


Special Tribute Issue

Celebrating the life, achievements and photography of
Tony Wharton FRPS



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It is with great sadness that we have to report the passing of one of our stalwart members - Tony Wharton FRPS. A well respected and long serving member of the Nature Group Committee and a former Chairman. He also served on the RPS Natural History Distinctions Team for many years, culminating with him becoming Panel Chair.

In addition to a summary of Tony's life written by his son Andy, this issue contains a selection of Tony's images and personal reflections from some of our members who knew or served with him on our Committee or the RPS Nature Distinctions Team.

Anthony Wharton FRPS

by Andy, Simon & Mike Wharton

Anthony (Tony) Wharton was born in 1932 in Lower High Street, Cradley Heath. His father George was a warehouseman by trade who, with Tony's mother Gladys, also ran a shop for a number of years. George was also an extremely accomplished violinist and played in several local bands and groups. Tony was a keen artist at school and good at languages. He attended what was then Halesowen Grammar School taking art and languages.

After leaving school Tony attended and passed a Joint Services Russian Course at Cambridge University when he was called up for National Service in the early 1950s. He trained as a Russian interpreter in the Intelligence Corps at the Joint Services School for Linguists (JSSL). With locations in Bodmin in Cornwall and Coulsdon near Croydon, JSSL was run by native Russian, Mandarin, Polish and Czech speakers as tutors - students had to endure intensive language training with eight-hour days, five days a week and lectures on the formalities of basic Russian Grammar. There were weekly 'tests' which had to be passed to avoid being returned to 'less desirable duties'.

After his National Service Tony continued with languages and graduated with a BA (Hons) in Russian with French from Birmingham University. He went on to teach languages at various Grammar/Secondary schools in the King's Heath area. He taught English, French, and Russian and in 1964 took a party of 52 pupils and staff to the Soviet Union - probably quite a challenge at the time. He was the Greek House Master at West Bromwich Grammar School and was Deputy Headmaster at King's Heath School when he took early retirement in 1982.

Tony took up photography in the mid sixties, when, as an avid angler, he bought his first camera to photograph the fish he caught. He was quickly bitten by the photographic bug and became fascinated with natural history, a long standing interest of his, as subject matter.

A member of Smethwick Photographic Society for many years, Tony served a term as its President, and was actively involved in the SPS Natural History group. He was also very active in the organisation and running of the Smethwick Photographic Society International



Grevy's Zebra quartet

Exhibition (which he also judged) and always provided the informative commentary for the nature section slides at the exhibition itself.

Over the years, Tony was very active in the amateur photographic world, travelling across the UK and abroad lecturing and judging exhibitions for many photographic clubs and societies. He joined the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) quite early on as obtaining a distinction with the Society appealed to him. He was awarded his Associateship in 1971 in what was then the pictorial section and followed this with a Fellowship in the Nature category in 1978. Tony took great pleasure in serving on the Nature Distinctions Panel, which he chaired for many years. The RPS awarded him its Fenton Medal in 2007 for services to the RPS together with an Honorary FRPS.

As an extremely active member of the RPS Nature Group for over twenty years (including a two-year period as its Chair), Tony frequently arranged and ran nature trips and talks for local RPS members as well as for the Smethwick Special Interest group. The RPS Nature Group awarded him its Silver Medal some years ago and made him an honourable lifetime member more recently.

After retiring from teaching in 1982, Tony became a self employed professional Natural History Photographer. He took and sold pictures (and indeed still has some with picture agencies) as well as running numerous

Natural History based photographic holidays all over the world. He travelled extensively, mainly via Photo Travellers, to destinations such as The Falklands, Galapagos, Antarctica, South Africa, Spain, Crete, Cyprus, Switzerland and Finland. He also organised and led quite a few trips for photo groups himself to East Africa (including the Gambia), Russia, India and the USA. These trips, along with all his UK-based lectures and workshops, helped many people to enhance their photographic skills as well as their natural history knowledge. Tony has had numerous pictures and articles published in magazines, books and other media and also had several Natural History based books for children published.

