, are included. The centre is set in its own spacious and beautiful grounds with ample parking adjacent to the accommodation.

I have been asked by the management to stress that no pets of any description are allowed anywhere on the Hayes site and residential vehicles cannot be parked overnight on the centre car parks.

John Tinning, Conference Organiser

THE NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS' JOINT CONVENTION, OCTOBER 24th- 26th, 2014.

BOOKING FORM

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Postcode: Telephone number:

Email address:

Accommodation Required [Please tick one box only]

☐ I wish to book a room for two persons @ £180 per person i.e. £360 all-inclusive.
Name of partner/guest:

☐ I wish to book a place in a shared twin-bedded room @ £180 per person all-inclusive.

☐ I would be willing to share with:

☐ I wish to book a room on a single-occupancy basis @ £190 all-inclusive.

☐ I wish to attend as a non-residential delegate @ £125, with all meals, except breakfast, included.

News, Views & Reviews

Photographic Exhibitions of Australia invite you to enter the

Sydney Harbour International

and the

Sydney International Exhibition of Photography.

Both exhibitions have sections for nature images.

Online submission of entries:

Sydney Harbour International by 14.04.2014 to:
www.sydney-harbour-international.org.au

Sydney International Exhibition of Photography by
28.07.2014 to: www.siep.org.au

Cheltenham Camera Club

invite you to enter the

2014 International Salon of Photography

Receiving entries now and until 11.04.14

Entries close 11 April 2014
Judging 25 - 28 April 2014

For instructions and on-line entry, visit

www.CheltenhamCameraClub.co.uk

FIAP, PSA & RPS Patronage



A confirmation of your reservation and an outline programme will be sent by email or 'snailmail' to the address you have provided overleaf. Please note that no monies can be refunded for cancellation after June 1st, 2014.

Special Requirements

- ☐ Dietary? [Please specify]
- ☐ Disabled access / room required?
- ☐ Any other? [Please specify]

Exhibitors

- ☐ My presentation will be digital images
- ☐ My presentation will be slide images
- ☐ I wish to show 50 images. [10 minutes maximum]
- ☐ I wish to show 25 images. [5 minutes maximum]

To ensure your place, please return this form with a cheque for the full amount as soon as possible. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Nature Photographers' Joint Convention' and sent to:

The Convention Organiser, John Tinning,
Brockwood House, 21 Ervin Way,
Queniborough,
LEICESTER, Leicestershire, LE7 3TT



Views & Reviews

I have some sympathy for Colin Smale's views on camera clubs (see *The Iris* issue 115, Spring 2013). We've all suffered from judges who don't understand - but he overlooks a few important facts.

He may have 40 years' experience behind the camera but others don't. What to him is just another boring snap may be a huge achievement for another photographer, even with 21st century technology. And that's assuming they can afford some.

Photography can be an expensive pastime - not everyone has a top-of-the-range DSLR and a bagful of lenses. That 'bird on a stick' of which he's so dismissive may have been taken by a beginner, or with a compact pushed to the limit of its capability.

I've been a camera club member for around four years, yet 'bird on a stick' is a phrase I've heard several times, usually expressed in an uncomplimentary manner. The implication is that the offending photographer shouldn't bother if that's the best they can do. Ironical when the cover of issue no. 115 of *The Iris* featured a bird on a stick taken by the late Tony Hamblin FRPS

and two more inside to illustrate the obituary which reminded us what a fine photographer he was.

Colin goes on to criticise DPIs because they're not "a one-off shot" like transparencies. However, that's no reason to scrap the DPI section - it has its place. Just as not everyone can afford the best camera, some photographers have to make do with low-end printers, cheap paper and compatible ink. Their prints can't possibly compete with those from a big-money nine-colour machine, but in the DPI everyone is equal; the best image wins, not the best print. The cost and time involved with entering print competitions can also be prohibitive. If club experts want a competition for images straight out of the camera there's nothing to stop them organising one.

For the record, I use an 'entry level' Pentax K100D and two Pentax zooms: 18-55mm and 50-300mm. I print using an Epson 2880 (with real ink).

Russell Turner LRPS

Review

Over the years, as my camera equipment has improved, I have built up a quite a collection of backpacks, tripods and tripod heads. None have been ideal for all purposes and many are now redundant and languishing in a cupboard. However, since the acquisition of a pretty heavy lens some 18 months ago combined with weight restrictions when flying, I have had to reconsider elements of my kit and to save some weight where I could. This resulted in the purchase of yet another tripod and a gimbal type tripod head which did not require the use of a heavy ball & socket head, like the Arca. I have often wished for something like the Wimberley MkII, but could never justify the £500 price tag to myself. Travelling can really knock your kit about too, especially on trips where you may be in an out of vehicles like Land Rovers - tripods slide about and rub against the floor; fellow travellers anxious not to miss anything pull out their tripod and yours with it, resulting in damage to yours when it hits the ground. I've had it all happen! Its bad enough when the kit is

moderately priced, but do you really want to throw a tripod & head combination with a value of £1000+ into the back of a LandRover?

