

THE IRIS



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

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*Orange and Brown Thermophile communities
Grand Prismatic Spring, Midway Geyser Basin
by Dawn Osborn FRPS*

The RPS Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2011



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Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD, or printed using double line spacing on one side of the paper only - please do not send hand written copy.

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Contents

2 Editorial

3 From the Chair

4 Nature Group Residential Weekend Field Meeting

by James Foad

7 Burwash Manor Farm Field Meeting

by Geoffrey Einon ARPS

8 Yellowstone

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

13 Voyeurism in the Ngorongoro Crater

by Geoffrey Einon ARPS

15 Help - I've been bitten by a Travelling Shutter Bug

by Patricia Kearton ARPS

18 Holiday Hot Spot

by Colin Smale ARPS

23 Bridging at Horsey Gap

by Russell Edwards ARPS

25 The Future of Field Meetings - Is there one?

by Tony Bond FRPS

26 Ten Top Tips for the Nature Photographer

by Mark Monckton ARPS

26 Ingleborough NNR Field Trip

by Len Shepherd

27 Beware - Your new camera may cost you more than you bargained for!

by Dawn Osborn 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. 2000 to 2007 are available in slide format. Since 2008 a CD of the Exhibition has been produced and is available for purchase. For more information please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above or go to our website: www.rpsnaturegroup.com

Editorial

Where does the time go? It seems as if there never enough of it, thats for sure. Just as I complete work on one issue of *The Iris*, its time to start on the next.

Summer was a big disappointment this year - in my part of East Anglia we either had no rain at all for several days at a time, or it was very cold with too much rain, often it was just too windy. Autumn too is off to a poor start - the fungus season seems to get worse every year! The lack of rain and high temperatures of the past few weeks have certainly affected fungus development in my neck of the woods and reports from other parts of the country suggest that this could be the most dire season yet. I hope things have improved by the time this issue hits your door mats.

I hope you find that this issue contains some interesting articles. I found it necessary to write a couple of these myself, so you will understand why I need to receive articles, reviews on books, kit, etc., for the next and future issues of *The Iris* as a matter of urgency. Please email me with your ideas and/or for a mailing address.

Chairman John Bebbington has mentioned the Nature Group Exhibition. Please read the Entry Form carefully as there are a number of changes to the Conditions from last year and I would also draw your attention to the fact that colour slides can no longer be accepted. Since the introduction of digital images into the exhibition, the number of colour slide entries declined rapidly and last year only two members entered colour slides, therefore it was decided by your committee to abandon this form of entry. In the past a great deal of the group's funds have been spent duplicating slides and copying prints on to slide media or more recently scanning to digital media. It is quite amazing how quickly group members have made this transition from film to digital especially those who insisted that they would never make the change. Never say never eh!

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and warm Christmas and photographically successful New Year.



From the chair

As I sit at my computer I'm looking out at a typically wild and woolly Autumn day, the third in a row after our wonderful Indian Summer. Over a 10 day period of continuous sunshine and amazingly high temperatures we had five different species of dragonfly in our garden – Brown, Southern and Migrant Hawker and both Common and Ruddy Darter, plus up to ten Red Admiral and two Comma butterflies competing for space on a heap of rotting pears, also several Hummingbird hawkmoths and Queen Bumblebees nectaring. Sadly I couldn't give them much attention with the camera as I had to meet a publisher's deadline for submission of a book manuscript!

There has been a remarkable influx of migrant moths to the South-west, but they seem to have given Langport, where I live, a wide berth (my moth trap catches have been very average), although in other parts of the region, particularly in Dorset and West Cornwall, some really good species have appeared. There have been two Clifden Nonpareil sightings within five miles of my garden, and a Crimson Speckled and a Dark Mottled Willow in Taunton.

I hope that you will read and think about Tony Bond's article in this issue, *"The future of field meetings – is there one?"*. As your group's Committee we need to know what you would like to see us organise or do, and so we need you to respond to Tony's musings. As he says, I am very happy to be contacted – preferably by email or letter, by phone if necessary – to hear your ideas. If you don't respond we can't help!

If you would like to host a Field Meeting next year, please contact me or download the form from the Events & Courses page of the Nature Group website. You are not required to instruct or teach and no specialised knowledge is required – merely a familiarity with the site.

Booking for next year's Residential Weekend at Malham Tarn Field Centre are already coming in – a limited number of places are available. Contact Len Shepherd at:
email: shepherdlen@btinternet.com or
telephone: 01969 622043

By the time you read this, I will have set up an exhibition page on the main RPS website showing some of the work done by participants on the Kingcombe Residential Weekend. This can be done for any Nature Group event – all you need to do is email me to get it set up and then send some images.

Finally please support the Nature Group Exhibition! In the past I have heard one or two comments like "its not worth submitting plant images, as they rarely get selected", but if they are of high quality and sufficient are entered, then they will be well represented. On the other hand, if only a very few are entered then it will appear as though they rarely get selected. The wider the range of subject matter, the more interesting the exhibition will be but please take care to identify and title your images appropriately. Remember, too, that you don't need to have travelled to far-flung places, enjoyable as that may have been, to have taken super photographs. There are plenty of photo opportunities to be found in the British Isles – think about Richard Revels' ideas in the last issue of *'The Iris'*.

The entry form for the 2012 Exhibition is on the centre pages of this issue. Make a note in your 2012 diary to send in your entry. Take time out to read the entry form, select your entry, complete the form and post it all to Sue McGarrigle, the Exhibition Secretary, but after Christmas please. We have three selectors, all experienced nature photographers, giving up their time to look at your images, so lets have a good entry for them to select from.



John Bebbington FRPS
October 2011

RPS Nature Group Residential Weekend

by James Foad

Friday 27th - Monday 30th of May 2011 was the first Nature group weekend I had ever organised. I knew I had my work cut out if I was going to make the weekend the success that my predecessors, the late Kath Bull ARPS and our Chairman John Bebbington FRPS, had done in the past. Oh boy, what had I let myself in for.

I would like to thank John for assisting me with this nerve racking task and for being at the receiving end of countless phone calls and emails.

I began the weekend with a visit to Arne RSPB nature reserve where among my finds were a moth Yellow Shell (*Camptogramma bilineata*) and Sloe bug (*Dolycoris baccarum*). At about 13:30hrs four of the group arrived and I met up with two of them, Alison and Elly. It soon became apparent that Alison would prove to be a real asset with her spotting skills.

The highlight of our afternoon was provided by a pair of Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) feeding their chicks. Hidden behind trees, we were able to approach to within 12 feet of the nest, and we achieved some reasonable photos.

We arrived at Kingcombe Centre, about 4pm. Douglas Hands had been at the Centre for quite some time and had enjoyed a productive afternoon in the Kingcombe meadows.

After dinner, Ian set up the moth trap at the barn ready for us in the morning and the rest of us got ready for the evenings entertainment and introduction. After we had all introduced ourselves, I showed a few digital images of the areas we were going to be visiting over the weekend. Douglas gave a short talk on dragonflies and damselflies with some superb images. Then after a long day it was time for a good nights sleep.