Over the years he was a huge inspiration to a great many photographers. Even in his retirement Tony retained his interest in photography and taught himself web-design as a means to showcase his photographs and to continue to pass on his knowledge and experience to others.

More recently, as his health began to decline, Tony moved into a care home and to be with his wife Doreen (who passed away in September 2020). Tony was enjoying his time being looked after in his twilight. He passed away suddenly but peacefully on 23rd July 2021. Tony and Doreen leave three children, Andy, Simon and Mike, and three grandchildren, Adam, Katie and Ruby.



Seven Spot Ladybird



Six Spot Burnet Moth

Thank you Tony.

Barbara Lawton FRPS

Cotton Grass



I first met Tony Wharton in 1984 when he visited Walsall Wood Camera Club to give a nature slide presentation. I had only recently purchased my first camera and had attempted to take nature images without any success. That evening was a turning point for me, as I saw for the first time what could be achieved and how one could go about photographing this wonderful and diverse natural world.

Fortunately for me Tony had retired from teaching and had started to run nature photography courses. I was fortunate and managed to get a place on his course at Flatford Mill Field Studies Centre. It soon became obvious that Tony had a passion for and an excellent knowledge of the natural world and an equal determination to photograph the subjects he came across to the best of his ability. Tony was an excellent



Keys of Field Maple



Flowers of Red Maple

and inspirational teacher, prepared to share his knowledge of the subjects being photographed as well as demonstrating and helping everyone, regardless of their experience or knowledge, on the different approaches and techniques needed to achieve a pleasing picture. He was always very generous with his time and support and nothing was too much trouble. He was extremely positive with his comments about the images you produced, but at the same time gave you some thoughts about how the image could be improved upon and how that could be achieved. This was certainly true, as being Chairman of the Nature Distinctions Panel; he devoted a great deal of time and effort in assisting members to achieve their RPS Distinctions.



Common Frog

Besides his work with the RPS, Tony was an active member of Smethwick Photographic Society (SPS) and was responsible for establishing the SPS Nature Group. He was a PAGB judge and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to visit photographic clubs and assist in the selecting of their international exhibitions.

I will miss Tony a great deal, for his friendship, companionship, support and inspiration, as well as for introducing me to the magical world of nature photography which has been a very important part of my life during the past 37 years or so, and of course the opportunity to meet some lovely people on that journey.

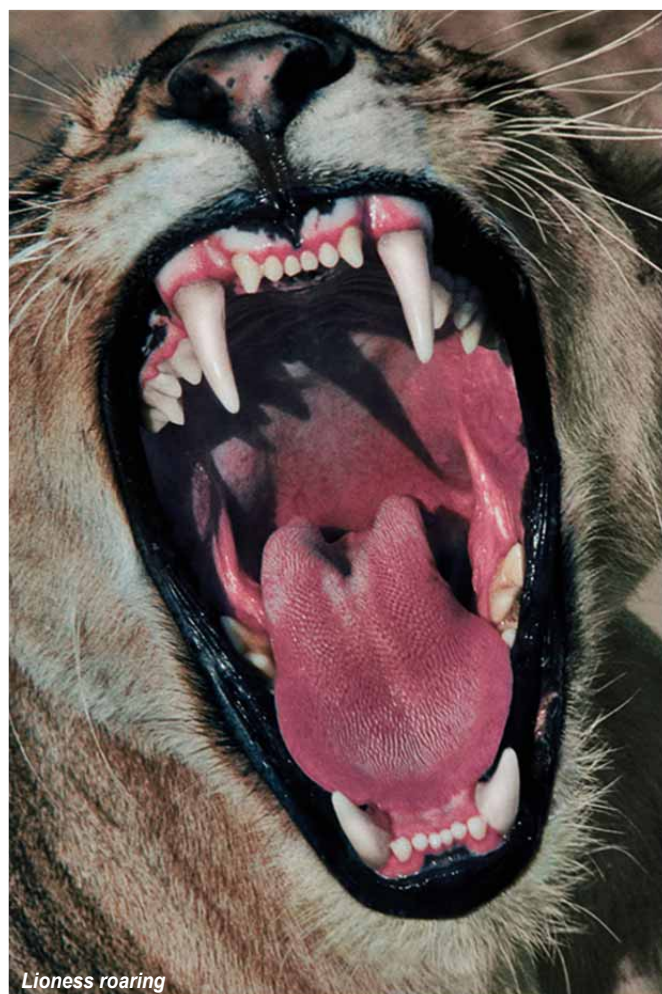
Thank you Tony.