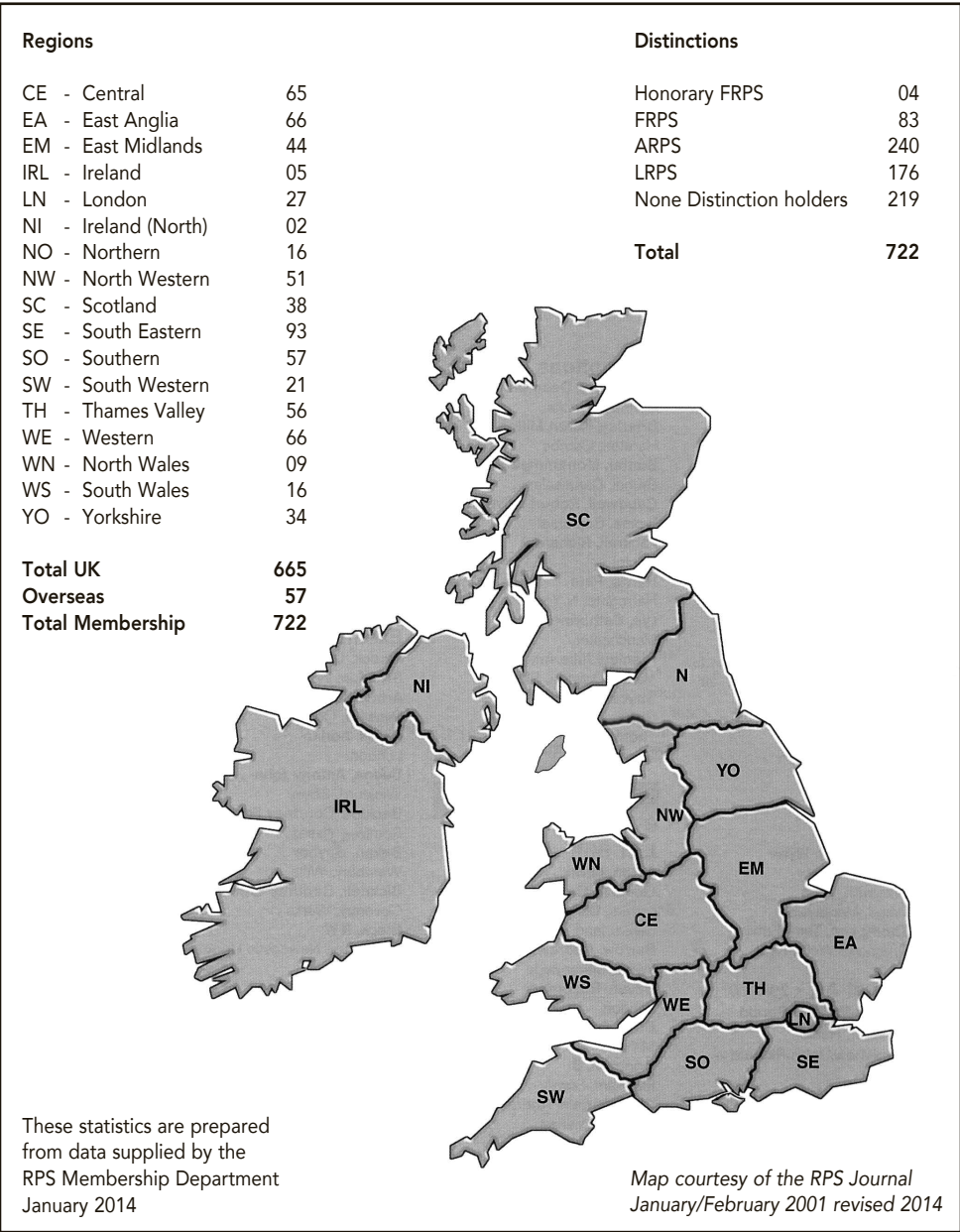
A few months ago I received a request from Mike Lane FRPS to place an ad in *The Iris* for an on-line shop he had started. One of the items I saw there was a gimbal head of the type I wanted. The price tag was under £70 including shipping and it took me no time at all to justify the expenditure.

I have just returned from a trip to the Falklands where the head was in use 12 hours a day, everyday for two weeks. I cannot say how it compares with similar designs such as the Wimberley MkII since I have not used one. It certainly gets my vote for value for money. It is robust and performed its duties very well and I was not disappointed with it in any way. I have already happily recommended it to several other photographers. It might be just what you are looking for and at a very affordable price too.