Saturday began as quite a breezy day. The moth trap provided us with about 20 moths, including several White Ermine (*Spilosoma lubricipeda*) a Buff-tip (*Phalera bucephala*) and a Scorched Wing (*Plagodis dolabraria*).

Our first full day shoot was at Powerstock - a site which has always been very productive on previous visits. Saturday proved to be no exception and within minutes of unloading the cars we had already found some good specimens of Common Twayblade orchid (*Listera ovata*), Common Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Ivy-Leaved Speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*), Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*).

There were a lot of Funnel Web Spiders (*Amaurobius similis*) around; one of them appeared to have a baby with it. Other members of the group found various species of grass hoppers, one particular was the Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*), which proved a little tricky to photograph in the breeze. My friend Len Shepherd and I went in search of the Birds Nest Orchids (*Niottia nidis-avis*) - a brownish fungal parasite, which lacks chlorophyll. It was abundant a few years before, but this year was to prove difficult as they blend in to their habitat so well! After about ten minutes of searching we found five and set about photographing them.

After lunch we visited the pond, but the rain had the final say and we eventually retreated to the centre where we found tea and cakes awaiting us. Back in our rooms we viewed our images and made a small selection for showing after dinner. We each shared our five best images with other group members and discussed them. Len then gave a short illustrated talk. Before going to bed, it was decided to put the moth trap out near Beech Cottage.

Sunday was another breezy morning! I decided to make my way into the meadow behind the cottage with Douglas and Alison. I hoped to photograph Demoiselles but instead I did find a Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrhosoma nymphula*) which had Parasites on its thorax. We found Burrowing Mayfly (*Ephemera danica*) newly emerged from its exuvium, an unusual find so high up in the field - Mayflies usually emerge from their exuvium underwater. There was also a good amount of Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*)

The choice of location for the moth trap had proved to be quite successful. Specimens found included a Peppered Moth (*Biston petularia*), another Buff-tip (*Phalera bucephala*) and more White Ermine (*Spilosoma lubricipeda*) but nothing compared to the numbers of the previous night!

After breakfast we collected our packed our lunches and headed off for a day of photography at Gogden Beach. Again we had the breeze to contend with. On the walk down we found the Larvae of Yellow-tailed Moth (*Euproctis similis*), Lackey Moth (*Malacosoma neustria*) and Vapourer Moth (*Orgia antiqua*), and a few butterflies, Speckled Wood (*Parage aegeria*) and Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphil*). Plants found included Giant Horsetail, Horsetail, Thrift, Yellow-Horned Poppy, Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*). We heard plenty of Marsh frogs but apart from one photographed by Douglas Hands ARPS we didn't see any.

In the afternoon the breeze had died down, so we headed back down to the beach and fields. Where we found Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*) Small Eggar larvae (*Eriogaster lanestris*) and Yellow-tailed Moth larvae.

When we arrived back at Kingcombe tea, coffee and cake was awaiting us. A few of us went into the field behind Beech Cottage to photograph roosting Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) and Green-veined White (*Artogeia napi*). The breeze picked up and rain began to fall, but not until after we had taken our pictures.

After the usual sumptuous dinner it was time for a viewing of our best images of the day, these included the Marsh Frog (*Rana ridibunda*) and Burrowing Mayfly.

The following morning we checked the moth trap which had again been placed near to Beech Cottage. Many moths had not entered the trap but had landed on the grass around the trap and on the nearby fence. It was a good catch, by Ian's reckoning there were about 100 moths. Species included: Lesser Swallow Prominent (*Apotheosis gnom*), White Ermines, Scorched Wing, Buff Tip, Heart & Dart (*Agrotis exclamationis*), Flame Shoulder, Blood Vein (*Timandra comai*), Water Carpet, Scalloped Hazel, Pale Tussock (*Caliteara pudibunda*), Peppered Moth (*Biston petularia*), Dark Arches (*Apamea monoglyph*), Privet Hawk-moth (*Sphinx ligustri*) and



Larva of Lackey Moth
Douglas Hands ARPS



Marsh Frog
Douglas Hands ARPS



Poplar Hawk-moth
Elly Dorman



Speckled Wood butterfly by
Martin Gandy



Blood-vein Moth
Brian Ferry



Green-veined White
Len Shepherd



Common Green Grasshopper
Alison Johnson



Ragged Robin
Martin Gandy

the pretty Lobster Moth (*Stauropus fagi*).

Our final day was a visit to Ryewater Nursery where our Chairman, John Bebbington FRPS, joined us. Due to rain we decided to go into the green houses to photograph the more exotic butterflies and larvae. As usual, within seconds, John was spotting the almost invisible, such as Shield-bug eggs. There was plenty of subject matter to keep us all busy once our cameras had acclimatised to the humidity.

The rain eventually eased off enough for us all to go outside and look for subject matter. At the ponds we found Azure Damselflies (*Coenagrion puella*), Common Blue Damsels (*Enallagma Cyathigerum*), Teneral Common darter. Emerging Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) which was fully emerged by the time Len and I got to photograph. Also found were exuvium of the Emperor dragonfly (*Anax imperator*) and an emerging Black-tailed Skimmer.

In the afternoon three of us ventured out into the field next to the car park. Within minutes John found the Larvae of the Yellow-tail Moth (*Euproctis similis*). There was a black Pheasant around which kept popping up from time to time. Among the butterflies: Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) and The Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobbaeae*).

All in all I think everyone enjoyed the weekend. It was nice that our Chairman was able to join us on our last day. I would particularly like to thank John for assisting me in getting the ball rolling and for his advice and help with identities of a few Larvae. Also thank you to Douglas and Len for their talks in the evenings. Thank you also to the members who attended the residential weekend at Kingcombe. Please take the time to look at the exhibition on the nature group website from the weekend at: www.rps.org/group/Nature/home

Burwash Manor Farm Field Meeting

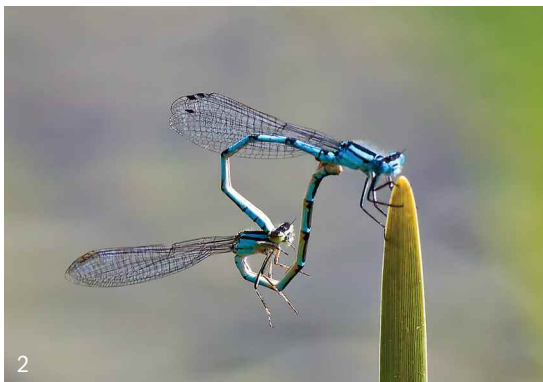
by Geoffrey Einon ARPS

Wildflowers and dragonflies were the highlights of the joint RPS/Cambridge CC field meet at Burwash Manor Farm organised by Ann Miles FRPS.

Burwash Manor is an organic farm on the outskirts of Cambridge (<http://burwashmanorfarm.com>). Our day started with a tractor ride hosted by Mike Radford, the fourth generation Radford to farm at Burwash, who gave us a guided tour of the farm and its flora and fauna. The farm's strict adherence to organic farming principles and practice ensure that the margins of its cereal crop and pathways blossom with masses of wild flowers. Scabious, poppies, Cranesbill and the local speciality, Blue Chicory, among a host of other species, provided a 'field day' for flower and landscape photographers. Wildlife enthusiasts had hoped to see more birds in the fields or overflying, but our real challenge came from dragon and damsel-fly populations at the farm's six ponds.