Crabeater Seals on ice flow

Even in his later years, when Tony was in care, I paid him a visit every week until the pandemic put a stop to it. The topic of conversation invariably turned to photography, the RPS and Smethwick Photographic Society. He would show me some of the prints he had with him and tell me the stories behind the images. He was still very enthusiastic about his photography but saddened that he was no longer able to get out and about. But, he still had his critical eye when I took some of my own images along for his valued evaluation.

With Tony as my mentor I never looked back, I have had 37 or so wonderful years involved in nature photography. It has presented me with opportunities - going on safari several times, and photographing different aspects of the natural world both at home and abroad, gaining my RPS Distinctions, becoming Chair of the RPS Nature Group and becoming an active member of Smethwick Photographic Society, where I have now taken over the Natural History Group started by Tony.



Lioness roaring

A Gentleman I shall miss greatly

David Osborn FRPS



Grey Seal Bull

It was with great sadness that I recently heard of the passing of Tony Wharton, my old mentor and colleague.

I first met Tony back in the mid '70s, when even I was young. My parents took me to see one of Tony's lectures at Wednesbury Photographic Society and in truth, for me, it was a life changing event. The standard and variety of his work was truly inspirational and seeing his images for the first time set me on my own journey into wildlife photography. In short, once I saw his images I knew that was what I wanted to try to emulate.

Over the years our paths crossed many, many times, especially once I started the pathway to the RPS Distinctions and whilst my son was at school in Stourbridge I spent many a pleasant Friday afternoon in Halesowen discussing all things to do with natural history photography. Both Tony and Doreen were always very welcoming.

Tony was always there for advice when needed and always freely offered opinion on work and suggestions once my Distinctions panels started to take shape. He truly was the archetypal mentor in every sense of the word and to whom I'll be forever grateful.

I also met with him on a number of occasions at one of the many field meetings that he ran regularly on behalf of the Nature Group and as always he was friendly, approachable and on hand to offer advice and suggestions.

I was lucky enough to go on one of his Kenyan photo safaris, which for me was a truly memorable occasion, especially as we discovered the rare Kenyan Sand Frog!

As time progressed and my own photo tour business took off I saw less of Tony, but as fate had it, a few years later he was instrumental in inviting me to join the RPS Nature Distinctions team and once again we met on a regular basis at the various assessment events. As always, Tony was there offering quiet advice and direction resulting in the 'new boy' quickly settling into the team and having the skill set to assess distinctions submissions.

I served on the distinctions team myself over a period of nearly 20 years and for the vast majority of that time Tony was there as a senior member and finally as the panel Chair, a role I know he thoroughly enjoyed.