Dawn Osborn FRPS

Membership Statistics

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



Canon 40mm STM Lens

by Graham Saxby

What does it do that's different from other lenses? Why would I, or anyone else, want to buy one? My main interest is nature photography but with an emphasis on wildlife and bird photography. I have been getting long lenses for bird photography and wide angle for environmental/habitat/landscape shots of the places I visit. But where would a 40mm pancake lens be useful?

When Canon launched the 40mm and 22mm stepper motor lenses I was quite taken by the 22mm and disappointed to find it was not made for the EOS range. The 40mm looked good but too pricey for me with RRP of £229 for something that was so close to 50mm. Nevertheless I was tempted by its small size.

I was unsure what to do with the Park Camera vouchers I had been given by friends. Nowadays I tend to buy L series lenses but the prices made such a purchase unrealistic. I thought about a new bag, filters, other accessories but I wanted to get something my friends would understand, I would use, enjoy and find useful in my photography. I also

felt that it had to be something I would not normally buy for myself. A tall order as I already have pretty much everything I need. The world of photography is such that there are always more toys to be desired and various manufacturers to persuade that these are essential to make our images that bit better.

It wasn't long after I was given the Park Camera vouchers that the pancake lens came to mind and I did some research. The typical shop price for the 40mm was about £150 - Park Cameras were selling it for £149. The lens is a small, light prime lens with a maximum aperture of f2.8. 35mm had always been a favourite focal length for me and 40mm is close enough. It is also close focusing on its own and even better with the extension tube I already had.

Canon promotes the lens as having a 'portable pancake design', 'smooth, quiet STM focusing when shooting movies on compatible cameras', 'fast f/2.8 maximum aperture for low-light shooting', 'close focus to 0.3m', 'fast, quiet AF for pin-sharp results', 'great image quality across the frame'.



I would definitely agree with most of these but only from an everyday use point of view. I am a physicist by background and at one time my work involved testing high quality reconnaissance lenses. The numbers are important but the lens also needs to be looked at in the context of practical use.

It is small, light and convenient out and about and I find this lens an absolute joy. Out of focus backgrounds do have a pleasing blur or bokeh to them. It is permanently attached to my 5D MkII. As a full frame camera with high resolution it would find any weaknesses in the corners; there doesn't seem to be any. I use it for habitat photography, small group portraits, and indoor animal portraits and expect to make use of its 64mm equivalent focal length on my cropped sensor 7D, as a portrait lens.

So how does it fit into the world of nature photography? I have back problems and when carrying my 500mm, camera and tripod I wanted something handy to do some habitat shots. I can either just put the lens in my pocket or as it is so small often take it on a second body. With a full frame and a cropped sensor that then gives me the equivalent of a 500mm, an 800mm, a 40mm and a 64mm.

It is not a macro lens but it has good close focusing (0.3m giving 0.18 life-size magnification). Put on a 12mm tube this gives a useful 0.50 magnification or a 25mm tube will give 0.88 magnification. There can however be issues with the lens hood getting close to the subject and causing shadows. One hot, summers' day I took it with me when walking and had no success with butterflies which flew away before I could get close enough for a shot. I was using my full-frame camera and a crop sensor may have done better.

The small size and low weight make it a easy to carry and use. The 52mm filter ring stays stationary when focusing which is useful with a polariser fitted. The small filter size keeps costs and weight down. I didn't bother with the extra cost option of the small plastic lens hood, preferring to use a collapsible rubber hood.

Canon says it is 'ideal for portrait, reportage, travel and landscape photography'. I would agree with all of those claims. But, is it of any use for nature photography? Well, I have certainly found it useful. I like it on its own when out walking and handholding is a dream. I carry it in my pocket when I have my 70-200 fitted to the camera.

In summary then, who is it for and would I recommend it to a friend? Its for everyone and I certainly would recommend it, particularly with a full-frame camera. I would be interested to try it with the smaller full-frame Canon 6D but it works really well with my 5D MkII.

I have included two shots of Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve taken with the 40mm STM, the venue for the Field Meeting I am running in May. I will certainly have it with me on the day.



Specification

Size:	Diameter:	68.2mm
	Length :	22.8mm
	Weight:	130g
	Filter:	52mm diameter
Lens construction:		6 elements
		4 groups
Diaphragm blades:		7
Maximum aperture:		f 2.8
Minimum aperture:		f 22
Closest focusing:		0.3m
Maximum magnification:		0.18
	with 12mm tube:	0.50-0.32
	with 25mm tube:	0.88-0.70
AF actuator:		STM (stepper motor)
RRP:		£229
Typical retail price:		£150 approx





More of David Cantrille's
images from Kruger N.P.

Top: Hammerkop on
Hippos Head

Centre: Lilac-breasted Roller
taking off

Bottom: Red-billed Ground
Hornbill