On the day of the outing, the previously unsettled July weather gave way to blue skies with frequent alternation between bright sunshine and clouded shade, giving exposure and contrast problems for us all. The periods of sunshine brought the rewards of squadrons of common damselflies cruising the ponds and mating in the reeds plus ample views of Emperor and Black-tailed Skimmer dragonflies.

Both male and female Emperors gave excellent photo opportunities - the males patrolling their ponds to protect their territories and the females laying eggs in the water margins. Dragon and damsel-fly flight shots brought the usual difficulties of establishing and maintaining focus on these rapidly moving targets, but by late afternoon most of us were able to retreat to the farm's tea rooms with a feeling of 'job done' and of gratitude to Ann for having organised another successful RPS field outing.



Pictures

- 1 Male Emperor Dragonfly (Anax imperator) on Patrol
- 2 Mating Common Blue Damselflies (Enallagma cyathigerum)
- 3 Female Emperor Dragonfly (Anax imperator) Egg-laying

Yellowstone

by Dawn Osborn FRPS



Black Growler steam vent, Porcelain Basin, Norris.

Yellowstone – a name we all recognise. At some time or another we have all seen scenes from Yellowstone National Park, either in still images, on TV or the ‘big’ screen. In September 2010 I made my first visit as co-leader on a trip organised by my brother, who was already very familiar with the area.

Yellowstone’s best known hydro-thermal feature is probably Old Faithful, a classic fountain type geyser. Geysers are found in other parts of the world, notably New Zealand, Chile, Iceland and the Kamchatka peninsula in north east Russia, but Yellowstone has the largest collection of hydrothermal activity in the world, and Upper Geyser Basin, the site of Old Faithful, has the highest concentration anywhere on the planet. Why? Well Yellowstone is really one enormous caldera – approximately 30 miles by 45 miles wide. In the last 2 million years there have been three volcanic eruptions here, roughly 700,000 years apart. The last one occurred as recently as 640,000 years ago when approximately 240 cubic miles of rock and dust erupted and covered the area. The centre eventually collapsed and formed a caldera that filled with lava and became the plateau we see today. Yellowstone is still a very active volcano and molten magma may be as close as 3 miles below the surface. The magma heats water deep underground and cracks in the

earth’s crust allow the water to rise back to the surface. In a nutshell, underground channels with constrictions produce Geysers and those without constrictions materialise as Hot Springs. There are also bubbling Mudpots, hissing Fumaroles and a host of spectacular geological features.

Our group met at Heathrow airport and chatted over coffee as we waited for our flight to be called. We flew with a scheduled carrier, making one welcome stop-over before arriving at our final destination in Montana, where we spent the night. The following morning, well rested, we continued our journey to a location a few miles from the north gate of Yellowstone National Park which provided a good base for our first few days exploration.

During our first few days we explored Mammoth Hot Springs, Norris Geyser Basin to the South and the valleys to the east. Amongst the sites I particularly enjoyed at Mammoth were Minerva Terrace, Palette Spring, and the Orange Spring Mound. Explorations to the north-eastern part of the park provided us with opportunities to photograph Black Bear and Bison. We were also privileged to see the resident Wolf pack in action but were without the kit necessary to obtain more than aide-memoire snapshots.

The drive south to Norris Geyser Basin passes a number of interesting features including the Sheepeater Cliffs (named for a local native American tribe) where we stopped for lunch and were rewarded with images of chipmunk and pika amongst columns of basalt rock formations reminiscent of the Giant's Causeway. A visiting Marten was spotted and provided us with a few photo-ops as it hunted for prey amongst the rocks. Further south the Roaring Mountain - an acidic hydrothermal area - lived up to its name as steam forcing its way to the surface through fumaroles creates a roaring sound that can be heard a considerable distance away.



Norris Basin lies just north of the Yellowstone caldera but is one of the hottest and most acidic hydrothermal areas with hot springs and fumaroles having water temperatures in excess of 200°F - it is the most active earthquake area in the park. According to the National Park Service "Norris Geyser Basin is the hottest, oldest, and most dynamic of Yellowstone's thermal areas. The highest temperature yet recorded in any geothermal area in Yellowstone was measured in a scientific drill hole at Norris: 459°F (237°C) just 1,087 feet (326 meters) below the surface!" Hydrothermal activity here is estimated to date back at least 115,000 years.



Norris is a volatile and frequently changing landscape - consisting of Porcelain Basin, Back Basin and the One hundred Spring Plain. In Porcelain Basin pungent steam vents, geysers, bright blue pools, colourful lime-green Cyanidium algae and orange cyanobacteria which thrive in the acidic warm water of the runoff streams delighted our eyes and provided an array of photogenic subject matter. There is always a chance that one of the geysers might put on a show. None here are predictable but Constant Geyser, as its name might suggest, did provide us with a couple of short eruptions in quick succession before becoming quiet once again. In the wooded Back Basin area we paused at the site of Steamboat Geyser - the world's tallest active geyser - it can throw water more than 400ft into the air and steam to twice that height. It erupts with no pattern and little warning. It erupted in October 1991, then was quiet until 2000, in 2002 it erupted twice and three times in 2003. The last occasion was May 2005. Who knows when it will do so again. We did however see several small geysers bubbling away - Pearl Geyser was one of these and proved a delightful little subject.





Bison, Mud Cauldron.



Marten at Sheepstealer Cliffs



Trumpeter Swan, Madison River.



Moose, Jackson.

After a few days we relocated to the central area of the park, from where we could explore other areas including the Yellowstone River and Canyon, Mud Volcano and Sulphur Cauldron areas. Bison were seen almost everywhere. Overnight and early in the morning many were to be found at the geothermal areas where temperatures may be several degrees warmer due to steam being forced from vents in the ground. These places are especially favoured by Elk and Bison during the long hard winter months of a Yellowstone winter when snow is deep on the ground. Yellowstone Canyon is a picturesque place where the colours of the rock strata contrast with the brilliance of the river below, and again provided us with photographic diversions.

From the Lake area we journeyed south and west to spend a few days in the Grand Teton National Park. A worthwhile detour – we photographed at several well known locations: Mormon Row, Schwabacher Landing, Ox-bow Bend and our efforts produced some attractive landscape and pictorial images. More importantly perhaps we went in search of and were rewarded with images of Black Bear and Moose.

After a few days we returned to the spectacular sights, sounds and smells of Yellowstone. Again, we stayed on the edge of the park and travelled each morning along the Madison River valley. Elk were our target wildlife species here, but on a couple of mornings we came across a Trumpeter Swan who proved to be a very co-operative subject in the attractive early morning light.

The aptly named Firehole River flows north through Upper Geyser Basin to Biscuit Basin, Midway and Lower Geyser Basins to eventually join the Gibbon and become the Madison. The Firehole, got its name from early trappers – they called mountain valleys ‘holes’ and thought the steam rising from the river was smoke from fire – hence the name firehole was created. There are many many features in this area of the park, and as stated previously, Upper Geyser Basin has the highest concentration anywhere on the planet.