African Elephant family



Male Orange-tip on Larval Food Plant

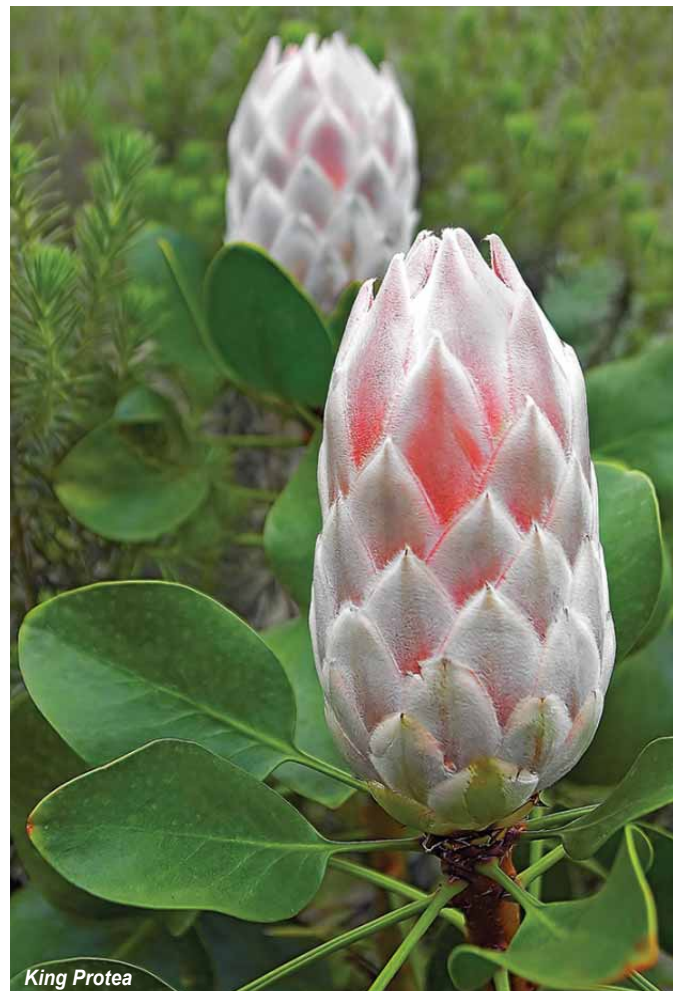
Unfortunately, due to advancing age, Tony was less active during the last 10 years and as such perhaps fewer members are now familiar with his photographic work and achievements but I do hope he will be remembered fondly and retain the credit he deserves. He served the RPS exceptionally well over many years, both on the NG Committee and Natural History Distinctions Team serving as Chair of both.

In the modern era where many photographers are subject specific he was of that rare breed that could achieve high quality images of whatever he was shooting, albeit a bird or a plant, he was quite a good landscape photographer as well. Very few modern photographers achieve that, but over many years and a long photographic career he truly achieved imaging excellence throughout the whole NH genre.

One thing I will never understand is why he never published a book for in that way we could have all remembered his work. Truly a great shame.

Tony Wharton - a gentleman I shall miss greatly.

David Osborn FRPS
Past Nature Group Chair and
Past Chair RPS Nature Distinctions Team



King Protea

An Extraordinary Man

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

Tony Wharton was an extraordinary man and I feel privileged to have known him even though I didn't know him even half as well as some of the others that have contributed to this tribute. Even so, I always found him to be friendly, supportive, knowledgeable about all things natural history and above all, honest.

I enrolled as a member of the RPS in 1990 shortly after returning home from several years in the USA. My Father and Brother were already members of the Nature Group and as we had always shared an interest in the natural world I decided to do the same. While reading the Winter 1992 issue of *The Iris* I noticed that the NG Committee had vacancies for new committee members and I volunteered. I met Tony at the very first Nature Group Committee Meeting I attended, September 1993, at The Octagon in Bath. At that time the Nature Group held its Committee Meetings following the Distinctions Assessments. I was already working towards my own submission for an Associate Distinction in Nature so spending the day at RPS HQ offered an opportunity to gain an insight into the assessment process and what was (and was not) going to succeed. A very worthwhile experience and time well spent. However, before I submitted my 15 transparencies I felt the need for a

second opinion. My Father gave his of course but advised that the person I really should be speaking with was Tony Wharton. I phoned Tony and he invited me over to his home. Upon arrival Tony's wife, Doreen, made tea while Tony projected my selection of slides. He made a few suggestions as to how I should proceed before making my application but generally was happy that my work was up to the standard required for an 'A'. I'm happy to say that in September 1994 my panel of Mediterranean Wildflowers was successful.