Part of Lower Geyser Basin includes an area known as the Fountain Paint Pot – the discovery of a thermophile organism *Thermus aquaticus* here revolutionized research into DNA. Indeed many forms of microscopic life linked to the emergence of life on earth billions of years ago are found in Yellowstone and are used for research in the fields

of medicine and criminal investigation. Fountain Paint Pot is actually a mudpot composed of clay minerals and silica – the mud was once used by the peoples of the Crow nation to paint their tipis. Many of the features in this area have a delightful aroma of rotten eggs caused by hydrogen sulphide gas. There are lots of geysers in the Lower Geyser Basin, many of which can be seen erupting at the same time. The largest of these is Clepsydra Geyser – its name means 'water clock' in Greek. Clepsydra erupts almost constantly.

Further upstream we explored Midway Geyser Basin, site of two of Yellowstone's largest geothermal features, Excelsior Geyser crater and the famous Grand Prismatic Spring - 370ft in diameter and more than 121ft in depth. Words fail me to describe the scene and it is impossible to capture it all from ground level - the waters are brilliant turquoise and the water running off from the spring provides habitat for a wide variety of thermophiles which form mats and ribbons of orange, rust and brown hues. Even on warm days steam rises from the hot spring water. Excelsior Geyser exploded several times during the late 19th century and is now a massive boiling spring with a crater of 200ft x 300ft discharging more than 4,000 gallons of water per minute into the Firehole River.

Biscuit Basin and Black Sands Basin were next, and each exhibited features worthy of exploration. Eventually we arrived at the Old Faithful area. A new visitor centre was opened in 2010 and offers a range of facilities and information, including the estimated times of eruptions for five geysers. To predict the next eruption of a geyser, you have to know the timing of the previous one. The five geysers are Old Faithful, Castle, Grand, Daisy and Riverside. Old Faithful, as its name suggests, erupts frequently and regularly – eruptions can vary from 50 minutes to 2 hours and the water phase can last up to 5 minutes. During this time up to 32,000 litres of boiling water is hurled into the air up to 180 feet. Not every eruption is as large but it is said that Old Faithful is as spectacular now as it was a hundred years ago. We witnessed its eruptions on several occasions and with only one exception it never failed to impress. We were lucky to observe two other impressive eruptions one of which was Castle Geyser. Castle erupts approximately every fourteen hours, so if the timing had been wrong we would have missed it altogether. Castle is a classic cone type geyser with a magnificent cone thousands



Castle Geyser, Upper Geyser Basin.



Black Bear



Yellow, Orange and Brown Thermophile communities thrive in the hot water run off at Grand Prismatic Spring, Midway Geyser Basin.



Grand Geyser erupts in a spectacular display, hurling boiling water over 200ft into the air, Upper Geyser Basin.

of years old. It typically erupts up to 75 ft for up to 20 minutes, followed by a steam phase which brings the whole eruption process to about an hour. If the sun is in the right direction you can often see a rainbow in the steam. The other eruption we were privileged to witness was that of Grand Geyser. Grand is the tallest predictable geyser in the world erupting regularly approximately every 9 hours or so. Grand is also a classic fountain geyser, but unlike Old Faithful which erupts in a steady column, Grand Geyser erupts in a series of up to 4 bursts each one often taller than the last and lasting in total around fifteen minutes. The Old Faithful area is also home to some beautiful hot springs, Beauty Pool, neighbouring Chromatic Pool and Morning Glory Pool to name but a few.

Yellowstone National Park should be on everyone's 'top ten places to visit before I die' list. It is awe inspiring, jaw dropping, it cannot fail to impress and I can't wait to go back again in 2012.

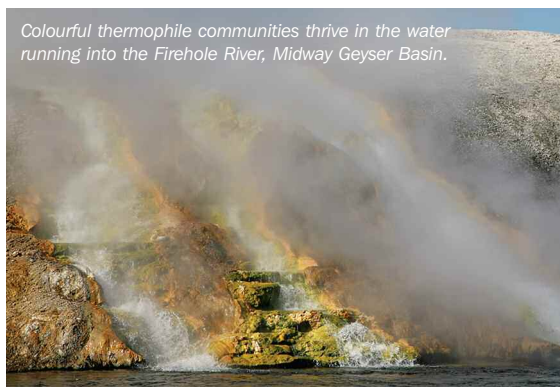
For more pictures of Yellowstone visit:
www.dawnosbornfrps.com



Old Faithful erupts on schedule as the sun goes down. Upper Geyser Basin.



The geysers of Midway Geyser Basin, the largest is Clepsydra Geyser.



Colourful thermophile communities thrive in the water running into the Firehole River, Midway Geyser Basin.

Voyeurism in the Ngorongoro Crater

by Geoffrey Einon ARPS

On a recent trip to the Ngorongoro Crater I was fortunate to encounter male and female Kori bustards (*Ardeotis kori struthiunculus*) and to be able to photograph their rarely described courtship and mating behaviours. These statuesque birds are a familiar sight to anyone who has enjoyed the wild life spectacle of the East African savannahs. Leading a solitary existence on the short grass plains, these large birds are frequently spotted but very rarely seen flying - preferring to escape from danger with their long legs. Despite this aversion to taking to the wing, the male Kori Bustard, weighing in at over 12kg, is a challenger for the title of the heaviest bird able to fly.

When first spotted, the Kori Bustard pair were in an early stage of their mating ritual. Initially, this consisted of the male displaying while strutting around the female who was passively crouched in the grass. During full sexual display the male's neck

inflates to about four times its normal size creating a large puffy ball; his black crest is raised as is his tail - with the tail revealing a mass of white erect underfeathers. As well as being a truly dramatic sight for an observer, it also has the desired effect on the female who remains transfixed in the grass.

In the next phase of the ritual, the male Kori moved from side to side of the female while pecking at a low frequency at her head. The female recoiled slightly with each peck but, after several minutes of pecking, it looked as if the male was grooming the female's head with his beak rather than pecking aggressively. Four or five minutes of strutting and pecking culminated in a brief copulation - followed by both birds wandering off, shaking their feathers. Having then regained his composure the male resumed his extravagant feather display, and oblivious to my shutter clicks, continued 'to strut his stuff'.





Female Kori Bustards lay one or two eggs in a nest on the ground. Chicks hatch after about three weeks and fledge at four to five weeks but will remain with the mother for a considerable period. Fortunately, my last encounter with Kori bustards in the Ngorongoro was with a female and two chicks who were fledging and who took brief flights - but then quickly returned to follow the mother.



Help - I've been bitten by a Travelling Shutter Bug

by Patricia Kearton LRPS



I have been interested in photography from an early age, but it was not until fairly recently that I took it more seriously. On my first ever long-haul holiday, to Antarctica, South Georgia and the Falklands in February 2006, I met Peter Jones ARPS (then RPS Nature Group Chairman). Peter was the tour leader, and was of tremendous value in helping me to improve my photography both during the trip and over the years since.

Peter encouraged me to join a local camera club (Northallerton) and then the RPS and the Nature Group - my main interest in photography being nature. He also encouraged me to try for the LRPS distinction, which I managed to obtain at 'Focus on Imaging' in March 2010.

All images in my panel were handheld large jpeg images using the detailed cameras and lenses and all taken on my holiday with Wildwatch Tours led by Peter; Antarctica was my first photographic trip as well as being the first trip I had made on my own. I was a little concerned about travelling so far from home with four people I hadn't previously met but after meeting Peter, Derek, Brett and Marilyn at the airport I was soon feeling part of "the gang" as we

later became known by the other passengers on board the ship. This trip was a life's ambition and one I enjoyed tremendously.

Spurred on by my Antarctic experience, I visited the Arctic the following year, to see the magnificent Polar Bears. We were lucky to have a mother and cub pass our ship early one morning while we were still stuck in the ice, their noses twitching as they smelt the bacon for our breakfast cooking.





My next trip was to Finland in February 2008, and then, needing to thaw out from my extreme cold trips, I decided to try a safari to Tanzania in June 2008 and to Botswana in October. It was pretty cool in Tanzania but was baking hot in Botswana.

The following March I made a visit to India. As I was climbing up a ladder on the side of a huge Elephant, I remember thinking "should I be doing this" and then "too late now, I'm on the Elephant" and soon we were heading into the jungle. When I saw my first Tiger my heart skipped a few beats! It was so close and lying in the water cooling itself. It was a wonderful experience. I soon found myself eagerly climbing onto Elephants by any means possible and had three more rides during this trip.

My next trip was rather closer to home, the Farne Islands and Bass Rock. Then in December 2009 I made a return visit to Tanzania - it was much hotter than my previous visit. Following this was visit to a very cold Yellowstone in February 2010 - here I discovered that tasting local beers was my new forte!

I returned to India in March 2010 but unfortunately there were less Tigers than during my previous visit. I plan to visit Namibia next and then in December, a return trip to where it all began - Antarctica.

Pictures:

Page 15: Old Dead Wood - Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana. This was a grab shot taken as our vehicle turned around in response to a radio message that we were needed to return to camp to assist a truck which had broken down.

Canon EOS 40D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F5.6 1/1600 sec, ISO 4001.

Cheetah - Ndutu, Tanzania. Reflections of a Cheetah making its way along the bank stopping for the occasional drink.

Canon EOS 40D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F5.6 1/3200 sec, ISO 400

Page 16: Grey Headed Kingfisher - Lake Manyara N.P. Tanzania. Day one of my first safari, a Kingfisher sat happily only a few feet from our vehicle, flying off to catch an insect and returning to the same place to devour it.

Canon EOS 350D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F5.6 1/125 sec, ISO 400

Page 16: Gannets with Feather - Bass Rock, Scotland. I watched these two Gannets playing with this feather for about 10 minutes, then when they had found just in the right position in their nest in which to place it disaster struck, the wind picked it up and swept it far out to sea.
Canon EOS 40D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F11 1/1000 sec, ISO 500

Puffin - Farne Islands. My first Puffin and first experience of being so close to so many different birds. I soon began to wonder why I hadn't come here sooner.
Canon EOS 350D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F5.6 1/400 sec ISO 400

Page 17. Tiger - Bandhavgarh N.P. India. This was taken while riding on an elephant. The Elephant had walked up a steep slope and we were at eye level with this magnificent creature, only a few feet away from us. No need for a very long lens here. I had my 28-300mm fitted to the camera. Trying to take a picture with your adrenalin pumping while riding an elephant on a steep slope is an art in its self.

Canon EOS 40D with Canon 28-300mm Lens, F5.6 1/125 sec, ISO 250



Holiday Hot Spot

by Colin Smale ARPS



I wonder how many times I have said *“Never go on a photo trip to the Med in high summer ... there’s no bird migration going on, the breeding season is all but over and it’s hot.”* Somehow I got talked into a visit during late July of this year. The trip was booked at very short notice and a week later we were off on a self-catering holiday to Rethymnon, Crete.

Hell’s bells it was hot, daytime temperatures were around 36C to 40C and I felt I could have fried an egg on my hand but I was wrong about getting good photographs.

I took my Canon 7D, 500mm f4 lens and X1.4 TC, plus a little 55mm-250mm IS lens I purchased for this trip for flowers etc. I also packed a handy little Lumix FZ100 camera with 14mp sensor for scenics, plenty of memory cards and a laptop to download em all to in the evenings.

The only birds visible around the apartments were good numbers of rustica Swallows, a pair of Hooded Crow and Sparrows but at least they were Italian Sparrow, a sub species of our own House Sparrow that I’d not seen before so, some kind of a tick I guess, not that I am a ticking Twitcher.

I planned on exploring the local area during the first week (yep, I agreed to two weeks) and hiring a car to get up into the mountains during the second week. My pal’s a non photographer, his bag is metal detecting on the beaches (each to his own eh).

The apartments were out in the countryside with fields on three sides, the beach literally a couple of minutes walk away. It was mostly large shingle, volcanic lava with patches of sand where the Loggerhead Turtles lay their eggs.

I discovered a substantial dried-up river about a quarter mile along the beach. It was about 15 mtrs wide with 6 mtr high reeds on each side and obviously discharged a lot of water during the winter months. As I approached a pair of Little Ringed Plover whipped out and over the sea, an encouraging sign. A short distance up 'river' there was a tiny 'flash' of water approximately 3 mtrs long by 1 mtr wide, maybe 10 cms deep and rapidly diminishing in the heat. It was full of small fish, many of them already dead because the water was so hot, there were also froglets thriving in these conditions. I guessed this would be a good spot to erect a hide but I hadn't taken one on this occasion - luckily I found a fence made of green plastic net that was falling into the sea and provided perfect material to construct a hide.

It was day three and hot hot hot. I have never experienced heat like it. I wasn't certain I would make it as far as the beach, let alone to my hide a quarter of a mile along the beach. Donning a wide brimmed white hat, white long sleeved shirt and carrying two bottles of drink I set off for my first session. It was already mid morning but the hide was in glorious shade, I slipped in, poked out the lens and felt so much better inside this cool little micro climate. I could hear a Great Reed Warbler singing, the little ringed plovers were still here and lots of sparrows.

I picked out one of the drinking sparrows to do a camera check and confirm that all was well. It wasn't. I couldn't change the aperture or the shutter speeds. Was it the heat? I couldn't sort it out and had to return to base for repairs and to delve into the 7D handbook for more clues.

I was unable to put it right and in desperation finally selected 'factory defaults' thinking that would clear the issue. This deleted all my custom settings of course and like a dark shadow the problem would still not go away. I could spin those wheels all day, but nothing happened. Thankfully the 7D does have a decent backup system with the 'Quick control Button', its much slower but it works. By this time it was mid afternoon and the grounds outside the apartment door were filled with butterflies. I had my eye on some Scarce Swallowtail butterflies that were doing long slow gliding courtship flights over the vegetation and I spent the rest of the day photographing them (in between dashing into the shower to cool off).





The 55mm-250mm lens I purchased especially for this trip turned out to be remarkable and so sharp. I used it to capture shots of the Swallowtails in flight and it did not disappoint. Using it near its shorter end 100-150mm I could easily watch a butterfly in that wider field of view and wait until it was near enough to be a decent size in the frame - only then did I let the focusing go for it. The hit rate was surprisingly high. My first attempts were at 250mm but although I could follow them at a distance, when they were nearer, they were impossible to follow.