Around the same time, Roy Osborn, my Father, became Nature Group Exhibition Secretary. Tony would always give a live commentary at the Exhibition. It was always ad-hoc - without notes and was more often than not the first time that he had seen the accepted entries. In those days, following the opening of the exhibition, the prints and copies of the transparencies were shown at clubs around the country accompanied by a taped commentary. Tony came to my parents home to make the recording and my father anticipated that he would need to project the slides while Tony commented on them, but he was wrong. Tony just sat down and talked about each image as though he was looking at them. The amount of detail he recalled about each image was truly amazing!



Marbled White on Pyramidal Orchid

Giraffe Mother and young



Great Tit

Equally amazing was that Tony never faltered - his recollection of the images was truly photographic.

I remember asking Tony if he would write me a reference to accompany my application to enrol on a Photographic course at Wolverhampton University. He was more than happy to oblige and gave a glowing report of my abilities as a photographer and my suitability for the course.

I became a member of Smethwick Photographic Society in 2005 and saw Tony more frequently. He offered advice and encouragement when I was working towards my Fellowship submission and wrote to congratulate me when I achieved it in May 2006.



Eurasian Jay

My last recollection of Tony was at the Nature Group's 40th Anniversary Day at SPS in September 2016. I had been asked to step in and present an hour long talk at quite short notice. Unsurprisingly perhaps, especially to those who know me well, the topic of my talk was my favourite subject - wildlife of The Falkland Islands. At the end, Tony took the time to speak to me and express his admiration and enjoyment at seeing my images and how much they had rekindled fond memories of his own visits to the Falklands. I confess, such praise from Tony did bring a lump to my throat.

Tony made a huge contribution to the RPS, the Nature Group and to nature photography in general. He will be remembered fondly by all those he inspired, helped and encouraged - we are all better photographers for having known this extraordinary man.



Lady Orchid



Bee Orchid



Grass Snake

Tony had a major impact on my Natural History photography. My first meeting with him is lost in the mists of time, but he tutored several courses for me when I was Head of Centre at the Field Studies Council's Juniper Hall.

I had the pleasure of driving the minibus for him (and of course tagging along in the field). I learnt a great deal during these courses, and was impressed by his willingness to help with field photography and the constructive criticism of the work of course members (part of my role was to process E6 transparency film between afternoon tea and evening meal so that we could project slides in the evening).

I was invited to join the A&F assessment panel soon after gaining my Fellowship and Tony was a very supportive DP chair and again gave me support in my early days on the panel.

John Bebbington FRPS



Grizzled Skipper



Red-legged Shieldbug



Lime Hawkmoth

"It was watching one of Tony's early slide show talks that initially encouraged me to take up nature photography."

My time on the Nature Distinctions Panel was after Tony had retired, so I only met him a few times, but on the occasions that I did, he was always very approachable and helpful.

The thing I admired most about Tony was that he was what I would call 'a complete all round nature photographer' - equally happy to photograph birds, butterflies, reptiles, insects, wild flowers and fungi. He could be termed an expert in all these area of nature photography."

Roger Hance FRPS

Hunting Spider - *Pisaura mirabilis*





"We met from time to time and I attended some of his NG field meetings. When Tony gave talks in my area I always made an effort to attend."

Richard Revels FRPS

"Tony kindly introduced the late Colin Smith and myself to some of his favourite sites in the Midlands and we in turn showed him around some of ours."

Tony Bond FRPS



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Digitally captured photographic images should be supplied as flattened 8bit sRGB tif or jpg files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch. Please do not email larger images.

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* Members please note:

The Nature Group is seeking a new Honorary Secretary to take over from Duncan Locke before he becomes Group Chair in April 2023. If you have the necessary experience, please help your Nature Group by volunteering for this very important role. Please contact Duncan Locke for further information. Email: duncan.locke@btinternet.com

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, E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

The next issue of eNews will be late September. If you have an item of interest you would like to share with fellow members please contact me.

Bye for now.



Dawn Osborn FRPS,
eNews Editor



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