Early next morning just after sunrise I was back at the hide. I could see that the Little Ringed Plovers had a preferred patch just a little further up river but I hoped that eventually they would visit my patch. Swallows and Sparrows perched on the reeds but little else was happening, however, I was in a hide, ready for anything, in a country I had never visited before and what's more, I was in the coolest place around, what could be better!

As the sunlight moved over the riverbed and towards that little patch of water, beautiful dragonflies, large blue ones and smaller crimson ones fizzed up and down between the tall reeds. I even got some flight shots of the big blue ones using the 500mm from the hide.

I looked at the little pool again for the umpteenth time when suddenly - where the heck did that come from! I had not considered that there would be snakes. I'm not into snakes - nevertheless there was one in the middle of the water. Fish were jumping out of the water and little frogs were leaping around everywhere, they knew what was about to happen and it very quickly became apparent to me too. The snake slid underwater and came up with a fish in its mouth then made its way to the far side of the riverbed to eat its prey. It did this several times, always taking the fish to the far side. Naturally I wished the snake had faced the camera. Suddenly it was joined by two more. Needless to say I was taken completely unawares - I had never seen anything like it but what shots I was getting. After about an hour of this incredible and frantic activity the appetites of the snakes were satiated and they slid off into the vegetation on the side of the bank to rest, on my side I hoped as my 'seat' was a ledge in the bank!

Those Plovers stayed upstream and the only birds that took any interest in this spot were the Sparrows, Swallows and a lone juvenile Blackbird. By midday I had almost run out of water and was ready for a few cups of tea and a snack so it was back to base.

In the evening I had a good look at these incredible pics. The most amazing wildlife spectacle I had ever witnessed was quickly followed by the worst ever wildlife disappointment. When I reset my camera to factory defaults the one custom function I forgot to reset was lens calibration! All those fabulous pics were just out of focus; I don't think it can ever get worse than that can it? If I had only realised when I was in the hide, it would have been a simple matter to re-set the lens calibration settings. Needless to say I did return to the hide. One of the snakes came back daily and I did get pictures but without the action I saw on that first day.

I finally photographed the Little Ringed Plovers from my hide, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Blackbirds and when a pair of foraging Great Reed Warblers discovered me in the hide they damn well mobbed me.

When I was not in the hide I spent a considerable amount of time at a stagnant pool that was filled with the most amazing array of dragonflies - that little zoom lens proved worth its weight in gold again.

So in that first week the highlights were actually not birds but snakes and dragonflies. The following week I had a car and was up in the mountains to the south. My target species were Red-rumped Swallow and Bearded Vulture (or Lammergeier) - a long shot but possible.

I had hardly travelled a mile inland before I saw my first Cretan Griffon Vulture, this was on the way to Plantenes Gorge, where I saw 8 more soaring too high for photos. Even though I was at a higher elevation I was still uncomfortably hot but the views were spectacular.

I arrived at a village called Maroulas, two miles inland from the sea and 4.5 miles south east of Rethymnon and found myself driving between houses with barely room to get the wing mirrors through. What a super place this was at this time of the year. There was an almost constant raptor sighting somewhere in the sky with Griffon, Buzzard, Peregrine, Raven and one of my two target species, the Red-rumped Swallow which were breeding there. Every now and then a swallow alarm call would ring out, meaning another raptor was too close for comfort and they all shot up into the air including the juveniles. I parked in the main square of Maroulas and headed uphill.

I am a bird photographer more than a bird watcher although by definition if I don't watch em I won't be able to pre-plan shots and so with my chances of seeing a Bearded Vulture dwindling, I concentrated on what was before me, the Red-rumps. It was very difficult to concentrate under such





relentless heat but I really wanted a nice flight shot. The 500mm was too long by a country mile, especially when they floated by me at ultra close range. What I would have given for a 300mm f2.8 Nevertheless I did get some pleasing images and these, along with some amazing dragonfly pics and of course the snakes, meant I would be taking home far more images than I ever imagined for a trip in high summer.

Two days before the end of my trip there were signs of migration. An exciting looking flock of over 50 Common Sandpiper pringling about on the rocky shoreline showed a promise of what could be expected over the forthcoming weeks when birds congregate and begin to head south.

On the very last day one of the holidaymakers who knew I was always looking for pictures came panting up from the beach to inform me that a Loggerhead Turtle *"the size of a round coffee table,"* was swimming just offshore and good pics could be had. Sure enough, although not quite coffee table size, there it was in that gin clear sea and within range of the 500mm with 1.4 converter. I spent a couple of hours with it. Clearly it would be visiting the beach that night to lay its eggs, which I was told later it did. It proved to be a tantalising subject, surfacing for only a couple of seconds before diving again. When I could see it under the water and coming to the surface I could be ahead of it and ready, but this is liquid terrain and too many times, as its head broke the surface, a small wave would appear in front and it was lost to my view.

Sometimes lady luck smiled on me and I got those unexpected shots which were a wonderful bonus - I achieved images of one of my two target birds, snakes catching fish right in front of my hide and a hatful of other decent images.

So, if the family want to drag you to Crete and to anywhere near Rethymnon next summer, hire a car, even for just a day and meander up to Maroulas. At that time of year there's no better place to see birds in decent numbers. Don't hire through the holiday company or the rep, have a look around and you can save yourself pounds. However, next time someone suggests a holiday in the Med in July I will save myself some cash and simply jump in my oven for a couple of weeks!

Good luck with the map reading by the way, it was all Greek to me.

Bridging at Horsey Gap.

by Russell Edwards ARPS

I was sitting in a hide in the Albufuera marshes in Majorca watching a Glossy Ibis, which was out of range of my camera, when I noticed the person next to me taking pictures with a very small camera which seemed to have an extraordinary long focal length. It turned out to be a Bridge camera, so called because it bridged the gap between a Compact camera and a DSLR.

On my return to England I learned that Nikon had just brought out a similar camera, the P100 - a very small camera, no bigger than a clenched fist, but having a zoom lens which went from 26mm to 678 mm focal length : that is focal lengths which give the same field of view as these focal lengths would do on a conventional 35mm film camera.

Internet reviews were not enthusiastic, particularly about the picture quality. Examining the camera at my local shop, I admired its compact size and the convenient positioning of the controls but was put off by the electronic viewfinder, which did its job but gave a poor viewing image. But it served its purpose, with the bonus that pictures could be played back and viewed through it - great help when the sun was shining and the monitor screen could not be used.

Against advice, I decided to purchase a P100, which cost around £300.

My first real opportunity to use the camera came when I visited Horsey Gap on the North Norfolk coast to photograph the seals. I knew I had a long trek in front of me across the sand dunes and along a sandy beach. I didn't relish the thought of carrying a heavy tripod and 500mm lens all that distance. So instead I took my P 100 weighing in at a mere 480 grams.

There was a colony of between a 100 and 150 seals, a mixture of Common and Grey lounging on the beach unperturbed by people nearby. I had taken the precaution of taking a monopod with me, which doubled as a walking stick and placing the camera on it, I set it to maximum zoom to get portraits of nearby seals and full size images of the seals at a distance in the water.

The resultant images were really sharp due to the image stabilisation and I have since learned that the P100 has in camera sharpening. Most of the pictures did not need to be sharpened further in Photoshop and indeed very little, if any enhancement was required. An eye cup would have been an advantage as it was a very bright, sunny day.





I also tried a close-up shot of a pair of mating dragonflies (opposite) which were in the dunes and only a couple of feet from my camera. Here the trick, I learned, is to zoom the lens out half way (there is a marker on the screen) and then crop the resulting image. Finally once at home I tried a couple of shots on a pair of hoverflies nestling on a marigold flower (below). By putting the camera in macro mode I could get within 4cm of the flies. I took the pictures hand holding the camera and letting the stabiliser do its work.

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I thought the resulting sharpness was excellent and even the internet critics had good things to say about the P 100's macro facility.

The P 100 has an abundance of extra facilities including modes for video and action photography and much else.

The great advantage of this camera is that it is compact and lightweight. The camera is so light and small that it need never be left at home. Now, when I come across unexpected photo opportunities I always have a camera to hand to record them, I probably would have missed them if I'd had to carry a DSLR and a heavy lens, etc.



The Future of Field Meetings.

Is there one?

Tony Bond, FRPS.

In the early days of the Nature Group the main pillar of our activities was the field meeting. Most weeks from early Spring to late Autumn saw a meeting somewhere in the country. And they were normally well attended with 20-30 members being not uncommon. They were invaluable at that time in bringing members of the new group together, spreading expertise and, hopefully, going home with some good pictures. Field Meetings numbers have been in decline for a number of years, but recently the committee has realised that field meetings are in serious trouble. Fewer members are volunteering to lead and attendances have often been poor. Only one member contacted the leader of a recent fungal foray. Sometimes there are more non-members than members.

There are several hypotheses as to why this should be so. Like many local and national organisations we have an ageing membership who may be reluctant to travel 20-50 miles on our chaotic roads unless it is absolutely necessary, plus the cost of petrol is at an all time high. However, our exhibition shows that members are willing to travel to foreign parts in the search for pictures. The view that nature photography in Britain is a waste of time is expressed by some. I do not subscribe to this but am willing to admit that it can be more difficult than going to some distant corner of the world where the wildlife gives itself up to be photographed. And then there is the weather to consider. It has always been with us but has been particularly difficult of late as climate change scientists have predicted.

And then there is the issue of the Society's Health and Safety policy and the requirement that a risk assessment be carried out before any field meeting. The committee expressed its concern that this could mean the end of our field meetings and, to be fair, the Advisory Board did modify its original proposals as a result. The need for a risk assessment is not unusual in our litigious society. Ask any teacher. If there were to be a reportable

accident it would be necessary for the Society to demonstrate that it was managing safety.

Preparing a risk assessment need not be a big deal - it is only common sense after all. I am fortunate in having had experience in industry but I can understand the concerns of anyone facing the prospect for the first time. It is regrettable that there has been no attempt to use *The Journal* to explain the Society's requirements and drive out some of the fear. All that I have seen is a measly 2 column inches in the *Journal*, in contrast to the pages of college photography. I could give you the names of two people who have led numerous field meetings over many years who have refused to lead any more because of the requirement for risk assessment.

People complain that there is never a meeting in their area. The answer is simple - organise one yourself or share the responsibility with another member. Leaders are entitled to claim expenses for reconnaissance of the site to carry out the risk assessment and travelling on the day of the meeting. One thing is certain, anyone who has put time and effort into organising a field meeting and is rewarded with a pitiful turnout is unlikely to do so again.

The crunch question is whether you would like to continue to see field meetings in our programme, assuming that there are members willing to lead them. Do not say yes simply because you feel that there ought to be support for them. Ask yourself when you last went on one and why you have not been on one since that time.

Please give your feedback to Nature Group Chairman John Bebbington FRPS, preferably by email at: john.bebbingtonfrps@btinternet.com.

10 Top Tips for the Nature Photographer

Part 2: Memory Cards

by Mark Monckton ARPS

Some tips on the care of your memory cards to avoid losing your precious images and corrupting data on your card.

- Always eject your card before removing it from your computer. By following this practice you will avoid corrupting your memory card.
PC: right click the icon and select 'Eject'.
MAC: drag the icon to the trash.
- Ensure your images are downloaded and backed up before formatting your card.
- Always format your card in the camera (low level if option available) after downloading.
- Always keep your cards away from the following: Direct sunlight, heat, radiation, microwaves, loudspeakers and magnets. All of the above can corrupt the data on your card.
- Always turn your camera off before inserting or removing your memory cards.
- Always buy quality brands. Good quality memory cards last longer and you will have fewer problems with data loss.
- Always carry spare memory cards with you and rotate their use.
- Don't delete images or format your card when your camera's battery is low. Doing so may cause images to become corrupted or lost.
- Ensure your cards are formatted before going out on a shoot. Your cards will be ready for use which will save you time in the field.
- If you have lost images or your memory card has become corrupted, don't despair. Software is available to solve these problems.
- Write your name and phone number on your memory card in case it gets lost.

I hope these tips will help you in your photography. Look out for another instalment of '10 Top Tips for the Nature Photographer' in a future issue of The Iris.

www.markmonckton.co.uk

Ingleborough NNR Field Meeting Report

Ten members gathered in July to explore parts of the Ingleborough NNR. In the morning we visited Scar Close, an area a limestone pavement being returned to natural semi woodland. Dark Green Fritillary were on the wing, along with Common Blue butterfly, and the occasional glimpse of Northern Brown Argus. Limestone, Buckler and Hart's-tongue Fern grew in the grikes, with limestone flowers such as Rock Rose, wild Thyme and Limestone Bedstraw plentiful. Round-leaf Sundew were nearby due to the unusual mix of peat and limestone pavement in close proximity.

In the afternoon we visited High Brae, a limestone rich wild flower area grazed by native

cattle. Frog Orchid and Dark Red Helleborine were the star species photographed despite the challenge of rising wind. We then moved to Ribbleshead Quarry where Twayblade were plentiful and Marsh Helleborine were coming into flower. Oystercatchers fed in the wetter areas and Ravens were nesting on the cliffs.

A northern Field Meeting is planned for Friday 1st June 2012 at Waitby Greenriggs near Kirby Stephen prior to the Residential Weekend starting in the evening at Malham Tarn. Contact Leonard Shepherd for details of both meetings. Tel: 01969 622043 or Email: shepherdlen@btinternet.com.

Beware – your new camera may cost you more than you bargained for!

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

As a photographer, the purchase of any new piece of kit should be a pleasurable experience, especially a major purchase. I recently purchased a new digital SLR. Like many making such purchases these days, I shopped around on line before ordering by phone from a dealer some distance from my home. The parcel arrived the next day and was duly unpacked, each item checked and inspected thoroughly. While the batteries were charging I sat down with a cuppa and flicked through the manual. The initial set up procedure was very similar to my existing cameras, so it all felt very familiar very quickly.

Unfortunately, during early February the weather was pretty awful and I was unable to do much more than confirm that the camera was functioning. I had been warned that this camera could exhibit noise above ISO 400, so avoided going higher even though this would have given me better shutter speeds. Therefore, in poor light, with wide apertures and not especially fast shutter speeds, I was not expecting great results and I was not proved wrong. The resulting images did seem soft, but I put this down to the less than ideal conditions.

At this juncture I must say something about why I purchased this SLR. For landscape work and some nature (flora, fungi, insects, etc.) I use a full frame sensor camera, we'll call it Camera A; for birds, mammals and sports I use a faster camera with a 1.3 crop sensor, lets call this one Camera B. I love them both for different reasons but felt that there were times when I needed something else. Camera B is heavy but fast, the batteries are heavy and the charger is the size of a house brick. Camera A is light but slow (only 3fps), so not suitable as a back-up camera for Camera B. Hence the purchase of Camera C – 18mp, 8 fps, optional grip, smaller lighter batteries and charger, and a 1.6 crop sensor - a suitable back-up for camera B, and for those trips/days when wildlife was not the prime target, an alternative to Camera B. I also travel with a netbook and external hard-drive, downloading images and backing up to the external drive at the end of each day's shoot.

Long distance travelling does not get any easier and having been 'caught' with overweight hand luggage a couple of times, I was very keen to lighten my load. With this in mind I had part exchanged my lighter 70-200mm f4 for a stabilised 70-200 f2.8 and a X2 Extender during Autumn 2010. I thought this would eliminate the need to carry both a 300 and 400mm lens for those trips where flora, landscape and geology were the prime targets and wildlife was secondary.

In March 2011 I found myself in Florida with two DSLRs (Cameras B and C), a 24-105, my 70-200mm f2.8, a pair of extenders and my 400mm. The 400mm stayed on the front of Camera B while the 70-200mm (with or without extender) was fitted to Camera C.

Within a couple of days of the start of my vacation it became very apparent that the images from the new camera were less than satisfactory. Despite good light, low ISO, f11 and high shutter speeds the images seemed soft, gritty, grainy and lacking clarity. Difficult to explain really but 'very disappointing' sums it up. I tried altering settings, focussing points, shutter speed, ISO, etc., but with little or no difference. Consequently, I used it very infrequently.

Since returning from my trip I carried out a number of tests with the new camera and a gamut of lenses, not just the ones that I intended to use with it. Initial results with my existing 70-200mm f2.8 were truly awful, especially at the edges; those with the 24-105 were also disappointing at smaller apertures. These lenses had given very satisfactory results with my other cameras, so was there a problem with Camera C? I decided it was time to call the manufacturer's – or at least, their UK headquarters.

A few days later I was contacted by a gentleman who attempted to explain why I should not compare results from Camera B with those from Camera C. He explained that because of the high density of pixels and their very small size I should expect the

images to look different especially when viewed at 100%. Different sharpening techniques were also advised. I was given a lot of technical jargon which I could not write down quickly enough, about ISOs, needing higher shutter speeds than previously, and importantly, old technology lenses not giving good results with 'new' technology cameras. I explained that my oldest lens was purchased 6 years ago and my newest just a year ago. Nevertheless they are considered 'old' technology. It was explained that the new megapixel cameras show up faults in lenses that would have gone unnoticed in cameras with less pixels and/or larger sensors. I was advised to try out the new Mk II version of my 70-200 and the latest versions of the X1.4 and X2 extenders. These new versions are significantly more expensive than the ones they replace and I complained that the camera did not come with a caveat that 'good image quality might not be achievable without the purchase of new, more expensive lenses' - to date I have received no response to that complaint, as you might imagine.

Further tests were carried out with a borrowed Mk II 70-200mm and these proved conclusive - the new version did give significantly better results. However this is the only Mk II lens currently available in the UK and as yet there has been no announcement regarding replacement wide to medium zoom lenses.

I have since spoken with many other owners of this camera model - some are happy and some are not. One thing that became clear was that, happy or not, many of them had never carried out any kind of test for lens performance let alone any lens calibration tests. Indeed, it wasn't something that was even mentioned by the representative of the manufacturer and although they do now acknowledge the need to perform lens calibrations, they do not tell you how to go about it.

It seems that a great many of these new mega pixel cameras now have the facility to be custom calibrated to your range of different lenses. Why would you need to do this? You may well ask why you would need to calibrate a camera/lens combination that you have paid two or three 4 figure sums for. It isn't anything to do with sloppy quality control either. All manufacturing processes work to tolerances - let's say $\pm 5\%$ for this example. Imagine that the focussing mechanism in your camera is $+5\%$ and your lens is -5% , the two should cancel each other out and your images should be

satisfactory. But what if your lens is also off by $+5\%$? Now your focussing is off by 10% - your images will not be critically sharp where you thought they would be. Your camera could be front or back focussing. Obviously this is more apparent at f4 than at f16 due to depth of field and of course should not be apparent at all if you have focussed manually. Your new camera may need to be calibrated to each different lens you own and, if you use extenders/converters, you will need to perform the procedure for each lens/extender combination. Once the settings are registered within the camera it will remember and apply them automatically whenever you change lenses and/or converters. It is quite time consuming to begin with, but well worth the time and effort.

Here is what major manufacturer Canon has to say on their website regarding the need to calibrate lenses with new DSLR cameras:

'It's not just about whether the lens or the camera are living up to the factory standards, it's about making sure that these are working optimally together.' and *'It's unrealistic to think you can always combine a new camera and an old, well-used, lens and have a perfect working combination.'*

So where am I with all this? At the time of writing (early September) I still await the arrival of a new Mk II lens and X2 Mk III extender (ordered over 4 weeks ago), which even allowing for the trade in of my existing lens and converter will set me back the equivalent of 150% of the price of the camera - a pretty expensive exercise one way or another and not one I bargained for!

Addendum

My new lens and converter finally arrived three days prior to my departure for the Canadian Rockies, giving me just enough time to test and calibrate the new lens and converter to the camera and make the necessary adjustments. I can report that the images now being captured with the new camera (no prizes for guessing what that is) are of a significantly higher quality with the new lens (with and without the new converter) than they were with the previous version.

More information on lens calibration can be obtained by Googling 'lens calibration' and from: www.michaeltapesdesign.com/lensalign
www.luminous-landscape.com/reviews/accessories/lensalign

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Yellowstone and The Tetons

David Osborn FRPS, a past Chairman of the Nature Group and Deputy-Chairman of the A&F Nature Distinction Panel, will be leading a small group of photographers on an exciting visit to Yellowstone and The Tetons in late September 2012.

A limited number of places only are available.

The itinerary includes all the prime geological and thermal features as well as sites offering the best opportunities to capture as much of the indigenous wildlife as possible.



For more information or a brochure contact
David at: Tel: 01263 511221
Email: poppyland3@aol.com
or browse images from previous Yellowstone
tours at: www.davidosbornphotography.co.uk





Images from a recently successful
Associate Distinction panel by
John Elmett ARPS

John's complete panel can be viewed
on the Nature Group website:
www.rpsnaturegroup.com

